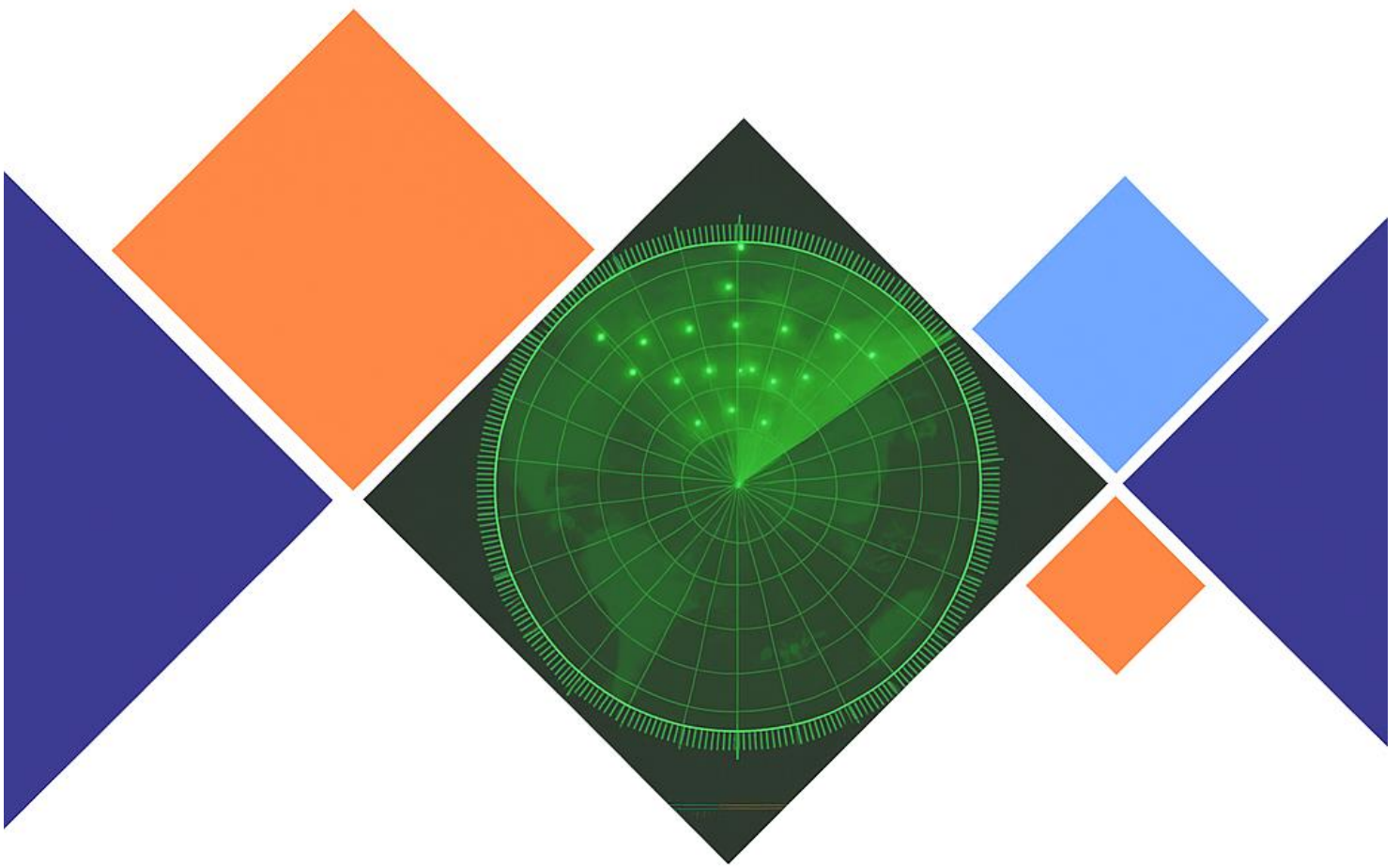




Journal of Defence & Policy Analysis 2025



JDPA
VOLUME 04, ISSUE 02, December 2025
JOURNAL OF DEFENCE & POLICY ANALYSIS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:

Dr. WASMAI Senevirathna

EDITORIAL BOARD

Dr. HR Vidanage

Dr. YJSN Fernando

Dr. KSC de Silva

Dr. DGN Sanjeevani

Mr. S Satheesmohan

Mr. KKP Ranaweera

Ms. YSHSK Silva

Ms. KD Godage

Ms. WMD Wijekoon

Mr. MAJ Gimantha

ADVISORY BOARD

Air Vice Marshal Sampath Thuyacontha (Retd), Secretary, Ministry of Defence

Ms. Aruni Ranaraja, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Former Ambassador HMGS Palihakkara

Professor Emeritus Amal Jayawardane - Adjunct Senior Professor

Senior Professor Nayani Melegoda - Senior Professor in International Relations

Colonel Ramindu Hasantha, Dean, Faculty of Defence & Strategic Studies

Dr. KSC de Silva, Head of the Department, Department of Strategic Studies



JDPA - The Journal of Defence & Policy Analysis (JDPA) is a bi-annual, refereed research periodically published by the Faculty of Defence and Strategic Studies (FDSS) at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU). It pursues to inspire further research on the core fields of defence studies, security studies and strategic studies, thereby providing an analysis on the contemporary developments in these fields.

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.

Copyrights © General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka 2025

Printed at the Press of General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University of Sri Lanka

ISSN 2820-2198 (Online)

All rights reserved. No part of the articles may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without written permission from the copyright holder.

Peer Review Policy

All research articles submitted to this journal will undergo rigorous blind peer review by at least two experts in the relevant field, based on initial screening of the editorial board.

The view expressed by the author/s are their own and do not necessarily represent the policies of the General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University of Sri Lanka. Authors are responsible for the originality and accuracy of their contributions.



Editorial Correspondence:

Editor in Chief,

JDPA, Journal of Defence & Policy Analysis

Faculty of Defence and Strategic Studies

Department of Strategic Studies

General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University of Sri Lanka

Kandawala Road, Ratmalana 10390, Sri Lanka

Web: <https://www.kdu.ac.lk/>

Email: dpajournal@kdu.ac.lk

ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR

Mr. MAJ Gimantha

Instructor

Department of Strategic Studies



CONTENTS

CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS REVISITED: CULTURAL NARRATIVES IN INDIA-CHINA STRATEGIC COMPETITION Maheshi Thellamurege	04
ESTABLISHING A MARITIME AIR WING IN SRI LANKA NAVY: AN ANALYSIS ON OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES Tharaka Wijesingha	34
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN PROVIDING HUMANITARIAN AID: EXAMINING THE CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST R. R. Abuthahir	52
THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE SHIPBORNE AIRCRAFT FOR ENHANCING SRI LANKA NAVY'S MARITIME SECURITY Prassanna Hettiarachchi	76
DIGITALIZATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN SRI LANKA: EMERGING CYBERSECURITY CHALLENGES M. H. M. Imran	85



**CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS REVISITED: CULTURAL NARRATIVES IN INDIA-CHINA STRATEGIC
COMPETITION**

Maheshi Thellamurege*

ABSTRACT

This article revisits Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations (CoC) theory to examine how cultural and civilizational narratives shape the contemporary strategic rivalry between India and China. While existing analyses largely emphasize military, economic, and geopolitical competition, this study argues that the India - China relationship is also deeply influenced by competing claims to civilizational identity, historical legacy, and regional leadership. Drawing on secondary sources, including political speeches, policy documents, media discourse, and academic literature, the article analyses how both states mobilize civilizational themes to frame national resurgence, territorial claims, and foreign policy orientations. India's self-presentation as a Hindu civilizational state and China's narrative of national rejuvenation under the "Chinese Dream" reveal parallel attempts to assert cultural authority in Asia. The article finds that although the CoC theory oversimplifies complex interstate dynamics, it offers useful insights into how identity-based discourses reinforce tensions in the India - China relationship. Ultimately, the study concludes that civilizational narratives function as a complementary layer, rather than the primary driver of strategic competition, amplifying mistrust and shaping the symbolic dimension of rivalry in the 21st-century Indo-Pacific.

Key Words: Clash of Civilization, India, China, Rivalry, Culture

INTRODUCTION

The India - China relationship stands today as one of the most consequential rivalries in the international system, shaping the strategic landscape of Asia and influencing global power dynamics (Bajpai, 2018). Much of the existing scholarship explains this rivalry through the lenses of geopolitics, military competition, economic asymmetry, and shifting regional alliances. Yet, beyond these material dimensions lies a powerful but less explored layer: the cultural and civilizational narratives through which both states imagine themselves, interpret each other, and articulate their foreign policy ambitions (Lysko, 2024). These narratives

* Ms. Maheshi Thellamurege serves as a Research and Programme Officer at the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS). (Correspondence: sadani2maheshi@gmail.com)



rooted in history, identity, and symbolic power play a significant role in shaping political discourse and influencing strategic behaviour. In this context, Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations (CoC) thesis, despite its limitations, provides a useful starting point for examining how culture and identity interact with geopolitical competition.

Huntington argued that post-Cold War conflicts would increasingly emerge along civilizational lines, driven not only by material interests but by deep-rooted cultural identities (Huntington, 1996; Hendrikson, 2018). Although his thesis has been widely debated and often criticized for essentializing civilizations, it usefully highlights how states mobilize cultural narratives to legitimize political agendas and project influence. Both India and China, as ancient civilizations with long historical memories, have increasingly positioned themselves not merely as nation-states but as civilizational powers reclaiming past status. This self-representation is evident in India's emphasis on Hindu civilizational heritage and democratic exceptionalism, and in China's articulation of national rejuvenation under the "Chinese Dream," which draws heavily on Confucian, imperial, and nationalist motifs (Prewitt, 2024).

These civilizational frameworks become especially salient in moments of strategic tension such as border disputes in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, competition for influence across South Asia, and the broader Indo - Pacific security environment (Sharma, 2024). Civilizational narratives influence how leaders justify foreign policies, how publics perceive rival intentions, and how each country interprets regional order. They also shape soft power projection, cultural diplomacy, and the symbolic contest over who represents the rightful leader of Asia. While material factors remain central to India-China competition, the discursive power of civilizational identity adds a unique and often under-analysed dimension to the rivalry.

This article argues that although the Clash of Civilizations thesis cannot fully explain India-China relations, it helps illuminate how identity-based narratives deepen mistrust and reinforce the symbolic battleground of their strategic competition. Using secondary sources including political speeches, media discourse, policy documents, and academic literature the study examines how both states invoke history, culture, and civilizational claims to frame their geopolitical ambitions. By analysing these narratives, the article demonstrates that cultural identity not only informs national self-perceptions but also shapes strategic behaviour, contributing to the complex and multi-layered nature of the India-China rivalry.



Ultimately, this article contends that civilizational narratives serve as a complementary layer, rather than the primary driver, of India-China competition. By revisiting Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* through a critical and constructivist lens, the study contributes to the literature by bridging cultural theory and strategic analysis in the study of Asian geopolitics. It moves beyond deterministic interpretations of civilizational conflict to demonstrate how identity-based narratives operate as discursive resources that amplify mistrust, legitimize policy choices, and shape perceptions of regional order. In doing so, the article advances a more integrated framework for understanding how symbolic power interacts with material competition in contemporary great-power rivalry.

From a policy perspective, recognizing the role of civilizational narratives offers important insights for conflict management and diplomatic engagement. If identity-based framings intensify threat perceptions and narrow space for compromise, then effective crisis management between India and China requires not only military confidence-building measures but also careful rhetorical and diplomatic signalling that avoids reinforcing civilizational antagonism. By illuminating this underexplored symbolic dimension, the article provides both scholars and policymakers with a deeper understanding of how cultural narratives shape strategic behaviour in the 21st-century Indo-Pacific, where shifts in material power are increasingly intertwined with contests over historical legitimacy and civilizational leadership.

BACKGROUND

Relations between India and China have historically oscillated between cooperation, cautious engagement, and open rivalry. Although both states share centuries of cultural exchange particularly through Buddhism and ancient trade routes their modern relationship has been shaped more sharply by territorial disputes, geopolitical competition, and differing political trajectories since the mid-20th century. The founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and India's independence in 1947 placed two large postcolonial states side by side, each aspiring to assert regional leadership while navigating Cold War pressures (Testbook, 2024). The promise of early solidarity under the Panchsheel Agreement soon gave way to mistrust, culminating in the 1962 Sino-Indian War, which left deep scars and continues to influence strategic perceptions today (Kansal, 2022).



Territorial disagreements remain central to bilateral tensions. China's claims over Arunachal Pradesh, India's concerns regarding Chinese presence in Aksai Chin, and periodic military stand-offs most recently the deadly 2020 Galwan Valley clash have reinforced mutual suspicion. These border disputes are not merely geographic or strategic; they are intertwined with nationalism, historical memory, and civilizational narratives of rightful territorial inheritance. For India, contested territories are tied to democratic sovereignty and civilizational continuity, while China frames them within narratives of national rejuvenation and the rectification of historical injustices (SCMP, 2020).

Beyond borders, the strategic landscape of the wider region has intensified the rivalry. China's expanding presence in South Asia through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), infrastructure investments, and port development has been viewed by India as encroaching into its traditional sphere of influence. In response, India has strengthened partnerships with the United States, Japan, and Australia through platforms such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), aligning itself with broader Indo-Pacific strategies aimed at balancing China's rise (Dutta, 2025). These developments reflect not only shifts in power but also competing visions of regional order China's preference for a hierarchical, Sino-centred Asia versus India's advocacy of a multipolar, rules-based Indo-Pacific (Mushtaq, 2025).

At the same time, both countries increasingly present themselves as civilizational states rather than merely modern nation-states. China under Xi Jinping promotes the narrative of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," emphasising Confucian concepts, imperial history, and national unity. India under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) highlights Hindu civilizational heritage, ancient wisdom traditions, and the idea of India as a "Vishwaguru" or global moral leader (de Estrada, 2023). These narratives influence foreign policy rhetoric, public diplomacy, and strategic decision-making, and often shape how each state interprets the ambitions of the other (Bajpai, 2018).

Understanding this historical and geopolitical backdrop is essential to analysing the symbolic and identity-based dimensions of India-China competition. While material power dynamics remain central, the growing prominence of civilizational narratives adds a deeper cultural layer that colours strategic perceptions and informs the broader rivalry in the 21st century (Lysko, 2024).



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article employs Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations (CoC) thesis as its primary conceptual lens, supplemented by insights from constructivist international relations theory and literature on civilizational states. Together, these frameworks help explain how culture, identity, and historical narratives shape the symbolic dimension of India - China rivalry.

Huntington's CoC thesis, introduced in 1993 and expanded in 1996, argues that post-Cold War conflicts will be driven less by ideology or economics and more by cultural and civilizational differences. According to Huntington, civilizations represent the highest form of cultural identity, and competition between major civilizational blocs becomes inevitable as states seek to defend values, expand influence, and reaffirm historical identities (Huntington, 1996). The India-China relationship exemplifies potential civilizational friction: China is situated within the Sinic civilization, while India is identified with Hindu civilization (Kumar, 2025). Although Huntington's categorisation has been widely criticised for essentialising identities and overlooking internal diversity, it provides a useful framework for analysing how states invoke cultural narratives to frame geopolitical rivalry.

To address the limitations of CoC, the analysis also draws on constructivist international relations theory, which emphasizes that state behaviour is shaped not only by material interests but by shared ideas, identity, and social meanings. Constructivists argue that states act according to how they perceive themselves and others, and these perceptions are formed through discourse, collective memory, and historical narratives. In the India-China context, constructivism helps explain how civilizational self-images such as China's "national rejuvenation" and India's "civilizational rise" shape foreign policy choices and influence interpretations of rival intentions.

A third lens informing this study is the concept of the civilizational state, increasingly used by scholars to describe countries that frame themselves not merely as modern nation-states but as inheritors of ancient civilizational legacies. Both India and China explicitly adopt this framing in their political rhetoric. China views itself as a 5,000-year-old civilization reclaiming historical greatness under the Chinese Dream, while India underlines its status as a Hindu civilization with a unique moral and spiritual heritage. The civilizational state framework helps



illuminate why identity-based narratives have become more prominent in strategic discourse and how they reinforce claims to leadership within Asia.

By combining these approaches, the theoretical framework acknowledges Huntington's contribution while critically situating it within broader scholarly debates. This allows the analysis to move beyond deterministic civilizational conflict and instead explore how cultural narratives interact with material power dynamics. In doing so, the article demonstrates that civilizational identity functions as a complementary, rather than primary, driver of India-China strategic competition, shaping perceptions, rhetoric, and the symbolic dimensions of rivalry.

ANALYSIS

The study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic approach, examining political speeches, policy statements, and diplomatic rhetoric to identify recurring civilizational signifiers and narrative patterns. Rather than assuming civilizational identity as fixed or coherent, the analysis treats it as a discursive resource selectively mobilized by political elites. The focus is therefore not on whether India and China are objectively "civilizations," but on how civilizational language frames strategic perception, legitimizes policy choices, and conditions crisis interpretation.

India's Civilizational Narrative: Reclaiming a Hindu Civilizational Identity

India's contemporary strategic discourse has increasingly intertwined foreign policy with civilizational identity, especially under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This shift reflects a broader ideological project that seeks to reinterpret India not merely as a modern, secular nation-state but as the inheritor of an ancient Hindu civilization with a distinct moral, cultural, and philosophical heritage (Saleem, 2023). The prominence of this narrative marks a significant transformation in how India articulates its global role and understands its relationship with neighbouring powers, particularly China (Bajpai, 2024).

Central to this narrative is the idea of India as a "Vishwaguru," or global teacher a nation that possesses unique wisdom rooted in Hindu philosophy, spirituality, and ancient knowledge systems (Desa, 2023). This concept appears repeatedly in political speeches, public diplomacy campaigns, and cultural initiatives, positioning India as a civilizational power whose



contributions to humanity extend beyond material achievements. The analytical significance of this framing lies less in its historical accuracy than in its political function. By grounding India's global role in civilizational antiquity, elite discourse indigenizes democratic legitimacy and reframes foreign policy ambition as moral stewardship rather than strategic assertion. Modi articulated this civilizational framing explicitly at the 2021 Summit for Democracy, where he stated "The democratic spirit is integral to our civilization ethos. Elected republican city-states such as "Lichhavi" and "Shakya" flourished in India as far as 2500 years back. This very democratic spirit and ethos had made ancient India one of the most prosperous. (Asian News International, 2021) By grounding democratic values in India's ancient past, Modi positioned Indian democracy not as a Western import but as an indigenous civilizational characteristic. Programs such as the International Day of Yoga, revived interest in Buddhism and Ayurveda, and increased focus on Sanskrit and Vedic traditions all form part of a soft power strategy that frames India as a moral and spiritual leader on the global stage (Ghosh, 2025).

This civilizational turn also influences India's interpretation of strategic challenges. For example, the long-standing border disputes with China, particularly in Arunachal Pradesh, are not presented solely as questions of geography or national security. Rather, political discourse often portrays them as challenges to India's civilizational integrity and historical continuity. Arunachal Pradesh referred to in Indian narratives as an integral part of ancient Bharat becomes symbolically significant as a frontier of civilizational belonging (Madhuri, 2024), reinforcing perceptions that China's territorial claims threaten not only national sovereignty but also India's cultural unity (Singh and Winter, 2023).

Similarly, India's engagement with South Asian neighbours draws on civilizational themes. The concept of "Neighbourhood First" is frequently framed in terms of shared cultural histories, religious linkages, and civilizational interconnectedness, particularly through Buddhism and Indic traditions (Simon, 2025). These references allow India to justify its leadership role in the region not as geopolitical dominance but as an extension of cultural stewardship. This perspective sharpens India's perception of China's expanding presence in South Asia through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and strategic port investments as an intrusion into a civilizational space that India believes to be historically and culturally its own. Here, civilizational language operates as a mechanism of symbolic securitization: infrastructure



competition is reframed as civilizational encroachment, raising the political costs of compromise and narrowing rhetorical flexibility.

Moreover, India's civilizational narrative reinforces its self-image as a counterweight to China. While China presents itself as a unified, harmonious, and hierarchical civilization rooted in Confucian and imperial traditions, India emphasizes its pluralism, democratic values, and openness, attributes that Indian policymakers argue make the country better suited to lead Asia's future (Junuguru, 2025). In his 2023 address to the Summit for Democracy, Modi explicitly claimed India as 'the mother of democracy,' asserting that elected leadership was common in ancient India long before the rest of the world, thereby establishing temporal precedence over Western democratic traditions (Haidar, 2023). This contrast is strategically significant; it positions India not only as a geopolitical competitor to China but as a symbolic competitor offering a different model of Asian modernity.

However, this narrative is neither universally accepted nor strategically determinative. India's continued participation in BRICS and sustained economic engagement with China suggest that civilizational rhetoric coexists with pragmatic strategic calculation. The narrative therefore conditions perception rather than dictating policy outcomes.

Thus, India's civilizational framing serves multiple strategic purposes across different levels of governance and engagement. Domestically, it reinforces nationalist sentiment by drawing upon shared historical memory and cultural pride, while simultaneously legitimizing political authority through the projection of the state as the guardian of an ancient and continuous civilization. Regionally, this narrative strengthens India's claim to leadership in South Asia by framing its influence as culturally rooted and historically justified rather than overtly hegemonic, particularly through references to shared civilizational and religious ties. Internationally, India's civilizational discourse functions as a soft power resource, enhancing its global cultural appeal and enabling it to project a distinct identity that contrasts with China's civilizational model (Singh and Winter, 2023). In doing so, India positions itself as an alternative center of Asian leadership, grounded in pluralism, democracy, and cultural continuity, thereby embedding symbolic competition within the broader strategic rivalry with China (Saleem, 2023).



In this sense, civilizational identity becomes a tool through which India interprets regional dynamics, evaluates China's intentions, and constructs its response to shifting power balances. It deepens the symbolic dimensions of India - China rivalry by embedding strategic competition within broader narratives of history, culture, and civilizational destiny.

China's Civilizational Narrative: The Chinese Dream and National Rejuvenation

China's contemporary self-representation as a civilizational state has become a defining feature of its domestic and foreign policy discourse, particularly under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. Central to this framing is the concept of the "Chinese Dream," which emphasizes the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" following what Chinese historiography describes as the "century of humiliation" inflicted by foreign powers (Prewitt, 2024). In his landmark 2021 speech marking the CCP's centenary, Xi invoked this narrative, stating that after the Opium War of 1840, "The country endured intense humiliation, the people were subjected to great pain, and the Chinese civilization was plunged into darkness." And also, he declared that "national rejuvenation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation". This narrative situates the modern Chinese state as the legitimate heir to a 5,000-year-old civilization whose historical continuity, cultural sophistication, and moral authority justify its aspiration for renewed global prominence. By embedding national resurgence within a civilizational storyline, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) links its political legitimacy to the restoration of China's historical greatness. This civilizational framing should not be interpreted as culturally inevitable. It is institutionally reproduced through party doctrine, state media, and education campaigns, reflecting political consolidation under centralized leadership rather than organic civilizational consensus.

Civilizational discourse in China draws heavily on Confucian philosophy, imperial governance traditions, and narratives of unity and harmony, which are mobilized to present China as a coherent and centralized civilization-state (Yang and Tamney, 2012; Yuqi and Ekanayaka, 2025). Xi became the first Chinese president to address an international Confucian conference in 2014, declaring that 'culture is the soul of a nation' and that without cherishing its thinking and culture, no nation can stand. He tied China's peace-loving nature to Confucian principles such as 'coordinate and seek harmony with all nations,' positioning traditional philosophy as proof of China's inherently benevolent character and non-hegemonic intentions (徐娉婷,



2015). Concepts such as harmony, order, and collective stability are emphasized to distinguish China's governance model from Western liberal democracy, which Beijing often portrays as fragmented, individualistic, and culturally alien. This framing also implicitly contrasts with India's pluralistic and democratic civilizational narrative, positioning China as a more disciplined and historically continuous model of Asian leadership. Through this lens, China presents itself not merely as a rising power, but as a natural and rightful centre of regional order in Asia.

These civilizational claims have significant implications for China's strategic behaviour, particularly in relation to territorial disputes and regional influence. In its border tensions with India, China consistently frames territorial claims as historically grounded and legally justified, reinforcing the idea that protecting territorial integrity is inseparable from the broader project of national rejuvenation (Langeh and Sudhakar, 2025). Challenges to these claims are therefore interpreted not only as strategic provocations but as affronts to China's civilizational dignity and historical sovereignty. The mechanism at work is legitimacy entanglement: territorial posture becomes symbolically tied to the broader project of national rejuvenation, increasing domestic audience costs in moments of crisis. This framing hardens negotiating positions and deepens mistrust, as compromise becomes symbolically linked to civilizational loss rather than pragmatic diplomacy.

China's civilizational narrative also extends beyond territorial disputes into its broader regional and global engagement. Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are frequently presented as modern expressions of ancient Silk Road connectivity, emphasizing themes of mutual benefit, shared prosperity, and cultural exchange (Yujia, 2023). By invoking historical precedents, China frames its infrastructure investments and diplomatic outreach in South Asia and the Indian Ocean as benevolent and non-hegemonic, masking strategic objectives within a civilizational discourse of cooperation. This narrative allows Beijing to counter accusations of expansionism while reinforcing its soft power and normative influence. Yet China's history of negotiated settlements with other neighbours demonstrates that civilizational rhetoric does not eliminate pragmatic flexibility. Rather, it amplifies symbolic stakes when disputes intersect with domestic legitimacy concerns.

In this sense, China's civilizational framing serves multiple strategic functions. Domestically, it reinforces national cohesion and legitimizes CCP authority by linking political leadership to



historical destiny. Regionally, it underpins China's claim to leadership in Asia by positioning Chinese values and governance traditions as central to regional stability. Internationally, it enables China to project a distinct global identity that challenges Western dominance and competes symbolically with India's civilizational narrative. Consequently, China's civilizational discourse operates as a powerful complementary force that shapes strategic perceptions, legitimizes geopolitical ambitions, and intensifies the symbolic dimension of India - China rivalry.

Civilizational Friction: Competing Claims to Regional Leadership

Although India and China are engaged in visible forms of material competition ranging from military modernisation and economic expansion to infrastructure development and strategic partnerships their rivalry is also deeply embedded in symbolic struggles over civilizational authority and regional leadership (Bajpae and Jie, 2025; Root, 2024). Both states perceive themselves not merely as powerful nation-states, but as ancient civilizations with historical legitimacy to shape Asia's political and moral order. This overlapping self-perception produces what can be described as civilizational friction, a condition in which strategic actions are interpreted through identity-laden narratives rather than purely rational or material calculations (Ganguly, Pardesi and Thompson, 2024). Civilizational friction therefore emerges not from essential cultural incompatibility, but from overlapping leadership narratives that interpret strategic competition through identity-based lenses.

At the heart of this friction lies the belief, shared by both countries, that they are the natural leaders of Asia (Root, 2024). India's civilizational narrative emphasizes its role as the cradle of major philosophical and religious traditions, including Hinduism and Buddhism, and highlights its long-standing cultural links across South and Southeast Asia (Miksic, 2006; Sengupta, 2024). This worldview constructs South Asia as a historically interconnected civilizational space in which India occupies a central position. Consequently, China's expanding economic and strategic presence in the region through infrastructure projects, port development, and diplomatic engagement is often interpreted in Indian discourse as an intrusion into a culturally familiar and historically Indian sphere of influence (Bajpae and Jie, 2025). Such perceptions extend beyond immediate security concerns and are framed instead as challenges to India's civilizational status and regional primacy.



China, by contrast, approaches regional leadership through a civilizational lens rooted in imperial history and Confucian notions of hierarchy, order, and harmony (Phillips, 2018; Root, 2024). From this perspective, China's rise is viewed as the restoration of a historically central position in Asia, disrupted temporarily by Western imperialism. Beijing's engagement with South Asia and the Indian Ocean is thus framed not as expansionist but as the re-emergence of a historically legitimate regional order. India's resistance to this process, particularly through closer alignment with the United States, Japan, and Australia is frequently interpreted in Chinese discourse as an externally driven attempt to constrain China's rightful resurgence rather than as an independent strategic choice (Wang, 2021; Chen, 2020).

This divergence in civilizational self-understanding significantly shapes how each state interprets the other's strategic behaviour. India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) is often portrayed domestically as a pragmatic response to China's assertiveness (Tarapore, 2023). However, from China's perspective, QUAD represents a deliberate effort to undermine China's civilizational and strategic ascent by embedding India within a Western-led containment framework (Wang, 2021; Da Wei, 2021). This interpretation reflects a broader assumption within Chinese strategic culture that opposition to China's rise is rooted in fear of its civilizational reassertion rather than in specific policy disagreements (Root, 2024). The key mechanism here is interpretive amplification: strategic initiatives are filtered through civilizational narratives, transforming policy disagreements into symbolic contests over legitimacy.

Civilizational friction also manifests in how both countries interpret norms of regional order. India tends to advocate a pluralistic, multipolar Asia grounded in democratic values, sovereignty, and rules-based governance principles that align with its self-image as a tolerant and diverse civilization (Bajpae and Jie, 2025; Miller 2020). China, in contrast, promotes a vision of regional stability based on respect for hierarchy, non-interference as defined by state authority, and centralized leadership (Phillips, 2018). These competing normative visions are not simply ideological preferences; they are embedded in broader civilizational narratives about how order, authority, and legitimacy should function in Asia (Root, 2024).

The consequences of such friction are particularly evident during periods of crisis, such as border standoffs or diplomatic confrontations (Verma, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2023). During these moments, civilizational narratives harden perceptions and reduce space



for compromise. Actions that might otherwise be interpreted as tactical manoeuvres become symbolically charged, reinforcing narratives of historical injustice, civilizational threat, or moral superiority (Bajpae and Jie, 2025; Lamb, 2024). As a result, mistrust deepens, and escalation risks increase, even when neither side seeks outright conflict (Khan, Bhat and Ishfaq Ahmad, 2024; Verma, 2024).

Importantly, this civilizational friction does not operate in isolation from material power dynamics. Rather, it amplifies them by providing a symbolic framework through which strategic competition is understood and justified. Infrastructure projects become markers of cultural influence, alliances are framed as civilizational alignments, and territorial disputes are elevated into questions of historical destiny (Paul, 2018). In this sense, civilizational narratives act as force multipliers, intensifying rivalry by embedding it within deeper identity-based claims.

Thus, civilizational friction between India and China represents a critical but often underexplored dimension of their strategic competition. It reveals how identity, history, and symbolism intersect with geopolitics, shaping perceptions of threat and legitimacy. While material factors remain central drivers of the rivalry, civilizational narratives condition how these factors are interpreted, responded to, and politically mobilized. Understanding this symbolic layer is therefore essential to grasping the enduring complexity of India-China relations and the broader struggle for leadership in 21st-century Asia.

Border Disputes Through a Civilizational Lens

Border disputes between India and China, particularly in regions such as Aksai Chin, Ladakh, and Arunachal Pradesh, are most commonly analysed through strategic, military, and geopolitical frameworks (Verma, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2023). These analyses focus on territorial control, military posturing, infrastructure development, and the balance of power along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). While such perspectives are essential, they do not fully capture the deeper symbolic and identity-based dimensions that shape how both states interpret and respond to border tensions (Bajpae and Jie, 2025). A civilizational lens reveals that these disputed territories are not merely strategic spaces but are deeply embedded within narratives of history, sovereignty, and national destiny (Abraham, 2014).



For India, contested border regions are closely tied to ideas of territorial integrity, postcolonial sovereignty, and civilizational continuity (Abraham, 2014; Wojczewski, 2019). The modern Indian state emerged from a history of colonial partition and territorial fragmentation, making borders a particularly sensitive marker of political and cultural unity (Kulke and Rothermund, 2002). Regions such as Arunachal Pradesh are framed in Indian political and public discourse as inseparable parts of the Indian civilizational space often referred to as Bharat with historical, religious, and cultural connections that predate the modern nation-state (Sengupta, 2024; Khosa, 2025). As a result, Chinese territorial claims are not perceived solely as strategic challenges but as threats to India's historical identity and civilizational wholeness (Abraham, 2014).

This framing reinforces a broader narrative in which defending borders becomes synonymous with defending civilization (Chacko, 2018). Political rhetoric frequently links territorial sovereignty to cultural pride and national resurgence, especially within the context of India's contemporary civilizational turn (Miller, 2020). Consequently, concessions or compromises in border negotiations are often viewed domestically as symbolic losses that undermine not only state authority but also India's civilizational dignity (Pattanaik, 2020). These dynamics limit diplomatic flexibility and elevate border disputes into emotionally charged issues with strong domestic resonance (Ganguly, Pardesi and Thompson, 2024).

For China, border disputes are similarly embedded within a civilizational narrative, though articulated through a different historical framework. Chinese territorial claims are frequently justified through references to historical maps, imperial-era boundaries, and the broader project of correcting injustices associated with the "century of humiliation" (Kaufman, 2010; Wang, 2020). Within this discourse, disputed territories are framed as historically Chinese lands that must be reclaimed or secured as part of the nation's rejuvenation (Carrai, 2019). Protecting territorial integrity is thus portrayed as a civilizational obligation, inseparable from restoring China's rightful place in history (Suzuki, 2017).

This perspective renders border disputes deeply symbolic for the Chinese state. Challenges to China's territorial claims whether through Indian resistance or international attention are often interpreted as attempts to undermine China's historical legitimacy and civilizational status (Lovell, 2011; Geaney, 2022). As a result, compromise is frequently portrayed as incompatible with national rejuvenation, reinforcing a rigid negotiating posture (Wang, 2020).



The civilizational framing also allows the Chinese leadership to mobilize domestic support by presenting border tensions as external challenges to China's historical destiny rather than as negotiable political disputes (Suzuki, 2017).

The interaction of these competing civilizational narratives significantly intensifies mistrust between the two states (Prasad, 2021; Verma, 2024). India often interprets China's infrastructure development and military movements along the border as evidence of expansionist ambition rooted in a centralized and hierarchical civilizational worldview (Bajpae and Jie, 2025). China, in turn, views India's resistance, infrastructural build-up, and growing strategic partnerships particularly with Western powers as deliberate efforts to contest China's historical legitimacy and constrain its civilizational resurgence (Hu and Wang, 2020). These interpretations go beyond rational assessments of threat and embed border tensions within broader narratives of identity and historical rivalry (Root, 2024).

Civilizational framing also shapes crisis dynamics. During border standoffs, such as the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, actions on the ground quickly acquire symbolic meaning (Chatterjee, 2024; Prasad, 2021). Military encounters are interpreted not simply as tactical incidents but as affirmations or violations of civilizational resolve (Verma, 2024). This symbolism heightens nationalist sentiment on both sides, narrows the space for de-escalation, and increases the political costs of compromise (International Crisis Group, 2023). Border management mechanisms, while important, struggle to contain escalation when disputes are framed as matters of historical destiny rather than pragmatic coexistence (Bajpae and Jie, 2025). In such moments, tactical incidents acquire civilizational symbolism. This symbolic elevation increases audience costs and narrows political flexibility, even when material incentives favour de-escalation.

Importantly, viewing border disputes through a civilizational lens does not negate the role of material factors such as military capability, geography, or strategic interest. Rather, it demonstrates how civilizational narratives amplify material tensions, transforming territorial disputes into deeply symbolic confrontations (Ganguly, Pardesi and Thompson, 2024). Borders become sites where history, identity, and power intersect, reinforcing the persistence and intensity of India-China rivalry (Paul, 2018). Nonetheless, subsequent disengagement negotiations illustrate that strategic risk calculations ultimately constrained



escalation. Civilizational narratives intensified emotional resonance but did not override material deterrence logic.

In this sense, border disputes function as a focal point where civilizational competition becomes most visible. They illustrate how identity-based narratives condition strategic behaviour, shape perceptions of legitimacy, and complicate conflict resolution (Root, 2024). Understanding these disputes therefore requires not only geopolitical analysis but also attention to the symbolic and civilizational meanings that both states attach to territory (Abraham, 2014; Bajpae and Jie, 2025). Such an approach helps explain why border tensions endure despite diplomatic engagement and economic interdependence, and why they remain central to the broader contest for leadership and legitimacy in 21st-century Asia (Paul, 2018).

Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Symbolic Competition

Soft power has emerged as a crucial arena of competition in the India-China relationship, complementing military, economic, and strategic rivalry with a symbolic struggle over legitimacy, values, and civilizational appeal. Coined by Joseph Nye (2004), soft power refers to the ability of states to shape the preferences of others through attraction rather than coercion or payment. In the context of India-China relations, soft power operates not merely as a foreign policy tool but as an extension of deeper civilizational narratives, enabling both countries to project culturally grounded visions of leadership in Asia and beyond (Kochhar and Ulman, 2020).

India's soft power strategy is closely tied to its portrayal as a pluralistic, democratic, and spiritually rich civilization (Verma, 2023). Cultural resources such as yoga, Ayurveda, classical arts, and philosophical traditions are mobilized to construct an image of India as a peaceful and morally grounded society with universal appeal (Halsana, 2025). The global promotion of yoga most visibly through the United Nations recognized International Day of Yoga has become a central pillar of India's cultural diplomacy, reinforcing narratives of harmony, well-being, and ancient wisdom (Black, 2025). These initiatives allow India to present itself as a civilization whose influence flows organically through culture rather than force, aligning with its broader self-image as a benign regional leader (Chacko, 2012).



The Indian diaspora also plays a significant role in this soft power projection. Large, politically active diaspora communities across North America, Europe, and Southeast Asia function as informal ambassadors of Indian culture, democracy, and economic success (Mahapatra, 2016; Rani, 2025). Through festivals, religious institutions, media, and political engagement, the diaspora amplifies India's civilizational narrative globally (Verma, 2023). This diasporic influence reinforces India's claim to moral authority and cultural relevance, particularly in democratic societies, and contrasts with China's more state-centric approach to cultural diplomacy (Melissen and Kumar, 2024).

China's soft power strategy, by contrast, is more institutionalized and centrally coordinated, reflecting its broader governance model (d'Hooghe, 2015; Wang and Adamson, 2015). The establishment of Confucius Institutes across the world represents one of China's most visible efforts to promote language, culture, and civilizational values (Hartig, 2015; Trang and Dat, 2025). These institutions aim to familiarize foreign audiences with Chinese history, philosophy, and contemporary society, framing China as a sophisticated and harmonious civilization. Alongside educational exchanges, cultural festivals, and media outreach, China projects an image of cultural continuity and civilizational depth that supports its claim to global leadership (Kurlantzick, 2007).

At the core of China's soft power narrative is the concept of "harmonious development", which presents China's rise as peaceful, cooperative, and mutually beneficial (d'Hooghe, 2015). This framing draws on Confucian ideals of harmony and order, positioning China as a stabilizing force rather than a disruptive power. Through this discourse, Beijing seeks to counter perceptions of threat associated with its rapid rise and to legitimize its expanding global presence (Li, 2009). However, critics argue that China's soft power efforts are often constrained by perceptions of political control and limited cultural openness, which can undermine their attractiveness in liberal democratic contexts (Brady, 2015; Paradise, 2009).

Buddhism has emerged as a particularly significant and subtle arena of symbolic competition between India and China (Scott, 2016). For India, Buddhism represents a powerful civilizational resource rooted in its historical identity as the birthplace of the Buddha. Sacred sites such as Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar are central to global Buddhist heritage, allowing India to claim spiritual primacy within the Buddhist world (Ramachandran, 2017).



Indian diplomacy frequently emphasizes Buddhism as a unifying cultural bridge across Asia, reinforcing narratives of peaceful influence and shared civilizational history (Scott, 2016).

China, however, has increasingly sought to position itself as a new center of global Buddhism (Wank, 2013; Scott, 2016). Through investments in Buddhist institutions, sponsorship of international Buddhist forums, and promotion of cultural tourism, China presents itself as a contemporary hub of Buddhist practice and scholarship. This effort is closely linked to China's broader civilizational narrative and to its political interests, particularly in managing religious authority within its borders and countering Tibetan Buddhist influence (Rao, 2025). By aligning Buddhism with state-led cultural diplomacy, China attempts to integrate spiritual heritage into its geopolitical strategy (Scott, 2016).

The symbolic competition over Buddhism illustrates how soft power becomes intertwined with civilizational legitimacy. While India emphasizes authenticity, historical origin, and spiritual continuity, China stresses institutional capacity, global outreach, and modern infrastructure (Scott, 2016). This contrast reflects broader differences in how both states conceptualize civilizational leadership India's decentralized, pluralistic approach versus China's centralized and state-managed model (Bajpaee and Jie, 2025). The effectiveness of these symbolic strategies, however, varies significantly across audiences. China's centralized cultural diplomacy faces skepticism in liberal democracies, while India's soft power projection is constrained by material capacity and institutional coordination. This variation indicates that civilizational appeal interacts with governance perception and economic capability.

Importantly, this soft power rivalry does not operate independently of material power dynamics. Cultural diplomacy often accompanies infrastructure projects, strategic partnerships, and diplomatic initiatives, reinforcing broader geopolitical objectives (d'Hooghe, 2015). For example, China's cultural engagement in South Asia frequently coincides with Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments, while India's cultural outreach aligns with its "Neighbourhood First" and "Act East" policies (Kochhar and Ulman, 2020). In this way, soft power functions as a force multiplier, enhancing the legitimacy and acceptance of strategic influence (Nye, 2004).

Ultimately, the symbolic competition between India and China in the realm of soft power deepens the civilizational dimension of their rivalry (Root, 2024). It shapes how both countries



are perceived by regional states and global audiences, influences normative debates about leadership and values, and reinforces identity-based interpretations of strategic behaviour (Bajpae and Jie, 2025). While neither country's soft power efforts alone determine regional order, they play a critical role in constructing legitimacy, amplifying influence, and embedding strategic competition within broader narratives of civilizational destiny (Paul, 2018).

Evaluating Huntington: Utility and Limitations

Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis offers a provocative and influential framework for understanding post-Cold War international politics by foregrounding culture and identity as central sources of conflict (Huntington, 1993; 1996). In the context of India-China relations, the thesis captures certain important dynamics, particularly the role of civilizational self-perceptions, historical memory, and symbolic narratives in shaping strategic mistrust. The persistence of tension between India and China despite deepening economic interdependence, diplomatic engagement, and participation in multilateral forums suggests that material incentives alone are insufficient to overcome deeply embedded identity-based suspicions (Bajpae and Jie, 2025). In this sense, Huntington's emphasis on culture provides a useful corrective to purely materialist or realist explanations of the rivalry (Root, 2024).

Huntington's framework is especially valuable in highlighting how civilizational identity shapes perception rather than directly causing conflict (Ganguly, Pardesi and Thompson, 2024). In the India-China case, cultural narratives influence how each state interprets the intentions and actions of the other. China's rise is not viewed by India solely in terms of shifting power balances but is often framed as the resurgence of a centralized, hierarchical civilization with expansionist tendencies (Chacko, 2018). Conversely, India's strategic autonomy and growing partnerships with Western democracies are interpreted in Chinese discourse as civilizational incongruent with China's vision of Asian order (Wang, 2021). These mutually reinforcing perceptions deepen mistrust and render strategic reassurance difficult, even when both sides profess peaceful intentions (Bajpae and Jie, 2025).

However, while Huntington's thesis helps illuminate the symbolic and discursive dimensions of rivalry, its deterministic assumptions significantly limit its explanatory power. Huntington treats civilizations as relatively fixed, coherent, and internally homogeneous entities whose interactions are predisposed toward conflict (Sen, 2006; Seif-Amir Hosseini, 2006). This



approach obscures the internal diversity, contestation, and evolution within civilizations themselves (Chiozza 2002). Both India and China encompass complex social, political, and cultural pluralities that cannot be reduced to singular civilizational identities. Moreover, the fluidity of identity narratives actively constructed and strategically deployed by political elites' challenges Huntington's assumption that civilizations are static and inherently antagonistic (Ozyurt, 2020; Lemke, 2019).

More importantly, the India-China rivalry demonstrates that material factors remain the primary drivers of conflict, with civilizational narratives operating as amplifiers rather than root causes (Verma, 2024; Paul, 2018). Territorial disputes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), competition for regional influence, concerns over military modernization, and broader great-power dynamics provide the structural foundations of rivalry (International Crisis Group, 2023). These factors would continue to generate strategic tension even in the absence of civilizational rhetoric. Identity-based narratives gain salience precisely because they are layered onto existing geopolitical and strategic contests, lending them symbolic depth and emotional resonance (Root, 2024).

The deterministic logic of the Clash of Civilizations thesis also underestimates the capacity for strategic pragmatism and cooperation across civilizational lines. India and China have demonstrated periods of collaboration in trade, climate negotiations, multilateral institutions such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and global governance forums (Pandey, 2025; Quadri, 2025). These interactions reveal that civilizational difference does not inevitably lead to conflict and that state behaviour remains contingent on strategic calculations, domestic priorities, and international constraints (Prasad, 2021). Huntington's framework struggles to account for such pragmatic engagement, instead privileging conflict as the dominant outcome of civilizational interaction (Haynes, 2019).

A more nuanced reading of Huntington emerges when his thesis is combined with constructivist insights. Rather than viewing civilizations as fixed and conflict-prone entities, civilizational identity can be understood as a discursive resource mobilized by political actors to frame interests, legitimize policies, and shape public perception (Ozyurt, 2020; Lemke, 2019). In this interpretation, civilizational narratives do not cause rivalry but condition how rivalry is understood and politically managed (Cox, 2017). They influence the language of diplomacy, the symbolism attached to territorial disputes, and the domestic framing of



foreign policy choices. This approach preserves Huntington's emphasis on identity while rejecting civilizational inevitability (Mace, 2019). Civilizations do not act; political actors mobilize civilizational language to frame interests and shape perception.

The India-China case thus suggests that civilizational identity functions as a complementary layer within a broader matrix of geopolitical competition. It reinforces existing tensions, legitimizes strategic postures, and deepens mistrust, but it does not independently generate conflict (Ganguly, Pardesi and Thompson, 2024). Civilizational narratives become most powerful when they intersect with material disputes, transforming strategic disagreements into questions of historical destiny, moral authority, and cultural legitimacy (Root, 2024). In doing so, they raise the political and symbolic stakes of rivalry, making compromise more difficult and confrontation more emotionally charged (Bajpae and Jie, 2025).

Ultimately, this evaluation demonstrates that while Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis cannot fully explain India-China relations, it remains analytically useful when applied critically and selectively (Gregg, 2021). Its greatest value lies not in predicting inevitable conflict, but in drawing attention to the cultural and symbolic dimensions of power politics (Paul, 2018). By situating civilizational identity as an amplifying rather than determinative force, this article advances a more balanced understanding of how culture, identity, and material power interact in shaping contemporary strategic competition in Asia.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to examine the India-China strategic rivalry through the lens of civilizational identity, revisiting Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis to assess its relevance in the contemporary Indo-Pacific context (Huntington, 1993; 1996). By analysing political discourse, policy narratives, border disputes, and soft power strategies, the study demonstrated that India and China increasingly frame their geopolitical ambitions through civilizational narratives rooted in history, culture, and identity (Bajpae and Jie, 2025; Root, 2024). These narratives shape how each state understands itself, interprets the intentions of the other, and articulates claims to regional leadership in Asia (Ganguly, Pardesi and Thompson, 2024).

The analysis shows that both India and China actively mobilize civilizational discourse to legitimize foreign policy choices and reinforce domestic political authority (Chacko, 2018;



Tellis, 2016). India's portrayal of itself as a pluralistic, democratic, and spiritually grounded civilization contrasts sharply with China's centralized narrative of national rejuvenation and Confucian harmony (Ford, 2016; Miller, 2020). These competing self-images deepen symbolic rivalry and influence perceptions surrounding border disputes, regional influence, and normative leadership (Narvenkar, 2025). In moments of crisis, such as border confrontations, civilizational narratives intensify mistrust by elevating strategic disagreements into questions of historical destiny and cultural legitimacy (Verma, 2024; Chatterjee, 2024).

At the same time, this study critically engages with Huntington's thesis and highlights its limitations. While civilizational identity clearly shapes discourse and perception, the evidence suggests that material factors territorial disputes, security concerns, power transitions, and regional alignments remain the primary drivers of India-China competition (Paul, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2023). Civilizational difference alone does not determine conflict, nor does it preclude cooperation, as demonstrated by periods of pragmatic engagement in trade, multilateral institutions, and global governance (Pandey, 2025; Mohan, 2025).

The study therefore concludes that civilizational narratives function as a complementary layer, rather than the primary driver, of strategic competition, amplifying mistrust and shaping the symbolic dimension of rivalry in the 21st-century Indo-Pacific (Tellis, 2016; Khoo, 2023). These narratives do not independently produce conflict, but they condition how strategic interactions are interpreted, justified, and politically mobilized (Narvenkar, 2025; Bajpae and Jie, 2025). By embedding geopolitical competition within broader stories of identity and historical purpose, civilizational discourse raises the symbolic stakes of rivalry and complicates efforts at conflict management (Root, 2024).

Understanding India-China relations thus requires moving beyond purely material explanations to incorporate the cultural and symbolic dimensions of power politics (Tellis, 2016; Pye, 1985). A nuanced approach that recognises the interaction between identity and strategy offers deeper insight into the persistence of mistrust and the evolving dynamics of Asian geopolitics (Ganguly, Pardesi and Thompson, 2024; Khoo, 2023). Such an understanding is essential for interpreting not only India–China relations, but also the broader patterns of competition and cooperation shaping the Indo-Pacific in the 21st century (Mohan, 2025; Hall, 2023).



REFERENCES

Abraham, I. (2014). *How India became territorial: Foreign policy, diaspora, geopolitics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Asian News International (2021). Colonial Rule Couldn't Suppress Democratic Spirit of Indians: PM Modi. [online] www.ndtv.com. Available at: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/pm-modi-at-democracy-summit-centuries-of-colonial-rule-could-not-suppress-democratic-spirit-of-indians-2645837>

Bajpai, R.D. (2018). *Civilizational Perspectives in International Relations and Contemporary China-India Relations*. [online] *E-International Relations*. Available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/04/26/civilizational-perspectives-in-international-relations-and-contemporary-china-india-relations/>

Bajpai, R.D. (2024). *Civilization-States of China and India*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bajpae, C. and Jie, Y. (2025) *How China–India relations will shape Asia and the global order*. Research Paper. London: Chatham House. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/04/how-china-india-relations-will-shape-asia-and-global-order>

Black, J. (2025). 'India's use of yoga in diplomacy', *The Journal of International Communication*, 31(1), pp. 23-45.

Brady, A.M. (2015). *Marketing dictatorship: Propaganda and thought work in contemporary China*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Carrai, M. A. (2019). *Sovereignty in China*.

Chacko, P. (2018) 'The right turn in India: Authoritarianism, populism and neoliberalisation', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 48(4), pp. 541-565.

Chatterjee, A. (2024) 'Authenticity during conflict reporting: The China–India border clash in the Indian press', *Media, War & Conflict*, 17(1), pp. 23-42.

Chen, P.-K. (2020). *The Prospects of the US Alliance System in Asia: Managing from the Hub*. *Issues & Studies*, 56(03).



Chiozza, G. (2002). 'Is there a clash of civilizations? Evidence from patterns of international conflict involvement, 1946-97', *Journal of Peace Research*, 39(6), pp. 711-734.

Cox, R.W. (2017). 'Civilizations: Encounters and transformations', in Acharya, A. and Buzan, B. (eds.) *Why is there no non-Western international relations theory?* London: Routledge, pp. 207-226.

Da Wei (2021). 'China's shifting attitude on the Indo-Pacific Quad', *War on the Rocks*, 7 April. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/chinas-shifting-attitude-on-the-indo-pacific-quad/>

de Estrada, K.S. (2023). What is a vishwaguru? Indian civilizational pedagogy as a transformative global imperative. *International Affairs*, 99(2), pp.433–455.

Desa, A.B. (2023). Editorial: India as Vishwaguru. [online] *Finsindia*. Available at: <https://finsindia.org/editorial-india-as-vishwaguru.html>.

d'Hooghe, I. (2015). *China's public diplomacy*. Leiden: Brill.

Dutta, D. (2025). India and the QUAD: Strategic Balancing or Containment of China? [online] *CESCcube*. Available at: <https://www.cescube.com/vp-india-and-the-quad-strategic-balancing-or-containment-of-china>.

Ford, C.A. (2016). 'China', in Tellis, A.J., Szalwinski, A. and Wills, M. (eds.) *Strategic Asia 2016-17: Understanding strategic cultures in the Asia-Pacific*. Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, pp. 65-94.

Ganguly, S., Pardesi, M.S. and Thompson, W.R. (2024) *The Sino-Indian rivalry: implications for the global order*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

Geaney, W. (2022). 'Understanding China's historical impetus', *Joint Force Quarterly*, 104, pp. 102-109.

Ghosh, S. (2025). Why has India reimagined its role from Vishwaguru to Vishwamitra? . *TheInterpreter*. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/why-has-india-reimagined-its-role-vishwaguru-vishwamitra>

Haidar, S. (2023, March 29). India is indeed the mother of democracy, says PM Modi citing Mahabharata and Vedas. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india->



mother-of-democracy-home-to-idea-of-elected-leaders-much-before-rest-of-world-pm-modi/article66675267.ece

Hall, I. (2023). 'India and order transition in the Indo-Pacific: Resisting the Quad as a "security community"', *The Pacific Review*, 36(6), pp. 1-28.

Halsana, H. (2025). 'India's soft power diplomacy during the Modi era: A strategic reimagining of global influence', *Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary*, 10(8), pp. 287-293.

Hartig, F. (2015). 'Communicating China to the world: Confucius Institutes and China's strategic narratives', *Politics*, 35(3-4), pp. 245-258.

Haynes, J. (ed.) (2019). *The Clash of Civilizations twenty-five years on: A multidisciplinary appraisal*. London: Routledge.

Hendrikson, H. (2018). Summary of 'The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order'. [online] Beyond Intractability. Available at: <https://www.beyondintractability.org/bksum/huntington-clash>.

Hu, S. and Wang, J. (2020) 'The behavioural logic of India's tough foreign policy towards China', *China International Relations*, 30(5), pp. 37-65.

Huntington, S.P. (1993). 'The clash of civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72(3), pp. 22-49.

Huntington, S.P. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

International Crisis Group (2023). *Thin ice in the Himalayas: handling the India-China border dispute*. Crisis Group Asia Report No. 334. Brussels: International Crisis Group.

Junuguru, S. (2025). *Review of the QUAD Role in India–China Relations*. East Asia.

Kansal, S. (2022). *Revisiting Misperceptions: The 1962 Indo-China War*. [online] *The Geopolitics*. Available at: <https://thegeopolitics.com/revisiting-misperceptions-the-1962-indo-china-war/>.

Kaufman, A.A. (2010). 'The "Century of Humiliation", then and now: Chinese perceptions of the international order', *Pacific Focus*, 25(1), pp. 1-33.



Khan, Z. Y., Bhat, S. A., & Ishfaq Ahmad. (2024). Unravelling The Complexities of The India-China Border Conflict: A Comprehensive Analysis. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 5(1).

Khoo, N. (2023). 'Great power rivalry and Southeast Asian agency: Southeast Asia in an era of US-China strategic competition', *The Pacific Review*, 36(1), pp. 189-209.

Khosa, R. (2025). 'India as civilizational state: Geopolitical blowback in South Asia', *Geopolitical Monitor*, 7 August. Available at: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/india-as-civilizational-state-geopolitical-blowback-in-south-asia/>

Kochhar, G. and Ulman, S.A. (eds.) (2020). *India and China: Economics and soft power diplomacy*. London: Routledge.

Kulke, H. and Rothermund, D. (2002). *A history of India*. 4th edn. London: Routledge.

Kurlantzick, J. (2007). *Charm offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kumar, Y. (2025). China and India can be civilizational partners. [online] *China Daily*. Available at: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202508/25/WS68abb430a310851ffdb4fd17.html>.

Lamb, A. (2024). 'The colonial strategy and India-China conflict', *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 22 January. Available at: <https://gia.georgetown.edu/2025/01/18/the-colonial-strategy-and-india-china-conflict-past-present-and-future/>

Langeh, A., & Sudhakar, R. (2025). *India-China Border Dispute: Historical Roots, Strategic Ambitions and Diplomatic Responses*. In N. Ahmed & J. H. Laskar (Eds.), *Dynamics of International Relations: Continuity and Change in a Globalized World* (pp. 23–40). Mittal Publications.

Lemke, T. (2019). 'The clash of civilizations: Still provocative after all these years', in Teaching roundtable 11-6 on the clash of civilizations in the IR classroom. H-Diplo/ISSF Teaching Roundtable.

Li, M. (ed.) (2009). *Soft power: China's emerging strategy in international politics*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.

Lovell, J. (2011). *The Opium War: Drugs, dreams and the making of China*. London: Picador.



Lysko, S. (2024). Civilizational Narrative in The Foreign Policy of India and China: The Impact of The Russian Ukrainian War. *UA: Ukraine Analytica*, 3(35), pp.48–58.

Mace, C. (2019). 'Huntington, world order, and Russia', *Christian Scholar's Review*, 49(1), pp. 43-62.

Madhuri, A. N. B. (2024). Arunachal Pradesh: A focal point of confrontation between India & China. *Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies*, 05(06), 80–106.

Mahapatra, D. A. (2016). From a latent to a “strong” soft power? The evolution of India’s cultural diplomacy. *Palgrave Communications*, 2(1).

Miksic, J.N. (2006). 'The Buddhist-Hindu divide in premodern Southeast Asia', ISEAS Working Paper, No. 1. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Miller, M.C. (2020). 'China, India, and their differing conceptions of international order', in Paul, T.V. (ed.) *The China-India rivalry in the globalization era*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, pp. 73-91.

Mohan, C.R. (2025). 'India: Leaning to one side (cautiously)', in Posen, B.R. (ed.) *Restraint and middle powers in a multipolar world*. Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, pp. 71-96.

Mushtaq, S.B. (2025). India’s strategic response to the Belt and Road Initiative: India’s countermeasures and regional alliances amid China’s global infrastructure push. [online] Meer. Available at: <https://www.meer.com/en/87923-indias-strategic-response-to-the-belt-and-road-initiative>.

Narvenkar, M.V. (2025). 'Geopolitical shifts in the Indo-Pacific: China's ambitions and India's security concerns', *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, 81(1), pp. 58-77.

Nye, J.S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

Ozyurt, S.G. (2020). 'Is Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" a self-fulfilled prophecy?', *E-International Relations*, 29 January. Available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/01/29/is-huntingtons-clash-of-civilizations-a-self-fulfilled-prophecy/>



Pandey, R. (2025). 'India's strategic autonomy: From balancing the West to trusting Russia', Valdai Discussion Club, December. Available at: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/india-s-strategic-autonomy-from-balancing-the-west/>

Paradise, J.F. (2009). 'China and international harmony: The role of Confucius Institutes in bolstering Beijing's soft power', *Asian Survey*, 49(4), pp. 647-669.

Paul, T.V. (ed.) (2018). *The China-India rivalry in the globalization era*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Phillips, A. (2018). 'Contesting the Confucian peace: civilization, barbarism and international hierarchy in East Asia', *European Journal of International Relations*, 24(4), pp. 740-764.

Prasad, S.R. (2021). 'The road from Galwan: The future of India-China relations', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 23 March. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/03/the-road-from-galwan-the-future-of-india-china-relations>

Prewitt, A. (2024). *The World in the Dream of China: How is Xi Jinping's China Dream transforming global power and order?* [online] *Foreign Analysis*. Available at: <https://foreignanalysis.com/the-world-in-the-dream-of-china/>.

Pye, L.W. (1985). *Asian power and politics: The cultural dimensions of authority*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Quadri, S.A. (2025). 'BRICS, SCO, and beyond: Can India sustain its strategic autonomy?', *GASAM*, 21 July. Available at: <https://gasam.org.tr/brics-sco-and-beyond-can-india-sustain-its-strategic-autonomy/>

Ramachandran, S. (2017). 'Rivalries and relics: Examining China's Buddhist public diplomacy', *China Brief*, 17(4), pp. 12-16.

Rani, A. (2025). 'Rising role of India's diaspora as soft power diplomacy', *Gyanshauryam International Scientific Refereed Research Journal*, 8(4), pp. 14-20.

Rao, N. (2025). 'China, India and the conflict over Buddhism', *The Hindu*, 23 July

Root, H.L. (2024). 'Civilisational conflict', *Survival*, 66(1), pp. 43-68.



Saleem, R.M.A. (2023). Hindu Civilizationism: Make India Great Again. *Religions*, 14(3), p.338.

Scott, D. (2016). 'Buddhism in current China-India diplomacy', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 45(3), pp. 431-460.

Seif-Amir Hosseini, Z. (2006). 'A critical reassessment of Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 23(3), pp. 96-119.

Sen, A. (2006). *Identity and violence: The illusion of destiny*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Sengupta, J. (2024). 'India's cultural and civilisational influence on Southeast Asia', *Observer Research Foundation*, 5 July. Available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-cultural-and-civilizational-influence-on-southeast-asia>

Sharma, B.K. (2024). *The Influence of Culture on India's Foreign Policy*. [online] Valdai Club. Available at: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-influence-of-culture-on-india-s-foreign-policy/>.

Simon, A. D. (2025, August 7). *India as Civilizational State: Geopolitical Blowback in South Asia*. *Geopolitical Monitor*. <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/india-as-civilizational-state-geopolitical-blowback-in-south-asia/>

Singh, R. and Winter, T. (2023). *From Hinduism to Hindutva: civilizational internationalism and UNESCO*. *International Affairs*, 99(2), pp.515–530.

South China Morning Post (2020). 'The China-India border dispute: its origins and impact', *South China Morning Post*, 29 July. Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3094884/china-india-border-dispute-its-origins-and-impact>

Suzuki, S. (2017). 'China's perceptions of International Society in the nineteenth century: Learning more about power politics?', *The Pacific Review*, 30(3), pp. 323-340.

Tarapore, A. (2023). 'Responding to China's growing naval power: India's zone balancing strategy', *The Washington Quarterly*, 46(1), pp. 239-256.



Tellis, A.J. (2016). 'Understanding strategic cultures in the Asia-Pacific', in Tellis, A.J., Szalwinski, A. and Wills, M. (eds.) *Strategic Asia 2016-17: Understanding strategic cultures in the Asia-Pacific*. Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, pp. 3-28.

Testbook (2024). 'Panchsheel Agreement, Five Principles, History', Testbook, 31 October. Available at: <https://testbook.com/ias-preparation/panchsheel-agreement>

Trang, N.M. and Dat, W.T. (2025) 'Cultural diplomacy and soft power of China: Theory, strategy and application in South East Asia', *Economy*, 12(2), pp. 90-99.

徐娉婷 (2015). Xi cites Confucius as positive example for modern nation - Culture - Chinadaily.com.cn. [online] Chinadaily.com.cn. Available at: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2014-09/25/content_18658579.htm.

Verma, R. (2024). 'India–China rivalry, border dispute, border standoffs, and crises', *India Review*, 23(5), pp. 370-395.

Wang, Y. (2021). 'The evolution of the "QUAD": driving forces, impacts, and limitations', *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8, Article 281.

Wank, D. L. (2013). Institutionalizing Modern “Religion” in China’s Buddhism: Political Phases of a Local Revival. In Y. Ashiwa & D. L. Wank (Eds.), *Making Religion, Making the State The Politics of Religion in Modern China* (pp. 97–126). Stanford University Press.

Wojczewski, T. (2019). Identity and world order in India’s post-Cold War foreign policy discourse. *Third World Quarterly*, 40(1), 180–198.

Yang, F., & Tamney, J. B. (2012). *Confucianism and Spiritual Traditions in Modern China and Beyond*. In BRILL eBooks. Brill.

Yuqi, D., & Ekanayaka, N. (2025). The Impact of Traditional Chinese Philosophy on Global Political Culture: Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism in China’s Diplomacy and Governance. *Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Science and Technology*, 3(5), 561–590.

Zhao Yujia. (2023). *12 From Ancient Silk Road to Modern Belt and Road Initiative: A Signaling Approach to Trust-Building across Narratives*. University of California Press eBooks, 241–264



**ESTABLISHING A MARITIME AIR WING IN SRI LANKA NAVY: AN ANALYSIS ON
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

Tharaka Wijesingha*

ABSTRACT

Ocean is a vital domain for an island nation like Sri Lanka. It is important to many economic activities and more important for national security. As a coastal nation it is obvious that Sri Lanka is facing both traditional and non-traditional security threats in the maritime domain. To ensure the national security, Sri Lanka Navy has been tirelessly working to ensure maritime security of the country. Not only the maritime security, as a coastal nation, Sri Lanka is responsible of other aspects such as Search and Rescue, Maritime Disaster Response and Preventing Maritime Pollution. Air Power in maritime domain is a critical capability in present context to face many of these challenges. However, Sri Lanka has hardly exploited the air dimension of maritime domain. This study emphasizes the requirement of a maritime air wing for the Sri Lanka Navy and identifies the role that maritime air wing should perform, opportunities that it provides and challenges of establishing a maritime air wing through a quantitative and qualitative analysis. The study focused on the research questions, What are the key opportunities and challenges in establishing a maritime air wing within the Sri Lanka Navy, and what are the roles it could play in enhancing national maritime security? The final outcomes are being further discussed and in conclusion, identifies in which roles that maritime air wing should focus on. Finally, this research recommends 'Duo Approach' for the future development of a maritime air wing for Sri Lanka Navy.

Key Words: Maritime Security, Maritime Air Wing, Opportunities, Challenges, Sri Lanka Navy

INTRODUCTION

A maritime air wing is an extensive, structured group of aircraft groups that is meant to support naval and maritime missions. Aircraft have been employed for military and non-military purposes all throughout the world. According to Lepore (1994) aircraft were frequently employed in military operations and peace-time applications. Aircraft provide various types of operational capabilities in the maritime environment, by virtue of the speed,

* Squadron Leader Tharaka Wijesingha is currently serving as a Staff Officer at the Defence Services Command and Staff College. (Correspondence: wijesingha3941@gmail.com)



range and altitude they can achieve, which can be incorporated into various mission profiles. In attack functions, these traits can be engaged quickly and flexibly. Modern sensors in aerial platforms are better at the maritime domain awareness by allowing faster, wider coverage of the sea than on ships as part of surveillance. Helicopters, with their high maneuverability, vertical landing and takeoff and hovering capabilities are key to search and rescue operations in the sea as well as in land. Further, maritime planes and helicopters with dipping sonar and sonar buoys, as well as anti-submarine weapons are useful in anti-submarine warfare in the quest to recognize and decommission underwater threats.

For a coastal nation, it is vital to protect critical maritime infrastructure that support the energy supply and communication systems, such as the internet and maritime aviation is important for the protection of those structures. In addition, Fixed-wing aircraft and rotary aircraft also are used in transport and logistical support whereas transport planes provide time-sensitive logistical support, and helicopters transport troops and cargo. Also, aerial platforms are very important in pollution control in the sea as they monitor the spills and the efforts of environmental response. A combination of these functions highlights the versatility of the role played by aircraft in improving maritime security, safety, and management of the environment.

Maritime air power is a vital component for maritime power projection. According to Watson et al., (2019) maritime air wings provide strike capabilities. Further, it is highly supportive for amphibious operations. In addition, it is highly useful in developing Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2AD) capabilities, which is required for maritime border protection. Further, rotor wing aircraft provides an irreplaceable platform for law enforcement in the sea (Zhang et al., 2020). In the Sri Lankan context, in order to face modern challenges, Sri Lanka Navy Maritime Strategy 2025, advocates to improve its offshore patrol capabilities. Most of the offshore platforms currently in service and about to be acquired by SLN include Helidecks and Heli-bays, which can accommodate maritime helicopters. Incorporating air capabilities to offshore patrol vessels will be a paradigm shift in maritime security in Sri Lanka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Ho and Bateman (2012), allowing nations to pursue their maritime interests and develop their marine resources in conformity with established rules of international law, good



order at sea guarantees the safety and security of ships. Threats to maritime law and order encompass armed robberies and pirate attacks on ships, maritime terrorism, illegal drug and weapon trafficking, people-smuggling, pollution, unlawful fishing, marine natural hazards, and interstate maritime conflicts. Further, Paleri (2012) argues that in the current context non-military threats are more common in maritime domain. He further emphasizes the responsibility toward coastal state and even the landlock countries which maintain maritime entities to ensure the safety and freedom of navigation on oceans.

Due to these increasing activities in the waters around South Asia, there is a significant increase in non-traditional threats. For several reasons, the Indian Ocean region has been accurately referred to as a "sea of troubles." Numerous factors, including nation-state and terrorist threats, transnational crime and pirate threats, theft, etc., could jeopardize the security of this ocean. These include, but are not limited to, non-traditional maritime security issues like piracy and sea robbery, maritime terrorist activities, trafficking and smuggling of weapons, people, and drugs, as well as natural disasters. The spread of contagious diseases, food security, and energy security are all pressing problems with important marine implications (Kumar et al., 2016).

According to Premarathna (2021) Piracy, Drug Trafficking, Maritime Terrorism and Human smuggling have been major issues to Sri Lanka as a coastal nation in Indian Ocean. Piracy is now an issue for mariners in the current era. The most potent force among the few terrorist groups with marine capabilities was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). When it comes to the creation and widespread application of suicide bombing as a terrorist tactic, the LTTE was a pioneer. The military demise of the LTTE and the destruction of its infrastructure have significantly decreased South Asia's security risks. The LTTE's tactics have been widely adopted and imitated by other terrorist groups, making them a threat not only to foreign countries but also to Sri Lanka (Premarathna, 2021). The LTTE has established traffic routes to transport armaments back to Sri Lanka, including China, North Korea, and Hong Kong. Arms from Cambodia, Vietnam, Burma, Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and Middle East pass through Thailand, the Suez Canal, and the Horn of Africa before reaching Sri Lanka. Arms from Africa are smuggled back to the LTTE jungle strongholds via Madagascar (Biswas, 2008).

The situation of small weapons trafficking is especially dangerous in South and South-East Asia. There are several reasons for this. Perhaps the greatest concentration of illicit weaponry

in the world is found in the Afghanistan–Pakistan region. They are being smuggled to other countries in the region through sea routes. The other reason is the geographic location of the Indian sub-continent. Since located between the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, this region has been a hotspot for all kind of smuggling, arms and drugs (Biswas, 2008).

In the meantime, drug trafficking from the Golden Crescent has made Sri Lanka a major transit point. The Indian cities of Tuticorine and Kochi, along with Pakistan and Iran, have become major hubs for illicit drug trade via fishing vessels into Sri Lanka and the Maldives (Premarathna, 2021).

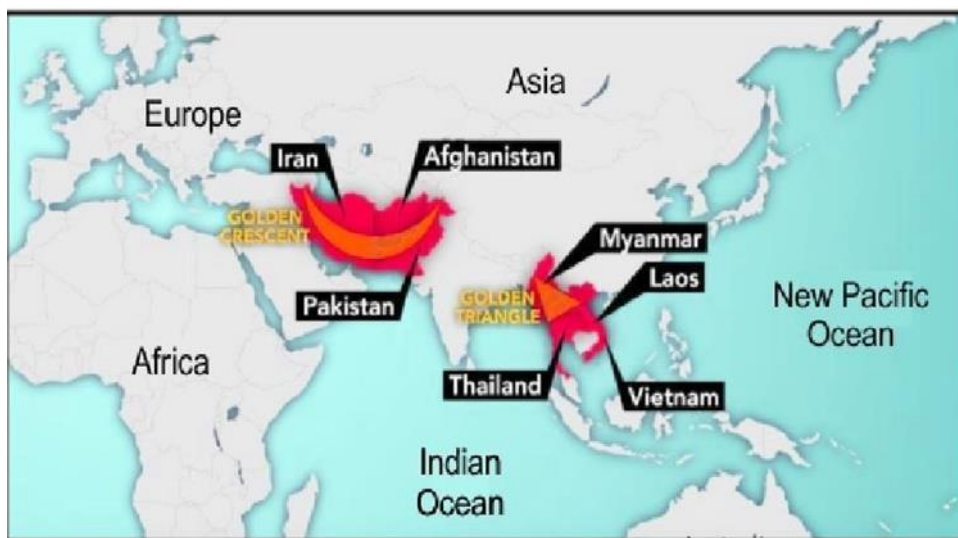


Figure 2.1: Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle (Testbook, n.d.)

As Madhubhashani & Hejran (2020) argues, in the last ten years, drug trafficking has exploited Sri Lanka as a transshipment hub, and the country is now responsible for a disproportionately high number of arrests. These illicit drugs are transported to Sri Lanka by fishing boats or by plane, when couriers pose as tourists and travel through Pakistan, Iran, and India.

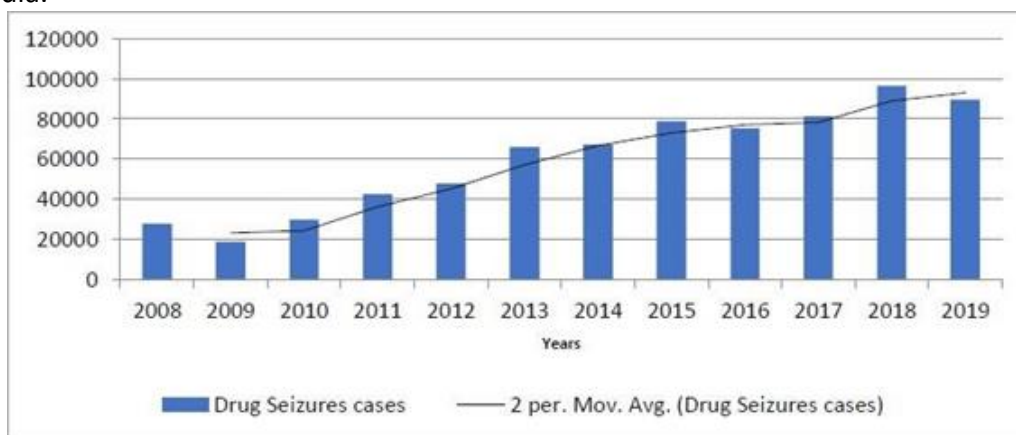


Figure 2.2: Drug Trafficking cases in Sri Lanka (Police Narcotic Bureau, 2019)



Human Trafficking is referred as slavery at sea. It is a form of modern slavery. The increasing trend of women being trafficked in Asia over the last ten years is not new. The global criminal sector is expanding quickly. It is a very profitable sector globally, generating between \$5 and \$9 billion in revenue annually. One overlooked slave trade route is the Indian Ocean. The world's second-largest illicit industry is the trafficking of women (Magsi & Mir, 2023). Further, they emphasise that human trafficking is one of the most dangerous security threats in the Indian Ocean region. Kaumada (2019) highlights that, Sri Lanka's illicit human trafficking, immigrants from India enter the country illegally through several landing sites like Mannar, Jaffna, and Negombo, where smugglers and fishing captains operate.

Another issue in the maritime domain is illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing). According to Madanayake (2015) IUU fishing by Indian fishermen in the Mannar bay, Palk Strait and Northern waters has been a problem not only to local fishermen, but also to the sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

On September 3, 2020, the crude oil taker "MT New Diamond" caught fire within the EEZ over the coast of Southeast. This served as a wake-up call regarding the potential harm that incidents in our nearby waterways could do to our national interests. The episode made clear how inadequate our resources and knowledge on how to lessen and manage catastrophes like this (Walakuluge, 2022).

In order to counter these non-traditional threats, Sri Lanka Navy is constantly upgrading its vision and capabilities. According to Admiral Wijegunaratna (2024), The Navy clearly saw itself as the maritime arm that would eventually guard the astounding 1,738,062.24 km² Search and Rescue territory as well as the 200 nm Exclusive Economic Zone. If the Sri Lankan Navy is to become a force capable of exploring the deep blue waters, it is imperative that it acquire large ships and boats equipped with cutting edge technologies. The "Sri Lanka Navy's Maritime Strategy 2025" lays out the precise plan to equip the Navy with 20 ships by that time.

As Abeysekara (2020) emphasises, Sri Lanka is under a lot of non-traditional security challenges due to its developing strategic environment in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which calls for comprehensive response. However as of presently, Sri Lanka lacks MDA systems and works with the Sri Lanka Air Force to coordinate a number of surveillance



activities. However, the Sri Lanka Navy currently uses a number of techniques, including human intelligence, coastal observation posts (radar stations), and maritime patrols, to keep an eye on and stop illicit maritime activity in Sri Lanka's littoral regions.

The aviation branch of the Bangladesh Navy is called Bangladesh Naval Aviation. Two Dornier class Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) from Germany and two Augusta Westland Helicopters from Italy are now being flown by Bangladesh Naval Aviation. Further, Bangladesh has a visionary plan to develop their Naval aviation capabilities according to their vision of becoming more relevant to maritime security of Indian Ocean Region (Bangladesh Naval Aviation, 2023). In contrast, Ghana Air Force conducting all types of maritime air operations in support of Navy (Ghana Air Force, 2023). Meantime, Ghana Navy is developing their drone capabilities to enhance their ISR capabilities in maritime domain (Ghanapeace, 2024).

As emphasized in Maritime Doctrine of Sri Lanka (2020), the current strategic environment necessitates real-time information exchange and prompt and efficient information collecting. Thus, it is appropriate that the SLN start up the process of creating the Naval Air Arm. The SLN now has five helicopter landing platforms, and as its Maritime Strategy 2025 progresses, a few more will be added to the inventory (BBC Vietnam, 2013).

Sri Lanka Air Force No. 3 Maritime Squadron is currently flying Beech King Air B-200 and Dornier 228 aircraft. These aircraft are used for maritime and land air surveillance and reconnaissance missions, Search and Rescue (SAR), Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC), Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Maritime Pollution Monitoring and Control Flying Operations, and other flying necessities assigned by the AFHQ to protect the sovereignty of the motherland in line with the SLAF vision (Sri Lanka Air Force, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a post-positivist philosophy with both inductive and deductive approaches, using a mixed method to explore the formation of a maritime air wing from two perspectives. Quantitatively, it surveys 120 purposively sampled middle-level Navy and Air Force officers involved in maritime security, analyzing their views on key roles, opportunities, and challenges influencing establishment of maritime air wing in SL Navy. From Five scaled Likert scale survey was used to identify and filter the most prominent roles, opportunities and challenges. Qualitatively, it gathers expert opinions from national security and policy



professionals. Semi-structured interviews are being conducted to capture insights on necessity, opportunities, and implementation challenges. Quantitative data were analyzed and presented using MS Excel for interpretation, while thematic analysis will identify core themes from qualitative data. The combined results aim to inform policy and strategic recommendations for stakeholders.

DISCUSSION

Roles of a Maritime Air Wing

The analysis of quantitative data indicates that majority of the sample population either strongly agrees or agree for the roles stated in the questionnaire. Percentage who have indicated disagree or strongly disagree is insignificant. However, it is important to identify the most prominent roles of a maritime air wing. Hence, accumulated percentages of ‘Strongly agree’ and ‘Agree’ will be used as an indication to identify that.

<u>Role</u>	<u>Accumulated Agree Percentage</u>
Improve Surveillance	95.80%
Improve emergency respond times	92.40%
Enhance the attack capabilities	90.80%
Search and rescue operations	90.80%
monitoring maritime crimes	89.20%
Security of key maritime installations	88.20%
Improve offensive capabilities	82.50%
Protect critical maritime infrastructure	79.80%
Help control maritime pollution	73.30%
Enhance logistic operations	72.50%
efficiency of supply chain management	68.10%
Submarine detection and neutralization	66.60%
Environmental protection	65%
Strength the anti-submarine warfare capabilities	63.90%

Table 4.1: Accumulated Agree Percentage

(Source: Author constructed, 2025).



As per the survey, the main roles of a maritime air wing focus on improving surveillance to ensure comprehensive maritime domain awareness, enhancing emergency response times to quickly address crises, and boosting attack capabilities to effectively counter threats. Additionally, the air wing plays a vital role in search and rescue operations, providing timely assistance to those in distress at sea. Monitoring maritime crimes is another critical function, enabling the identification and prevention of illegal activities, thereby contributing to overall maritime security and enforcement. Together, these roles ensure the effective protection and operational readiness of maritime forces.

The qualitative analysis shed light on the importance of Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, maritime surveillance and patrol. Sri Lanka's responsibility for a vast Flight Information Region (FIR) and Search and Rescue Region (SRR) under the 1974 SOLAS convention. Hence, improving SAR capabilities enhance the credibility as a nation in the international arena. A maritime air wing will indeed complement the SAR capabilities of the Navy. A maritime air wing certainly complements the Navy's enforcement capabilities by providing an aerial view of the maritime domain. That helps in monitoring illegal activities such as drug trafficking, human smuggling, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which are been the prominent none-traditional threats in Sri Lankan waters in the recent history.

Further, qualitative data reveals that a maritime air wing will significantly contribute in maintaining law and order at sea. This includes preventing illegal activities, protecting maritime boundaries, and ensuring the security of vital economic assets such as the Colombo port, which plays a key role in regional transshipment. Hence, it is a major contributor for the safety toward the blue economy that Sri Lanka is heading.

Opportunities Provides by a Maritime Air Wing

Quantitative analysis indicates that majority of the sample population either strongly agree or agree with the opportunities stated in the questionnaire. Percentage who have indicated disagree or strongly disagree is insignificant. However, it is important to identify the most prominent opportunities provided by a maritime air wing. Hence, accumulated percentages of 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' will be used as an indication to identify that.



<u>Opportunity</u>	<u>Accumulated Percentage</u>
Increase the operational reach	91.60%
Offer flexibility and adaptive mission support	89.70%
Boost the strategic influence	89.10%
Drive the technological advancement	89.10%
Enhance power projection capabilities	88.30%
Provide versatility to Naval Operations	88.10%
Be a force multiplier for Sri Lanka Navy	86.40%
Increase the range of naval operations	86.40%
Enhance the operational capabilities	85.80%
Encourage innovation and technical improvement	83.90%

Table 4.2: Accumulated Percentage (Author constructed, 2025)

The most significant opportunity offered by a maritime air wing is the increase in operational reach, which plays a crucial role in enhancing various naval operations. This extended reach allows the navy to conduct search and rescue (SAR) missions, surveillance, and monitoring over vast oceanic areas, ensuring effective situational awareness and rapid response. Moreover, it strengthens efforts to combat non-traditional threats such as piracy, smuggling, and illegal fishing, which require persistent presence and coverage over wide maritime regions. By extending the operational range beyond the capabilities of surface vessels alone, a maritime air wing significantly improves the navy's ability to maintain security, project power, and respond flexibly to dynamic challenges across the maritime domain.

The results of the qualitative analysis emphasize that a maritime air wing will enhance the reach to provide humanitarian assistance to regional countries in case of natural disasters. Further, it could position Sri Lanka as a regional leader in maritime security, contributing to stability in the Indian Ocean. This could also lead to increased international cooperation in areas such as combating illegal fishing and drug trafficking. Hence, in many ways it elevates Sri Lanka's credibility as a responsible maritime state. Furthermore, providing natural disaster relief and provide relief in ship accidents are crucial responsibilities of a Navy and aircraft's ability to rapidly respond to incidents at sea is highlighted as a critical opportunity, especially



for lifesaving operations. Aircraft could provide timely initial assessments of crises or accidents, contributing to faster decision-making and action.

In this study two questions raised, “Do Sri Lanka Navy actually need a power projection capability in the present context or in near future?” and the other question in “Against whom that we are projecting power?”. Therefore, power projection should not be an immediate requirement of a maritime air wing. However, it has been identified that the maritime air wing would be a force multiplier for Sri Lanka Navy in many operational aspects. It drastically improves both offensive and defensive capabilities of the Navy since aircraft are more efficient when operating in vast areas in the maritime domain.

It has been identified that maritime air wing extends the operational reach of the Navy and improve maritime domain awareness. Further, for countering human smuggling, drug trafficking, and search and rescue operations it gives more reach from the shore. CASEVAC and MEDIVAC in deep seas would also be possible from a maritime air wing with limited time period. In addition, it would give more reach for logistic operations. In addition, maritime air wing would enhance the ability to monitor and respond to activities in the maritime domain enhances the Navy’s role in ensuring the security of sea lanes. It can provide a wider maritime picture for operational purposes.

As per the study, maritime air wing could significantly enhance Sri Lanka’s ability to safeguard its sea routes, protect vital maritime infrastructure like the Colombo port, and prevent illegal activities at sea. Further, air assets would allow for faster response times and broader coverage of the maritime domain, improving the overall efficiency of naval operations.

Challenges to the Establishment of Maritime Air Wing

This analysis indicates that majority of the sample population of the quantitative study either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ for the challenges identified and stated in the questionnaire. Percentage who have indicated disagree or strongly disagree is insignificant. However, it is important to identify the most prominent challenges to a maritime air wing. Hence, accumulated percentages of ‘Strongly agree’ and ‘Agree’ will be used as an indication to identify that.



<u>Challenge</u>	<u>Accumulated percentage</u>
Comprehensive training programs	95.80%
Procurement and maintenance	93.30%
Establishing adequate infrastructure facilities	93.20%
Procuring and maintaining air assets	91.60%
Ensuring sustainability and cost-effectiveness	89.10%
Providing effective training and development	86.50%
Establishing building and maintaining infrastructure like hangers and workshops	82%
Acquiring highly skilled personnel	79%
Retaining skilled experts	79%
Balancing cost and maintaining long-term sustainability	77.30%

Table 4.3: Accumulated percentage (Author constructed, 2025)

Establishing a maritime air wing in Sri Lanka faces significant challenges, with comprehensive training programs identified as the most difficult due to the lack of current facilities in the Navy and Air Force. Additionally, acquiring the necessary aerial platforms, sensors, equipment, and naval platforms is costly and complex, requiring considerable time and strong diplomatic ties with manufacturing countries despite financial constraints. Initial procurement would not be the end of that challenge, continuously sustaining air operations require regular maintenance and spare parts. Procuring requires items for the sustainment is also identified as a significant challenge. Though Sri Lanka Air Force is having facilities to sustain air operations, in the present context SLN has no required infrastructure facilities to carry out air operations. Hence, developing such facilities would require massive funding and will take years to develop.

Sustaining a maritime air wing is equally challenging as establishing it. In that case, cost effectiveness of the operations to be considered and requires a sustainable plan to long run maritime air operations cost effectively. According to the qualitative analysis, the primary challenge is the cost associated with acquiring and maintaining shipborne aircraft and maritime patrol aircraft. With limited financial resources and recent economic difficulties, the allocation of funds for such an initiative remains a significant hurdle. There were many



attempts in history to form an air wing for the Navy, but all had gone in vain due to financial constraints. The current economic context in Sri Lanka also poses significant challenges in financing such an initiative.

Procuring and maintaining air platforms with the necessary avionics and sensors is a costly endeavour. However, the need for advanced sensors, cameras, and other electronic systems further complicates the establishment of a maritime air wing. Due to financial constraints procuring suitable platforms with on suitable avionics, weapon systems, and the payload has become a significant challenge to for a maritime air wing. There are limited financial resources to sustain a high-cost operation in a maritime air wing. Hence, maritime air assets should only be deployed in unavoidable circumstances.

Technological advancement is also critical for the effective operation of a maritime air wing, especially in overcoming challenges such as downlinking data from aircraft to naval platforms. Without efficient data-sharing capabilities, the operational reach and responsiveness of the air wing would be severely limited. Advanced technologies are essential not only for data transmission but also for the overall functioning of the maritime air wing, making their acquisition a significant challenge for countries like Sri Lanka. Additionally, a robust communication system is vital to ensure seamless information sharing with other agencies and regional partners. Constant coordination among the Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard is necessary to maintain operational effectiveness and foster collaboration in maritime security efforts.

Human resource development is essential for the success of a maritime air wing, as personnel need to be thoroughly trained not only in operating advanced equipment but also in understanding the complex maritime environment. Providing such specialized training is challenging, especially in Sri Lanka, where opportunities and facilities for developing comprehensive training programs are limited. Additionally, crew fatigue is a significant factor to consider due to the demanding and often extended nature of maritime operations, which can impact performance and operational safety, making effective personnel management and support crucial for sustaining readiness.

One of the significant challenges in establishing a maritime air wing lies in the mindset and vision within governance and military leadership. Such an initiative is expensive and complex



but represents a visionary aspiration crucial for future maritime capabilities. For a country like Sri Lanka, balancing the high costs and strategic importance demands committed leadership, long-term planning, and a clear understanding of its transformative potential for national security and regional influence.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to achieve above objectives a literature review was conducted and through those certain roles of a maritime air wing, opportunities it provides for Sri Lanka Navy and challenges on establishing a maritime air wing for Navy has been identified. Base on those identifications a quantitative analysis was carried out by taking middle grade officers of Sri Lanka Navy and Sri Lanka Air Force who has experiences in maritime air operations as sample population. Further, a qualitative analysis has been conducted by interviewing experts in the field of defence, naval strategies and air operations. The outcome of both qualitative and quantitative analysis was illustrated and discussed in order to get the final outcome of the research. Through the above-mentioned process surveillance and monitoring of maritime domain for military and law enforcement purposes has been identified as the main role of a maritime air wing foe Sri Lanka Navy and Search and Rescue is the other role of a future maritime air wing. Further, three opportunities are been identified as the opportunities that a maritime air wing in Sri Lanka Navy will provide to the country. The first one is the Operational Reach that a maritime air wing provides. Operational reach enables Sri Lanka Navy to conduct various types of operations in distance away from the shore. The next most important opportunity is flexibility and adaptiveness. It complements disaster respond capabilities, maritime security and operational efficiency of Sri Lanka Navy. Further, a maritime air wing provides an opportunity of regional influence and cooperation for the country. Furthermore, there are certain challenges been identified from this research for establishing a maritime air wing. The greatest challenge for the establishment of a maritime air wing is financing it. Due to the economic situation of the country financing such endeavour would be difficult and would not be highlighted as a priority. Further, even with the finance, procuring platforms, sensors and technologies would be a challenge as well. In addition, maintenance of such assets and related infrastructure facilities would be a huge challenge too. Finally, maintaining cost-effectiveness and sustainability of a maritime air wing is also

identified as a challenge. Based on the findings of the research, following recommendations can be made for establishing a maritime air wing for Sri Lanka Navy.

Duo Faced Approach

First of all, the attitude towards establishing a maritime air wing is to be changed. It is not a distant dream and for a country like Sri Lanka it is a necessity. Hence, through a meticulous approach it can be achieved. To make this dream a reality it is to be recommend to have a “Duo Faced Approach”. Duo Approach is an interdepending approach which mutually complement each other. That consists of individual approach by Navy to develop an own maritime air wing while engaging with Joint approach which is a cooperative effort by multiple entities.

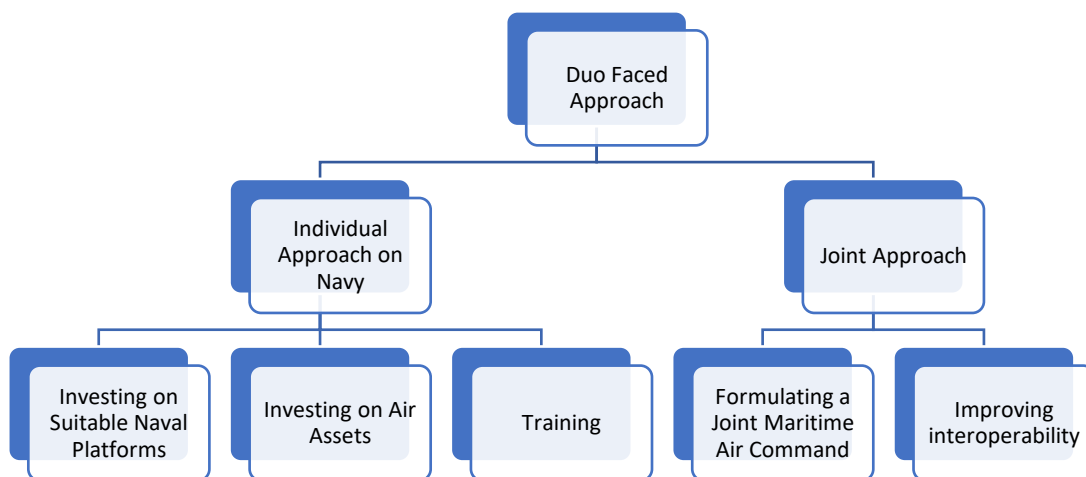


Figure 6.1: Duo Approach (Author constructed, 2025)

Individual Approach by Navy

In this approach, Navy is to meticulously utilize the budget allocation to procure and maintain necessary naval platforms and air assets while developing the human resource by training naval personnel. This is a long-term effort with a vision forward. It can be started with employing maritime helicopters which can be accommodated in OPVs operated by Navy. Then it can be expanded into drone operations and fixed-wing aircraft operation. On the initial stage the main roles of the maritime air wing should be surveillance and monitoring,



and search and rescue. Gradually it can be developed to carry out operations in other roles as well.

Joint Approach

Since due to the current challenges, Navy cannot develop a fully fledged maritime air wing with required operational capabilities. Hence, with collaboration of other entities, such as Sri Lanka Air Force, Coast Guard etc. Developing a 'Maritime Air Command' would be more practical and reasonable to cater required operational requirement. By collaborating with this unified maritime command, Navy can enhance their maritime air capabilities while contributing their assets to the maritime air command. The resources available in other entities such as training, maintenance and infrastructure facilities of Sri Lanka Air Force could be used by Navy to fulfill their operational requirement. This interoperable environment not only satisfy the operational requirements, but also provides necessary experiences to naval personnel to develop their air capabilities until Navy would able to independently conduct all sorts of maritime air operations.



REFERENCES

Abeysekara, B. (2020). Prospects of Improving Civil-Military Integration to Address Maritime Drug Trafficking in Sri Lanka. Colombo: General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University.

Biswas, A. (2008). Small arms and drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean Region. Mumbai: University of Mumbai.

CFD-generated Airwake of the HMS queen elizabeth aircraft carrier', AIAA Aviation 2019 Forum [Preprint]. doi:10.2514/6.2019-3029.

David (2015). 25th anniversary of the Maritime Air Squadron (1990-2015), Mauritian Philatelic Blog. Available at: <http://mauritianphilatelicblog.blogspot.com/2015/08/25th-anniversary-ofmaritime-air.html> (Accessed: 02 July 2024).

Gard.no. 2021. The ship that came in from the cold - GARD. [online] Available at: <https://www.gard.no/web/updates/content/52689/the-ship-that-came-in-from-thecold> [Accessed 2 May 2024].

Hu L., Zikun C., Yongliang T., Bin W., Hao Y., Guanghui W. (2021).

Evaluation method for helicopter maritime search and rescue response plan with uncertainty, Chinese Journal of Aeronautics, 34 (4), pp. 493-507.

Kaumada, O. (2019a). 'Illegal Drug and Human Trafficking in Indian Ocean and Sri Lanka's Response in terms of International, Regional and Domestic Law and Policy', Faculty of Law, University of Colombo [Preprint].

Kumar, S., Dwivedi, D. and Hussain, M.S. (2016). Maritime security challenges: The changing scenario. New Delhi: G.B. Books in association with Advance Research Institute for Development of Social Science-ARIDSS, Meerut.

Leishman, J., (2000). A History of Helicopter Flight. p.8.

Lepore, H.P. (1994) 'The Coming of Age: The Role of the Helicopter in the Vietnam War', Army History [Preprint].

Magsi, H.A. and Mir, F. (2023) Indian Ocean: A Trade Route of Women Trafficking, Volume:3.



'Maritime challenges and priorities in Asia: An Indian perspective' (2013) Maritime Challenges and Priorities in Asia, pp. 288–299. doi:10.4324/9780203116272-27.

Maritime security: What is maritime security? (2023) Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies (MITAGS). Available at: <https://www.mitags.org/securityguide/> (Accessed: 19 April 2024).

Madhubhashani, U. and Hejran, P. (2020) 'Smuggling of Narcotic Drugs from Afghanistan to Sri Lanka', INSSSL Defence Review [Preprint].

Network, M.N. (2019) Watch: Hellenic Air Force rescues 14 crew members of Leo Cargo Ship, Marine Insight. Available at: <https://www.marineinsight.com/videos/watch-hellenic-air-force-rescues-14crewmembers-of-leo-cargo-ship/> (Accessed: 05 April 2024).

N.R.W. (2020) MARITIME DOCTRINE OF SRI LANKA (MDSL). Walisara, Sri Lanka: Naval Research Wing (NRW).

Police Narcotic Bureau. (2019). Drug trafficking cases in Sri Lanka. In <https://www.police.lk/statistics>.

Premarathna, P.K.B.I. (2021) 'Maritime security challenges in the Indian Ocean: Special reference to sri lanka', International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 05(01), pp. 158–173. doi:10.47772/ijriss.2021.5107.

Sri Lanka Navy. (2021). Drug Bust Images. Available at https://www.navy.lk/assets/images/drug_bust/reports/pdf/search_rescue_15_02_2020.pdf (Accessed 2 May 2024).

Understanding IUU Fishing (2022) The Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute. Available at: <https://lki.lk/publication/understanding-iuu-fishing/> (Accessed: 08 April 2024).

VN Lập lữ đoàn Không Quân Hải Quân (2013) BBC News Tiếng Việt. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/vietnam/2013/07/130704_navy_air_force_vn (Accessed: 03 July 2024).

Walakuluge, C. (2022) REVIVING THE NAVAL THINKING: PRAGMATISM IN PURSUIT OF NATIONAL INTERESTS, Navy.lk.



Watson, N.A., White, M. and Owen, I. (2019) 'Experimental validation of the unsteady

Wessels, A. (2012) 'South Africa's naval forces, 1922-2012', University of the Free State [Preprint].

Web.archive.org. 2021. Maritime Aircraft. [online] Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20150322095403/http://www.navy.mil.za/equipment/maritime_aircraft.html [Accessed 2 May 2024].

What is Golden Crescent - Know Its Routes And Impact on India. (n.d.). Testbook. <https://testbook.com/ias-preparation/golden-crescent>

Wingrin, D., 2021. The South African Air Force. [online] Saairforce.co.za. Available at: <https://www.saairforce.co.za/the-airforce/squadrons/7/22-squadron> [Accessed 2 May 2024].

Wiki, C. to M. (n.d.) Bangladesh Naval Aviation, Military Wiki. Available at: https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Bangladesh_Naval_Aviation (Accessed: 02 July 2024).

Woode (2024). Ghana Navy makes great strides at total surveillance of EEZ, Ghana Peace Journal. Available at: <https://www.ghanapeacejournal.com/ghana-navy-makes-great-strides-at-totalsurveillance-of-eez/> (Accessed: 03 July 2024).

Zhang, B. et al. (2020) 'The impact of marine environment on the flight safety of marine surveillance aircraft and countermeasures', Journal of Coastal Research, 107(sp1), p. 113. doi:10.2112/jcr-si107-029.1.



**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN PROVIDING
HUMANITARIAN AID: EXAMINING THE CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

R. R. Abuthahir*

ABSTRACT

There is no letup to conflicts, political instability and humanitarian crises affecting the Middle East and therefore international intervention is urgent. The scope of this study critically evaluates the work of international organizations ranging from the United Nations (UN), Red Cross (RC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), World Food Programme (WFP), International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Palestine Children's Relief Fund (PCRF) in aid provision and conflict resolution within conflict prone countries as in Syria, Yemen, Palestine and Iraq. The study is conducted using qualitative research methodology, inductive approach and a case study strategy. It analyses secondary data, which consists of organizational reports, academic literature, and policy documents, in order to identify recurring challenges and best practices. The study is based on conflict transformation theory and peace building frameworks as contextualizing the operational realities of humanitarian interventions. Additionally, findings show that, while international organizations provide crucial assistance against immediate humanitarian suffering, their activities are constrained by political interference, sectarian conditions, security threats and a lack of funding. Politicization of aid weakens the neutrality on which a humanitarian operation relies and makes integrated emergency relief and long-term peace building strategies weaker. Finally, the study emphasizes the need to adopt conflict sensitive humanitarian approaches, as well as to enhance local communities' capacity in order for sustainable peace in the Middle East to be achieved. The research provides essential knowledge for policy makers, humanitarian actors, and scholars by urging for multifaceted, context specific strategies that resolve existent needs and prevent causes of conflict. Its focus is on the importance of aligning aid to broader socio-political reconstruction for the long-term peace and stability in the region.

Key Words: Humanitarian Aid, Conflict Resolution, International Organizations, Middle East

* Rukshana Rizvi is a Sri Lankan researcher and education professional specializing in political science, strategic studies, and international relations. She is actively engaged in research focusing on human rights, conflict resolution, and international relations. (Correspondence: rukshanarizvi96@gmail.com)



INTRODUCTION

The Middle East, a geographical region that has experienced significant political unrest and ongoing warfare, faces inherent challenges. These built-in issues hinder its ability to achieve and maintain stability and peace. During ongoing international conflicts, international organizations have become key actors in regional efforts to address these challenges by providing foreign aid to affected areas. Organizations like the United Nations (UN), Red Cross (RC), Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), World Food Programme (WFP), and International Rescue Committee (ICRC) provide aid supplies, delivering necessities like drugs, food, shelter, and infrastructure rebuilding. The areas in which these organizations not only help to reduce the suffering such as hunger, homelessness, and lack of medical care, but also contribute to recovery efforts in the aftermath of conflict in places like Syria, Yemen, and Palestine (Chervinka, 2013).

Moreover, conflict resolution and management within the Middle East does not only involve the nation's government but also international organizations. Besides offering humanitarian assistance they play the role of a middleman in the conflict and assist in dropping the fighting and pursuing the peace processes. However, despite their critical importance they experience several problems, such as political influences, insecurity and lack of finances to provide full solutions. These challenges raise questions to better understand how such organizations operate and address the dynamics of the area.

The Middle Eastern region, characterized by fluid politics and diverse social culture has remained an area of conflict and disaster. States like Syria, Yemen, Palestine, and Israel are examples of states that for years have been in ongoing conflicts that have caused massive destruction of infrastructure and displacement, disruption of basic services. In such a dynamic situation, humanitarian aid especially from Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) has played the role of offering the much-needed disaster response and fostering peace and stability (Chervinka, 2013). NGO's play an essential role of minimizing the effects that arise from conflicts and providing logistic support to many affected communities besides offering medical help, food, shelter and means of education.

The UN, RC, Doctors Without Borders, WFP, ICRC, and the PCRF are prominent organizations actively involved in providing humanitarian aid in the Middle East. One outstanding example



of such work is the PCRf, a non-profit organization primarily focused on aiding children in need of medical and humanitarian assistance who have been affected by wars in the region. PCRf's initiatives include providing essential healthcare facilities in conflict-affected areas, such as Gaza, where infrastructure has been destroyed, and healthcare resources are limited and insufficient (Chervinka, 2013). Additionally, PCRf contributes to long-term recovery through projects like constructing medical facilities, which serve as a cornerstone for reconstruction efforts (Chervinka, 2013). However, the involvement of international organizations extends beyond relief efforts. Many of these organizations, including the UN, RC, Doctors Without Borders, WFP, ICRC, and the PCRf, also act as official mediators in conflict resolution. They facilitate reconciliation between opposing parties and support peacekeeping processes, underscoring their critical role in both humanitarian assistance and fostering long-term stability in the Middle East.

However, international organizations experience various challenges within the Middle East region such as political constraints, inadequate funding and insecurity. Expectedly, concerns from political authority, especially local governments and other non-state agents, frequently stand in the way of effective aid provision; the slippery security situation also poses significant challenges to assistance delivery (Hancock, 2011). Thus, to enhance the performance of international organizations in the consideration of the Arab Middle Eastern crisis in the future, it is crucial to investigate how they affect conflict transformation in the region and what challenges they encounter.

Thus, this study is crucial with increased cases of conflicts and wars that are still occurring in the Middle East region affecting the entire world. International organizations are involved in responding to the identified consequential impacts but also to the challenges of post-war state reconstruction. Nonetheless, they play an active role, yet there is a lack of focused studies on the effectiveness of these strategies and interventions within the complex geopolitical and socio-political context of the contemporary Middle East. This study will systematically review the role of these organizations in conflict resolution with a view of establishing the present and potential challenges that confront them as well as the Facilitators and Barriers to their effectiveness. In addition, such a contextualization provides valuable knowledge for other organizations and scholars who attempt to learn from humanitarian operations and adjust the strategies they use in conflict-affected areas. Since the Middle East



remains strategically significant to the global order, this study is important not only to the policymakers and humanitarian agencies but also to the scholarly community interested in peace and conflict, international relations. It will help to identify the prospects for further evolution of the strategies used by international organizations to achieve more effective intervention activities that will strengthen regional stability and reduce human suffering.

The study further focuses on addressing the research questions on the specific roles of international organizations, such as the UN, RC, Doctors Without Borders, WFP, ICRC, and the PCRF conflicts within the Middle East, the effectiveness of their mechanisms in fostering peace, the key challenges faced by international organizations in humanitarian aid operation within the Middle East, particularly in regions with deeply divided political, religious, and sectarian interests and the balance immediate humanitarian needs in the Middle East with long-term peace-building initiatives by the international organizations and strategies utilized to improve their effectiveness in both areas.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

International organizations working in the Middle East need to respond to two simultaneous requirements by offering instant humanitarian assistance and promoting enduring peace development. Understanding conflict resolution along with humanitarian aid through theoretical models becomes essential for developing effective and sustainable organizational operations. This segment evaluates important theories about conflict transformation as well as humanitarian intervention and peacebuilding before analyzing their suitability to resolve local problems in the region.

Conflict Transformation Concept and Humanitarian Intervention Theory

The development of conflict transformation concept built from conflict resolution theory introduced structural approaches to establish lasting peace. John Paul Lederach explains that “conflicts go beyond two-sided disputes resolved through negotiation because they are dynamic processes which demand handling their fundamental social and economic along with political factors including inequality” (Lederach, 1997). Conflicts require relationship evolution to transform the overall society structure while creating permanent peace through sustained social changes.



Moreover, the Middle Eastern countries of Syria along with Palestine and Yemen have suffered from years-long wars because of religious and political and ethnic diversities which drives their ongoing conflicts (Murphy, 2001). The UN with MSF and Red Cross implement humanitarian relief efforts to immediately deliver food and medical care together with shelter to affected populations. The problem with these interventions stems from their focus on conflict symptom management without establishing meaningful social change. Chervinka (2013) notes how humanitarian relief effectively reduces suffering but does not lead to essential social alterations which would eliminate conflict roots. According to Miller (2024), The integration of effective humanitarian actions within conflict transformation perspectives allows for correcting structural properties and working toward national unification.

In addition, humanitarian organizations need to implement their aid delivery methods based on conflict transformation objectives. To fulfill this goal humanitarian organizations should provide assistance which supports both peace processes together with sustainable development initiatives. The delivery of medical help and food supplies by organizations in Palestine needs to be combined with backing of local peace talks dedicated to bridging Palestinian factions and Israeli relations (Harary, 2024). When humanitarian relief combines with conflict transformation practices, there is a decreased probability of future conflicts.

Moreover, conflicts transform with crucial help from impartial outside groups according to conflict transformation theory. The author Mitchell (2002) outlines how third-party agencies contribute to conflict evolution through their capacity to facilitate dialogues and provide impartial mediation that establishes necessary conditions for peace agreement development. The United Nations together with European Union and local regional powers act as external mediators between different factions at play in the Middle Eastern region. Third-party interventions face political and security constraints according to Stivachtis (2018), which damages their ability to perform their function impartially. According to Miller (2024) Syrian peace attempts remain difficult because different external powers like Russia that supports Assad clash with the U.S. which supports opposition elements (Miller, 2024).

Peace-Building Theory

International organizations establish their sustained objectives in troubled areas through the application of peace-building theory principles. Peace-building describes the sustained



approaches which work for enduring peace while rebuilding institutions and social harmony and economic growth and human rights implementation. One of the foundational works on peace-building theory was published by Johan Galtung who established positive peace beyond avoiding violence to include social justice and development equality and human dignity protection (Galtung, 1969).

Furthermore, to effectively apply peace-building theory within the Middle East practitioners must focus on resolving both openly visible conditions stemming from war such as population dislocations as well as difficult to see systematic origins of conflict including political discrimination together with religious divides and uneven resource allocations. According to Stivachtis (2018) real and sustainable peace in the region requires more than short-lived ceasefires to establish inclusive politics because successful long-term peace-building depends on building social trust while developing institutions that are responsible and answerable to their communities.

Moreover, the “peace dividend” functions as a fundamental building block in peace building theories. Scholars including Collier (2003) introduced this concept that defines peace benefits as essential elements for sustainable peace which the population desires. The outcome of peace in the Middle East would provide basic services alongside job opportunities and economic power to the local population. According to Chervinka (2013) these advantages are frequently postponed or given unevenly to the population which reduces the validity of peace initiatives. The population in Gaza experiences ongoing unemployment coupled with scarce healthcare and restricted academic prospects thus creating challenges for peace dividend implementation in the area.

In addition, a successful combination of peace-building with humanitarian aid requires an understanding of all social dimensions together with political and economic requirements among affected communities. Woodhouse (2020) explains that humanitarian relief combined with peace-building initiatives requires handlers to meet basic requirements while developing frameworks for future social and institutional recovery. The process requires multiple initiatives starting from support for institutional governance improvements to public community engagement for trust restoration. Practical applications of these strategies meet substantial challenges from local political elites alongside armed groups who hold resistance toward changes. According to Harary (2024), peace-building activities in Syria remain



impossible to integrate with humanitarian aid since the ongoing conflict continues between the Assad government and multiple opposition groups.

Theory of Sectarianism

Sectarianism theory creates helpful guidelines to explain why sectarian allegiances and political loyalties modify Middle Eastern relief aid distribution and peace negotiation dynamics. The intensification of sectarian divisions makes it harder to transport humanitarian aid and obstructs conflict resolution work.

Furthermore, groups with opposing religious or ethnic backgrounds experience the Ethnic Security Dilemma that leads them to consider each other as life-threatening enemies. The increased competition over resources creates tensions which result in resistance from non-sharing of resources between opposing factions. Humanitarian aid appears as a zero-sum competition in Iraq's protracted conflict since different religious factions continuously perceive their gains as their opponents' losses in the face of sectorial violence. The misconception about aid reduces its effectiveness by encouraging adversarial behaviors between groups (Stivachtis, 2018).

According to Stivachtis (2018) humanitarian assistance creates an issue because deep sectarian rifts may strengthen deep-seated divisions instead of promoting social unification. Performing aid distribution that shows preference to one sect above another intensifies social tensions and accelerates societal division. In Syria the Assad-regime uses aid delivered to its territories to build its governing power while systematically denying aid to opposition-members' territories. International organizations face significant barriers when attempting to develop trust-based communal cooperation in divided regions because of this prolonged conflict situation.

In addition, the distribution of humanitarian aid needs conflict-sensitive solutions that understand the psychological and religious nature of the conflict regions. As humanitarian organizations distribute aid impartially and without concerns for political or sectarian rules they aid in lowering sectarianism-related divisiveness and thus support enduring peace advancement.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS

Humanitarian Action Frameworks

Multiple humanitarian action frameworks deliver practical methods to handle complicated conflicts specifically when supporting sensitive political regions as the Middle East. One notable framework is the Do No Harm (DNH) principle, which was developed in the 1990s by Mary B. Anderson. According to the DNH principle humanitarian interventions must be developed and carried out using strategies which aim to protect affected communities from further conflict escalation while accomplishing their objectives (Muriuki 2017). This principle demonstrates relevance to the Middle East region because humanitarian aid frequently acquires political motives for using military objectives.

The DNH principle enables organizations to develop aid strategies that understand the complete political and social atmosphere which occurs in conflict areas such as Syria and Yemen and Palestine. Humanitarian aid distribution requires organizations to avoid perpetuating sectarian or political separation through their food and medical resources. A practical application requires close observation with local contacts for successful aid delivery to every individual needing assistance without considering their political or sectarian identities.

The UNDP's conflict-sensitive humanitarian aid framework promotes conflict analysis integration into humanitarian interventions as a method to prevent conflict tensions from worsening (UNDP, 2023). The proposed framework errors require complete comprehension of local politics with awareness about power distribution across parties and prevention against aid exploitation by politicians for their advantage. Organizations following conflict-sensitive approaches enable them to deliver relief while developing peace-based initiatives which protect their assistance from causing needless tensions.

Theories of Development

Sustainable development theories act as essential tools for developing peace-building efforts during recovery from conflicts. Humanitarians rely on these developmental theories to create permanent solutions to address social and economic and political problems when integrating aid into wider development frameworks. Post-conflict societies need humanitarian aid to



become a part of development-based initiatives which reconstruct local governance systems alongside rebuilding infrastructure as well as economies according to Harary (2024). Clamping down humanitarian assistance to this framework remains essential to achieve ongoing recovery processes that stop conflicts from returning.

According to Woodhouse (2020) development frameworks require integration of humanitarian aid to establish sustainable peace. Organization-based relief programs enhance self-sustainable communities by uniting development initiatives and peace-building work which creates lasting social bonds after conflict phase transitions.

Further, future research should adopt theoretical frameworks together with empirical investigations for promising results. International organizations can learn valuable intervention measures from established conflict transformation theory (Lederach, 1997) together with peace-building theory (Galtung, 1969). These theories demonstrate deficient application for understanding what occurs in real Middle Eastern conflict areas. The adaptation of theoretical models faces resistance due to the complex political and sectarian and geopolitical forces dominating the Middle East region.

Empirical research presented by Woodhouse (2020) and Stivachtis (2018) demonstrates peace-building's value alongside humanitarian aid while researchers should explore developing thorough systems which integrate the political and social elements of the Middle East. The geographical region lacks comprehensive implementation of "Do No Harm" frameworks as developed by Anderson (1999) and conflict-sensitive humanitarian aid standards set by UNDP (2023). Research should concentrate on developing flexible theoretical frameworks capable of addressing changes in Middle Eastern conflicts particularly in locations where political dynamics and sectarian divisions persist.

Research should progress by examining humanitarian aid relationships with political agendas to meet the requirements identified by Miller (2024). Research that examines how diplomatic tensions between Russia and the U.S. in Syria affects aid programs will demonstrate the barriers as well as possibilities for maintaining professional humanitarian missions. Research into external political disruptions of peace-building operations will lead to improved humanitarian tactics as well as effective strategies for handling these specific challenges.



METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research method using an inductive approach and case study design to critically analyze the peace-building and humanitarian aid provision dynamics of international organizations within the Middle East. The study focused on four conflict-ridden nations, Syria, Yemen, Palestine, and Iraq where international organizations such as the UN, Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, WFP, ICRC, and PCRF are currently operational.

Data collection was founded on secondary data, including organizational documents, policy briefs, academic publications, and conflict appraisals. Using thematic analysis and content analysis, patterns, challenges, and humanitarian intervention strategies of organizations were explored. The study was embedded by primary theoretical frameworks, including Conflict Transformation Theory, Peace-building Theory, and the Do No Harm principle, which informed the explanation of organizational practice in contested political and sectarian realities.

A purposive case study sampling technique is used whereby four key conflict zones (Syria, Palestine, Yemen and Iraq) are chosen that are on the basis of their geopolitical importance, prolonged humanitarian need and diversity of international organizational presence. Spectrum of operational experience in these countries is comprised of active warzones to protracted crises into which these countries serve as the object case for the comparative study of organizational behavior. The cases selected will not be selected because they are statistically representative but because they illustrate the practicalities of humanitarian operations. These cases will be analysed within which the secondary data will come from a variety of credible organizations including United Nations agencies (e.g. UNHCR, OCHA), the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, the World Food Programme and the International Rescue Committee. They are members of these organizations for their central position, long lifetimes, and established activities in the Middle East. Triangulation and validity will be supported by further academic studies, as well as by field and policy papers.

Even though the research presented valuable observations, it was marred by the lack of primary field data due to the unstable security situation in the region. Nonetheless, the



approach used had a rigorous and context-specific understanding of the field realities of international organizations operating in conflict zones of the Middle East.

In this study, ethical considerations will be applied by ensuring that all secondary data used, such as reports, academic literature, and policy documents, are properly credited and referenced to maintain intellectual integrity and avoid plagiarism. Since no interviews or primary data collection involving participants will be conducted, the focus will be on respecting the original sources of data. Further, the research will ensure that sensitive information, especially related to conflict zones and humanitarian efforts, is handled responsibly and without bias. Care will also be taken to accurately represent the data to avoid misinterpretation or harm to the reputation of any organization or stakeholder involved. Adhering to institutional ethical guidelines, the study will maintain transparency and integrity throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study examined seven overarching themes that could be used to explain the successes and persistent gaps in humanitarian interventions in the Middle East by considering the work of the United Nations (UN), Red Cross (RC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), World Food Programme (WFP), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the Palestine Children's Relief Fund (PCRF). Not only do these findings pinpoint the persistent operational difficulties that afflict such agencies but they also reveal the embedded political, sectarian and structural impediments at work within the system that would prevent the accomplishment of sustainable peace and post conflict recovery.

Role of International Organizations

Amid those regions, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Palestine, million of civilians have been depending on international humanitarian organizations as lifelines. Additionally, their roles have been recognized in terms of providing critical services, including in emergency medical assistance, food aid, shelter, clean water, education, and psychological support. UN and its agencies (UNRWA, UNHCR, and OCHA) have played an important role as coordination and logistical framework in transferring aid across the international borders. Both the WFP has tackled large scale hunger in Yemen and MSF has kept up emergency medical care under hostile and insecure conditions in Syria.



The work of the PCRF to deliver targeted pediatric care in Gaza and throughout the region provides a perfect model for how small NGOs can effectively have a meaningful impact. Working in conjunction with local partners or combinations of local partners or independently in areas that may be off limits to state institutions and multilateral actors, these organizations have often triumphed where state institutions and multilateral actors have failed. Unfortunately, not only are those contributions indispensable; the environments in which they work are often undercut themselves — environments of violence, political polarization, and societal fragments.

Political and Sectarian Divides

The most dominant barriers to the delivery of humanitarian aid being effective were political instability and sectarian divides. Most conflicts in the Middle East are not a simple struggle over territory but rather drawn out and deep-rooted historical grievances, religious schisms and identity politics. Sunni-Shia rivalries have often set the framework as to how aid is dispensed, often leading to suspicions of favoritism and exclusion in international and local media.

The government and humanitarian coordination have stalled in Palestine between Hamas in Gaza and in the West Bank Palestinian Authority. Delivery of aid becomes politicized to commence political dominance of the country at hand through control of the flow of external assistance. Such dynamics violate the neutrality and impartiality needed in humanitarian principles.

The Assad regime's refusal to allow access to rebel-held areas has led to a bifurcated aid landscape where aid sometimes avoids some of the most affected communities. In this case, aid is not mere assistance but an instrument to be wielded strategically, to encourage loyalty, or as dissuade opposition. The weaponization of aid to the point that it can't be equally distributed and in fact exacerbates existing conflicts by fanning resentment among marginalized groups of people is this.

Security and Geopolitical Barriers

Humanitarian operations in the Middle East are not shielded from the security risks. Humanitarian workers can advertise that in many places affected by conflict, they could be bombed, kidnapped, or attacked. For example, hospitals in Syria have been bombed despite



being clearly marked and reported to all parties of armed conflict. These violations of international humanitarian law have a direct impact on protecting lives and are counterproductive to the expansion of agencies in high-risk areas.

Regional geopolitical rivalries further complicate matters beyond localized insecurity. The global and regional powers that compete in the Middle East most notably the US, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel have none of them higher priorities than their own strategic interests. Local proxies or indeed it directly intervenes militarily, only adds to the instability of the region. This broader chess game causes humanitarian aid to become a pawn organizations on the ground that rely on humanitarians for funding or resources are pressured or manipulated into working in or with certain narratives or actors.

The politicization undermines the credibility of international organizations and increases distrust from affected communities, hindering deliver of services to vulnerable populations. Additionally, organizations are pushed to ethical dilemmas that almost make it impossible to be neutral. A shrinking physical and political humanitarian space, a cumulative effect of which is a decrease in frontlines and a restriction of mandates.

Operational Limitations

In both instances where there is political and security space for access, but operational constraints severely constrain the delivery of aid. The most pressing issue is chronic underfunding. When conflict persists for long periods with no evident end, donor fatigue is widespread. Yemen, Syria, and Palestine are always underfunded, meaning that critical gaps in health services, education and food provision remain unfunded.

The latter is what another debilitating factor is, infrastructural collapse. The roads, hospitals, water treatment plants and energy systems have all been destroyed by war. Transporting supplies or setting up clinics is extremely difficult as a result. Often, for organizations to deliver service efficiently, they are forced to run with outmoded or ad hoc logistics networks that are prone to delay.

Moreover, rapid response is impeded by bureaucratic red tape in aid agencies and by host governments. Slowness comes from permit denials, delays in customs, restriction on foreign



staff. There it also happens sometimes further distorting the delivery of aid by corruption in local authorities, siphoning resources from intended beneficiaries.

Coordination And Neutrality

Between fragmentation of aid agencies and absence of coherent coordination mechanisms, aid agencies have supported overlapping activities in some areas and failed in others. It also suffers from competition for funding and visibility among dozens of international NGOs operating in the same conflict zones. It causes duplicated efforts, standard inconsistencies, and lack of ways to well allocate the resources.

And the issue is of neutrality. Aid organizations may be seen as part of one faction or external power in politicized environments, be it in Gaza or Eastern Syria. Perceptions alone can damage them even when they adhere to strict neutrality: acceptance denial, attack, rejection. While MSF and ICRC are well known for their commitment to impartiality, these same organizations have also been accused by state as well as non-state actors.

The difficulty lies in the fact that neutrality, though important in principle, is rarely feasible in practice when humanitarian intervention takes place in deeply politicised settings. Consequently, organizations need to compromise between operative utilitarianism and ethical integrity, a compromise that must be continually made.

Humanitarian Aid Vs. Long-Term Peacebuilding

This study finds a gap between emergency relief and peace-building strategies in the long term. Humanitarian aid provides short term relief for people suffering but it never does anything to address the structural conditions of conflict: bad governance, divisive politics, unequal economics, social fragmentation. Humanitarian operations risk becoming cyclical, treating symptoms rather than causes, without integrating into broader political and developmental frameworks.

Sustained efforts are needed for investment in institutions, reconciliation, and political reform in post conflict environments. However, not many humanitarian organizations are set up or mandated to achieve such tasks. This results in populations depending on aid for what little progress has been made toward the transformation of conflict or self-sufficiency.



Ultimately, the biggest barrier to lasting recovery in the Middle East is the lack of synergy between humanitarian and peace building actors.

Local Ownership in Recovery

Region	Key Challenges	Successes	Key Findings
Syria	Access Restrictions, Geopolitical Dynamics, Security Risks	Life-saving aid provided by UN and ICRC, healthcare by ICRC, medical supplies and food assistance.	Political fragmentation, international geopolitical involvement hinder aid delivery.
Palestine	Restricted Access, Internal Political Tensions, Security Issues	Medical care, especially through PCRF, local ownership of recovery programs.	Blockades, political divisions complicate aid distribution and effectiveness.
Yemen	Blockades and Access Issues, Geopolitical Dynamics, Security Concerns	WFP food assistance, critical healthcare by ICRC despite challenges.	Blockades, geopolitical interference, and security risks impede aid, with food and healthcare efforts.
Iraq	Sectarian Tensions, Impact of ISIS, Coordination Issues	MSF emergency healthcare, mental health support, efforts in post-conflict recovery.	Sectarianism, ISIS impact on infrastructure, government coordination issues hinder aid effectiveness.

Table 1: Key challenges, findings and successes

The research concludes with an emphasis of the importance and lack thereof in terms of local ownership. More sustainable, culturally relevant and impactful programs usually are those programmed and implemented based on the meaningful participation of the community. Besides, in polarized environments, they have a greater chance of nurturing trust and cooperation.

Examples of such organizations, like PCRF, have shown that enabling local professionals and working through networks of communities increases the organizations’ legitimacy and resilience. But such models are still the exception rather than anything else. In many cases the international agencies retain control over priorities, design and funding decisions leaving the local actors as sub-contractors rather than equal partners.



Fostering local ownership is made more difficult due to political fragmentation in areas that are in conflict. The absence of inclusive governance structures, lack of ability to lead recovery efforts, competing local authorities and power struggles limit the ability of communities to organize to deliver recovery. Therefore, externally driven solutions may not fit well into local realities and do not produce long lasting effects.

To sum up, this research supports the fact that international organizations have clearly played a significant role in reducing suffering in the Middle East region, which are however regularly constrained politically, security and structural perturbations. In addition to strengthening coordination, depoliticization of aid, integration of humanitarian and peace building strategies, and increased local power, we demand reform that strengthens impact and sustainability across a number of domains. Humanitarian work can only achieve transformational recovery if it is done through a multidimensional and context sensitive approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhanced Coordination Between International and Local Actors

So far, a cornerstone of successful humanitarian interventions has been effective coordination. In the Middle East duplication of efforts, resource wastage and fragmented aid delivery have resulted from lack of collaboration between the international organizations, host governments and the local NGOs. In response, we will need to establish frameworks that are structured and institutionalized for coordinating international and local efforts to address this. The assignment of joint humanitarian task forces composed of local authorities, civil society actors, and international representatives, that do reflect inclusive and shared responsibilities will be established.

Furthermore, frameworks to enhance data-sharing mechanisms in order to achieve real time access of the humanitarian situation will help in better planning and response. Digital platforms that provide an aid distribution map, the gaps in distribution, and logistical routes down can increase transparency and decrease the misallocation of resources. In addition, training, reporting standards and operational protocols among agencies located within the same area should also be coordinated among them.



Maintaining Political Neutrality

It has been crucial in the Middle East that all humanitarian organisations should be strictly apolitical and impartial in order to respond to the extremely volatile political and sectarian situation. In need, aid must be delivered and regardless of who the beneficiaries are politically or religiously. But neutrality cannot just be a statement, it should kick in demonstrably through transparent operational policies as well as clear communication.

Organizations must communicate their humanitarian mandate with all stakeholders including the conflicting parties, the local leaders and the community representatives on a weekly basis. Special importance lies in its neutrality in gaining access to all affected communities and preventing backlash from communities or local or political actors who may perceive the aid process as biased. But by keeping the trust and credibility with partisan representatives, humanitarian agencies are more safe and effective functioning.

Integration Of Humanitarian Aid and Peace-Building Initiatives

Long, the separate humanitarian relief and peace building efforts have hindered the potential for long term recovery in conflict zones. This can be overcome by humanitarian organizations working in close cooperation with peace-oriented actors in developing interventions that respond to the immediate needs as well as the structural causes of conflict. The integration of these two processes can be achieved through joint programming, the use of shared frameworks, coordinated funding that matches emergency responses with governance reform, social reconciliation and development strategies.

For example, linking food aid programs with rebuilding agricultural infrastructure initiatives, or medical mission to the rehabilitation of local health system. Reconciliation programs in community can be inserted in education or vocational training project to increase intragroup trust and social cohesion. Both integrate the social aspects of natural hazards with the physical manifestations and ameliorate the effect on communities in terms of their resilience and the recurrence risk of conflict.

Strengthening Security Protocols for Humanitarian Workers

Yet one of the most persistent threats to humanitarian personnel in the Middle East continues to be security. Due to the increased targeting of aid workers and facilities in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and other countries, organizations have to enhance security infrastructure. This includes not only physical protection (horned vehicles, fortified compounds and detection systems) but also the ability to monitor and asses risk.



Standardized and mandatory pre-deployment security training must be provided with scenario-based learning on conflict navigation, hostage survival and emergency response. They should also lobby and join in humanitarian access negotiation with local factions to secure safe zones as well as corridors for aid delivery. Further, on ground security liaisons and partnerships with international peace keeping forces or neutral intermediaries should be established to safeguard personnel and assets.

Fostering Local Ownership and Capacity Building

In many ways, humanitarian interventions are most sustainable when local communities are allowed to play a major role in the planning, implementation and evaluation of aid programs. Local ownership is a *でき* of legitimacy, raising trust, and creating cultural relevant. Organizations have to move beyond the consultation and have to bring in the local actors as equal partners ranging from grassroots NGOs to tribal leaders and municipal governments.

Local staff will participate in capacity building work through training in logistics, monitoring and evaluation, financial management, and conflict sensitivity, among others. Small grants and technical support provided to local NGOs should help to increase their independence in responding to future crises. Moreover, establishing local advisory councils to steer aid programs will ensure that such interventions intersect with local priorities as well as build the long-term institutional capacity.

Addressing Funding and Resource Constraints

Funding shortfalls severely reduce the impact of humanitarian operations. To solve, organizations should diversify their funding portfolio and attract nontraditional donors to work with regional philanthropy foundations, the private sector, and diaspora communities. Typical donor support can be supplemented from innovative financing models such as pooled funds or micro contributions through mobile platforms.

Additionally, building donor confidence through more transparency and accountability mechanisms, including open financial audits, performance dashboards, and impact reports, will lead to long term commitment. It should also step up the advocacy efforts to make sure that the Middle East's protracted crises remain on the international agenda and are fully funded.



Improving Aid Distribution and Access in Conflict Zones

Restricting humanitarian access is one of the most debilitating constraints in accorded areas of conflicts. Consequently, armed groups should be negotiated through diplomatic engagement and skills for community negotiation to reach agreements with them and local authorities. Remote programming models where local partners provide aid in the supervision of remote international teams are sometimes employed in some circumstances.

There should also be exploration of technological innovations. For instance, drones or autonomous vehicles can be used for delivering of goods when traditionally delivery has been difficult to achieve. Decentralized entity entities create low risk ways to transport large convoys across hostile territories. In addition, cross border humanitarian aid corridors can be secured by international mediation and humanitarian relief routes can be opened.

Implementing Conflict-Sensitive Aid Delivery

There should be conflict sensitive programming framework that humanitarian organizations must develop, which can be used to imagine the social, political and ethnic dynamics in which humanitarians serve. It involves detailed conflict analysis before any program design, and does not make aid distribution a source of conflict or give the appearance of favoring one group over another. For instance, sectarian aid allocations must be visibly balanced to avoid accusations of bias or milt will upon reflection.

To detect and respond to potential grievances, field training staff should be trained in conflict sensitivity and mechanisms of community feedback. In this, peace education, dialogue facilitation and trauma healing are also incorporated as part of humanitarian programs for social cohesion. In the end, aid should unite, not perpetuate the lines drawn between us.

Promoting Gender-Sensitive Humanitarian Interventions

How conflict and how aid are experienced in turn seems to be influenced by gender dynamics. Moreover, women and girl suffer from other risks, such as gender-based violence; losing a livelihood; and exclusion from decision making process. Thus, gender must become mainstream in all humanitarian action sectors.

That includes making those distribution points safe for women, using gender segregated facilities where necessary, and involving women in needs assessments and leadership gender



stages of the crisis. Also, programs should cater to the special needs for widows and single men household and former victims of violence. Working in collaboration with the local women's organizations can assist in increasing cultural appropriateness and effectiveness of these interventions.

Enhancing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEAL)

To achieve accountability and learning, humanitarian organizations must invest in robust monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. It encompasses establishing clear, specific indicators of success, collecting disaggregated data, and creating systems to measure impact that are independent of the program.

Mobile surveys and GIS mappings can provide real time monitoring of the aid distribution and alert you to potential problems at an early stage. Output metrics should not be evaluated but ought instead to be evaluated alongside outcomes and sustainability. Furthermore, organizations need to institutionalize learning through conducting regular reflection sessions, publishing lessons learned and coming up with strategies based on evidence. Good MEAL systems do not only improve program effectiveness but also strengthen donor trust and improve community engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examined the role of international organizations in providing humanitarian aid in the Middle East, assessing their effectiveness and the challenges they face in addressing the region's complex political, cultural, and security dynamics. Through both thematic and content analysis, the study identified key recurring themes such as political fragmentation, sectarian divides, security barriers, operational limitations, and the need for greater coordination among international actors. It was found that while international organizations like the UN, MSF, WFP, IRC, and PCRF play a crucial role in alleviating immediate humanitarian suffering, their efforts are often hindered by geopolitical interference, security risks, and the lack of integrated peace-building strategies.

The study highlighted the impact of political and sectarian divides on aid delivery, where competing factions and external powers use humanitarian aid for political leverage, undermining the neutrality required for effective humanitarian intervention. Additionally, the



lack of effective coordination between international organizations and local actors, compounded by financial limitations and logistical challenges, further reduces the effectiveness of relief efforts.

While there have been notable successes, such as the provision of medical care, food, and shelter, the long-term sustainability of these interventions remains uncertain due to the failure to address the underlying causes of conflict. The study also emphasized the importance of local ownership in post-conflict recovery, suggesting that greater local participation in decision-making could lead to more enduring impacts.

In conclusion, the study calls for a more integrated and context-sensitive approach to humanitarian aid that links short-term relief with long-term peace-building efforts. Enhanced coordination, security measures, and a more flexible, impartial approach to aid delivery are essential to improving the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions in the Middle East. This research lays the groundwork for future exploration into the intersection of humanitarian aid and conflict resolution, urging further studies into how international organizations can better navigate the complexities of the region to create sustainable peace and recovery.



REFERENCES

Afolaranmi, O. (2025). Role of International Organizations in Humanitarian Aid and Conflict Resolution in the Middle East.

Al-Rawashdeh, T. (2024). International Organizations and Their Role in Conflict Resolution: A Case Study.

Amnesty. (2004). Sudan: Armed groups must stop targeting civilians and humanitarian Convoys. Amnesty International.

Bohnenblust, N. (2016). The logistical challenges of humanitarian medical emergency action, especially war surgery in conflict areas. Researchgate, 86.

Bohnenblust, N. (2016). The logistical challenges of humanitarian medical emergency action, especially war surgery in conflict areas. Researchgate, 86.

Chervinka, C. (2013). International Organizations in Humanitarian Assistance and Post-Conflict Recovery in the Middle East.

Coombs, N. C. (2022, April 2). A qualitative study of rural healthcare providers' views of social, cultural, and programmatic barriers to healthcare access. Retrieved from National Institute of Health: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8976509/>

Coppi, G. (2018). The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Beyond the Man-Made Disaster. International Peace Institute.

Davey, E. (2014). Histories of humanitarian action in the middle east and north Africa. Researchgate, 62.

Devaouduper, S. (2024). Humanitarian Aid and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Yemen.

Freer, C. (2022). MENA Regional Organisations in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding. Edinburgh : LSE Middle East Centre.

Harary, D. (2024). Role of International Organizations in Conflict Resolution: A Case Study of the United Nations in Syria. American Journal of International Relations, 9(3), 12-23.

HRW. (2023, June 22). Questions and Answers: How Sanctions Affect the Humanitarian Response in Syria. Retrieved from www.hrw.org:



<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/22/questions-and-answers-how-sanctions-affect-humanitarian-response-syria>

ISS. (2024). Adapting UN Mediation for Emerging Challenges and Security Threats. Institute for Security Studies.

Kabore, F. (2023). The Role of International Organizations in Conflict Management in Burkina Faso. *Journal of Conflict Management*, 3(1), 25-36.

Kembro, J. (2022). International Humanitarian Organizations' Perspectives on Localization Efforts. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 83, 103410.

Miller, A. (2024, Septmeber 22). The Role of International Organizations in Conflict Resolution: A Study of the UN and NATO. Researchgate, p. 33.

Miller, E. (2024). Geopolitical Rivalries and Their Impact on Humanitarian Aid in the Middle East. *Journal of International Relations*, 22(3), 42-56.

Muriuki, G. (2017). Challenges Faced by International Humanitarian Organizations in the Middle East.

Murphy, R. (2001, March 22). UN Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia: International and National Legal Perspectives. Researchgate, p. 460.

Roomi, F. (2023). The Iran-Israel Conflict: An Ultra-Ideological Explanation. Researchgate, 22.

Stivachtis, Y. (2018). Sectarian Divides and Humanitarian Aid in the Middle East.

Tuvdendarjaa, M. (2022, October 7). Challenges of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Retrieved from dkiapcss: <https://media.odi.org/documents/91411.pdf>

UN. (2024, March 11). 2024. Retrieved from United Nations: <https://www.wfp.org/news/month-fasting-begins-middle-east-region-grapples-unprecedented-hunger>

UNDP. (2023). Humanitarian Aid and Conflict Resolution: Integrating Peace-building Strategies.

Woodhouse, T. (2020). Geopolitical and Operational Challenges in Middle Eastern Humanitarian Aid.



Coppi, G. (2018). The humanitarian crisis in Yemen: Beyond the man-made disaster. International Peace Institute. Available at: <https://www.ipinst.org>

ICRC (2024). Humanitarian action in Syria. International Committee of the Red Cross. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org>

IRC (2023). IRC Watchlist 2023: Global humanitarian crisis. International Rescue Committee. Available at: <https://www.rescue.org>

MSF (2024). Médecins Sans Frontières operations in Iraq. Médecins Sans Frontières. Available at: <https://www.msf.org>

UNDP (2023). Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict Resolution: Integrating Peace-Building Strategies. United Nations Development Programme. Available at: <https://www.undp.org>

WFP (2024). Update on WFP's role in the collective humanitarian response (2023). World Food Programme. Available at: <https://www.wfp.org>

Yusseff, Z. N. (2024). The responsibility to protect in Palestine: Analysing UN actions and refugee voices. Master Thesis, International Relations. Available at: <https://www.universitylink.com>



**THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE SHIPBORNE AIRCRAFT FOR ENHANCING SRI LANKA
NAVY'S MARITIME SECURITY**

Prassanna Hettiarachchi*

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean and its expansive Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) present both immense opportunities and significant vulnerabilities. Maritime threats such as piracy, drug trafficking, illegal fishing, arms smuggling, and human trafficking have intensified in recent years, requiring enhanced maritime surveillance and rapid response capabilities (Bandara, 2018; Hapugoda, 2020). This paper critically evaluates the Sri Lanka Navy's (SLN) development of shipborne aircraft as a strategic solution to these challenges. Drawing on qualitative data, the study explores the operational effectiveness of shipborne helicopters, the prerequisites for their deployment, and the broader implications for national security and regional stability. The findings highlight that acquiring shipborne air power is vital to increase effectiveness of operations, and the capability of ships to operate them as well. However, it emphasises of fulfilling other requisites such as training of crew and pilots, requirements of ground support and frequent joint operations with Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF). The paper concludes by recommending implementing increased spending on shipborne aircraft, comprehensive programmes, infrastructure development, staged execution, and inter-service cooperation in order to increase effectiveness of operations.

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka's strategic geographical position in the Indian Ocean makes its EEZ a vital economic and security zone, stretching approximately 200 nautical miles and comprising over 500,000 square kilometres (United Nation, 1982; Sakhuja, 2021). As threats such as illegal fishing, piracy, smuggling, and maritime terrorism increase, the SLN recognizes the need to strengthen its maritime surveillance and response capabilities to ensure security in the waters around Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Navy, 2021; Ministry of Defence, 2021). Traditionally, surface vessels and patrol boats have been primary assets; however, their limited range and endurance restrict operational scope in vast maritime areas (Nanayakkara, 2019). The

* Commodore Prassanna Hettiarachchi is a Senior Officer of the Sri Lanka Navy.
(Correspondence: prasanna0882@gmail.com)



concept of deploying shipborne aircraft, mainly helicopters, offers promising advantages due to their flexibility, speed, and superior surveillance capabilities (Gunasekara et al., 2016). This study evaluates the effectiveness of shipborne aircraft in protecting Sri Lanka's EEZ, exploring their technical specifications, operational integration, challenges, and potential for future enhancement (Kumaragre et al., 2018). Understanding these factors is essential for policymakers and naval strategists aiming to develop a robust, sustainable maritime security architecture. Moreover, a single nation could not be able to ensure the security of maritime sea lanes as the threats are emerging rapidly with the advanced technology. Therefore, cooperation between countries will increase capacity building and sharing knowledge and intelligence have become key weapon to address the treat.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach anchored in expert interviews, document analysis, and thematic analysis (Bryman, 2004). The unique experiences, beliefs, and values of these individuals influence their perspective on the development and deployment of shipborne aircraft, which is acknowledged in the study. As a result, the research philosophy will direct the efforts of study to acquire a deeper comprehension of these individuals' perspectives and experiences. This methodology facilitated a comprehensive understanding of both technical and strategic aspects of deploying shipborne aircraft within Sri Lanka's maritime security framework. The key components include:

- **Participants:** High-ranking officers, Subject Matter Experts (SME), pilots and operational commanders from the SLN and SLAF with experience in naval aviation.
- **Sampling Technique:** Purposive sampling ensured selection based on expertise and involvement with shipborne aircraft development and operations (Bryman, 2004). The sampling strategy involved identifying individuals who have direct knowledge and experience of the SLN's shipborne aircraft capabilities and their effectiveness in protecting the country's EEZ.
- **Data Collection:** This study primarily collected data through semi-structured interviews. Those interviews ensured that specific research questions were addressed while still allowing for conversational flexibility. Depending on the participant's availability and preference, the interviews had conducted in person, over the phone and even via video conferencing.



- **Data Analysis:** Transcripts from interviews and relevant policy/literature documents were coded and analyzed using thematic analysis identifying recurring themes, patterns, and insights. In order to ensure that the analysis is accurate and meaningful, it was ensured to maintain an open and reflexive attitude throughout the process of data analysis. This also enabled the willingness to change or improve the analysis based on feedback from study participants or other stakeholders and remaining open to new and unexpected findings.
- **Reliability Measures:** Triangulation with document sources and maintaining an audit trail ensured validity and trustworthiness of data.

DATA PRESENTATION

During the interviews, it was discovered that all experts accept Sri Lanka's friendly and non-alliance foreign policy (Ministry of Defence, 2021). The friendly and non-aligned approach of Sri Lanka's foreign policy sets it apart from nations that align themselves with particular power blocs or forge strategic alliances. In addition, economic diplomacy and trade relations are emphasized in Sri Lanka's foreign policy (Bandara, 2018). Not at all like nations that focus on political contemplations over monetary participation, Sri Lanka tries to lay out commonly helpful financial associations paying little mind to political arrangements.

During interviews, it was revealed that Sri Lanka's strategic location as an island nation in the Indian Ocean places it at the crossroads of important maritime routes (Sakhuja, 2001). Policymakers can develop effective strategies to mitigate these threats and safeguard Sri Lanka's maritime security by comprehending the unique difficulties and potential dangers along these maritime routes. Sri Lanka is a crucial transit hub for international shipping and a hub for maritime activities due to its proximity to crucial maritime chokepoints like the Suez Canal, the Malacca Strait, and the Strait of Hormuz (Attri & Bohler-Mulleris, 2018). The maritime threat factors in Sri Lankan waters were divided into the following subcategories on the basis of the information gleaned from professional interviews and research.

- Maritime terrorism and piracy
- Exploitation of maritime resources and illegal fishing
- Smuggling and drug trafficking

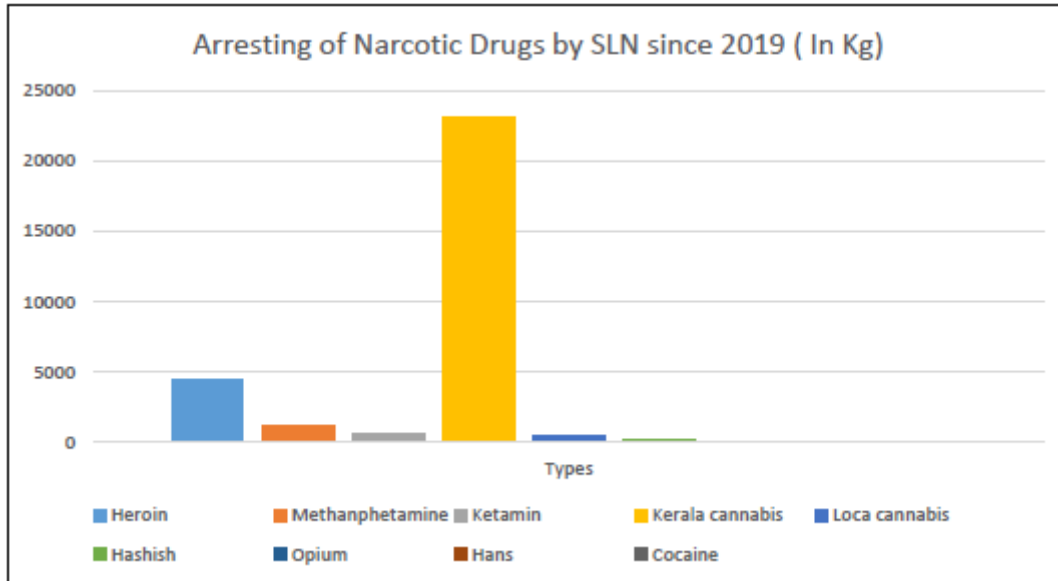


Figure1: Arresting of Narcotic Drugs by SLN since 2019 (Author Developed, 2024)

Considering above data and interview records, it is evident that the country is facing a critical threat due to these non-traditional threats. The following chart depicts the quantities of drugs arrested by SLN from 2019 to 2022 in Sri Lankan territorial waters. The chart has considered only the leading drug types and there are smaller scale arrests were taken place. This chart derives that the Kerala Cannabis are the most trafficking drug type. Moreover, every type of drug has increased its arrested quantity in 2022 compared with 2019.

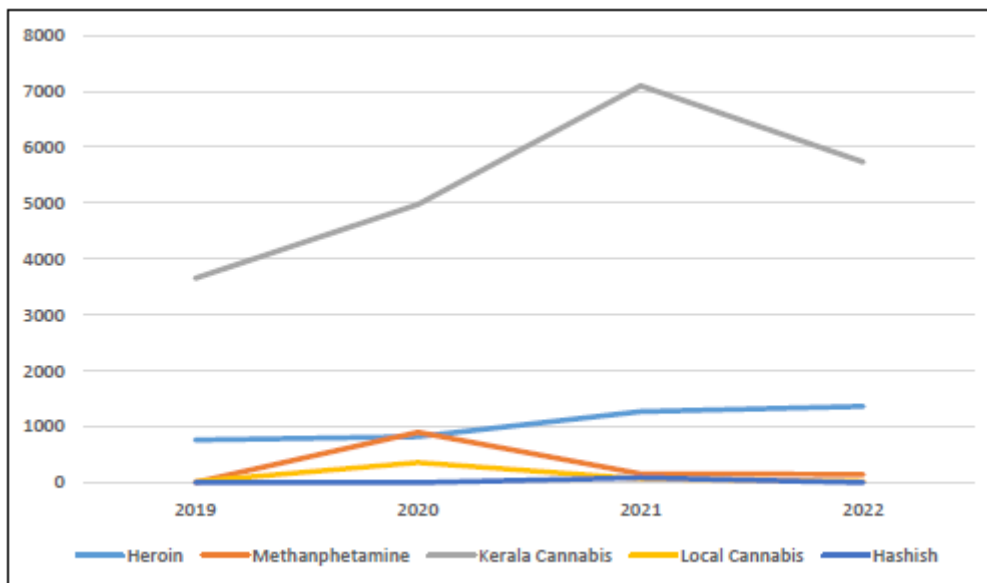


Figure 2: Quantities of drugs arrested by SLN from 2019 to 2022 (Author Developed,2025)



The Maritime Dominance of SLN

Even though the SLN only has the resources it needs to carry out routine maritime operations, it should have more advanced technology and resources to ensure its smooth operation (Hapugoda, 2020). However, experts believe that no nation can guarantee 100% maritime security. The SLN has established itself as a significant force in the maritime dominance of the region (Ministry of Defence, 2021). The Navy has developed into a modern, technologically advanced naval force capable of effectively safeguarding Sri Lanka's maritime interests over its decades-long history.

The Navy's maritime dominance has also relied heavily on cooperation and international partnerships. Sri Lanka actively fosters cooperative relationships with regional and global navies by participating in joint exercises, training programs, and information sharing. By utilizing shared knowledge, resources, and expertise, these collaborations not only improve interoperability but also strengthen Sri Lanka's maritime security (Sri Lanka Navy, 2021).

Assistance Could be Provided by SLAF to SLN Countering Maritime Threats

In the majority of both military and non-military operations, aircraft are unquestionably a potential weapon. Aircraft have the potential to be extremely useful tools in the fight against maritime threats due to their speed, maneuverability, role adaptability, and firepower (Gunasekara et al., 2016). During the expert interviews, it was emphasized that the SLAF gave the SLN a significant amount of support during the Elam War to combat the LTTE Sea Tiger threats (GlobalSecurity.org, 2022).

In addition to providing combat support, the SLAF has also provided SLN with surveillance assistance by effectively utilizing their unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and surveillance aircraft like the B 200 (Gunarathna, 2020). The assistance provided by SLAF was further increased as a result of the SLN's transition from the brown water strategy to the blue water strategy. However, SLN specialists have determined that the SLAF's current capabilities are insufficient to meet the entire range of SLN requirements (Senevirathna, 2017). As a result, the Indian Ocean region's security spectrum has been compromised. At this stage, it is essential to take the right countermeasures to close the security gap.



Requirement to Acquire Air Power

Experts in the SLN explain that the SLAF's current capabilities are insufficient to meet the entire range of SLN requirements (Nanayakkara, 2019). Given the ongoing economic crisis and the government's current strategy, it stands to reason that the available air assets are insufficient to fulfill all SLAF air power projection requirements. As a result, having an organic air capability for the SLN will make it much easier to carry out counter-maritime threat operations like surveillance, search and rescue, maritime disasters, medical evacuation, and reconnaissance needs, all of which are frequently related to naval operations and Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC) operations (Kumarage et al., 2018).

Experts in the SLAF have emphasized the shipborne aircraft's potential to reduce unnecessary delays and improve maritime operations in light of the prospect. It is explained that having shipborne aircraft would undoubtedly improve the SLN's operational capability for maritime operations in light of these facts (Gunasekara et al., 2016). However, it is necessary to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this proposal prior to making such a decision (Bajwa, 2018; Piumsiri, 2020). In order to better understand the situation, the benefits and drawbacks are listed here.

S/No	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Rapid Response	Cost and Resource Allocation
2	Enhanced Maritime Capabilities	Reduced Interoperability with SLAF
3	Commitment is high	Limited Scalability
4	Direct commanding ability	Malfuncton due to environmental issues
5	Commitment to duty	
6	Flexibility in handling	
7	Tailored Training and Expertise	
8	Integration with Naval Assets	

Figure3: Advantages and disadvantages of having a shipborne aircraft fleet to SLN (Author Developed, 2025)

According to the analysis, equipping SLN vessels with aircraft would significantly improve the execution of naval operations, particularly in the face of Sri Lanka's current and potential maritime threats. The hypothesis that acquiring air power would improve the SLN's effectiveness was consistently supported by the literature review and expert interviews. The



investigation of Sri Lanka's foreign policy yielded useful insights into the strategic priorities of the nation and the significance of protecting its maritime interests. Sri Lanka faces numerous maritime challenges that necessitate the development of robust naval capabilities, including air power, due to its extensive EEZ and strategic location in the Indian Ocean.

FINDINGS

The study's key findings underscore the significant role of shipborne aircraft in enhancing Sri Lanka's maritime security:

- **Operational Effectiveness:** Deploying helicopters from naval vessels notably extends surveillance range, improves threat detection, and accelerates response times (Mehta, 2019). They bolster anti-piracy, anti-smuggling, and illegal fishing operations with superior reconnaissance and patrol capabilities. The presence of these aircraft can reduce illegal activities within the EEZ, lead to more effective patrolling, and serve as a force multiplier for the SLN.
- **Capabilities and Benefits:** Helicopters such as the Bell 212 and helicopters with vertical takeoff/landing capabilities prove versatile, supporting missions from search and rescue to logistical support (Gill, 2019). Their ability to operate from smaller decks makes them suitable for the SLN's fleet.
- **Challenges in Training and Ground Support:** Major obstacles include high procurement and maintenance costs, limited infrastructure (hangars and repair facilities), and training requirements. Weather sensitivity and limited endurance further restrict operational windows.
- **Opportunities for Joint Operations:** The integration of shipborne aircraft offers opportunities for increased deterrence, improved situational awareness, and enhanced inter-agency coordination with SLAF, Coast Guard and regional partners. The SLN and SLAF are able to maximize their capabilities and improve overall operational efficacy by sharing intelligence, expertise, and resources. Joint operations enable a comprehensive approach to maritime security by facilitating the seamless integration of air and naval assets.



• **Challenges in Implementation:** Financial constraints, capability duplication with the Sri Lanka Air Force, and interoperability issues pose significant hurdles. Strategic planning is required to address these.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the positive findings regarding the acquisition of air power by the SLN, the following recommendations can be made to support and enhance its effectiveness:

- **Increased Spending on Shipborne Aircraft.** To improve its operational effectiveness and capabilities, the SLN ought to keep making investments in shipborne aircraft.
- **Establish comprehensive programs of instruction.** Pilots and ground crew members should receive specialized training in order to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills they need to effectively operate and maintain shipborne aircraft.
- **Infrastructure Development.** In order to provide shipborne aircraft with adequate storage, shelter, and maintenance assistance, the SLN ought to give priority to the construction of specialized hangars and maintenance facilities.
- **Staged Execution Plan.** The SLN ought to adopt a phased implementation strategy for the acquisition of shipborne aircraft in light of the significant costs involved.
- **Enhance inter-service cooperation.** Joint operations and collaborations with other sister services, particularly SLAF, should continue by the SLN. The seamless integration of air and naval assets in maritime operations will be ensured as a result of this improvement in coordination, communication, and joint planning efforts.

CONCLUSION

The development and deployment of shipborne aircraft, particularly helicopters, have demonstrated a marked improvement in Sri Lanka's maritime security posture. These assets significantly expand surveillance reach, enable rapid response, and bolster anti-threat capabilities within the EEZ. Despite challenges such as costs and infrastructural needs, the strategic advantages affirm their importance for the SLN's future operational planning. The study confirms that integrating shipborne aircraft aligns with Sri Lanka's maritime security objectives, providing a critical force multiplier to combat emerging threats and secure vital maritime resources.

**REFERENCES**

- Attri, V.N. & Bohler-Mulleris, N. (2018). *The Blue Economy Handbook of the Indian Ocean Region*. Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa.
- Bajwa, M.A. (2018). Sri Lanka Navy to acquire Ship-Borne Aircraft. *Pakistan Observer*.
- Bandara, N. (2018). 'The importance of maritime security to Sri Lanka'. *Journal of Defence Studies*, 12(2), 48–57.
- Bryman, A., (2004). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gill, P., (2019). 'Helicopter operations in small navies'. *Naval Review*, 107(3), 22–29.
- GlobalSecurity.org, (2022). Sri Lanka Air Force. accessed 20 January 2025, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/srilanka/airforce.htm>
- Gunaratna, S. (2020). Sri Lanka Navy receives advanced drone technology. *NewsFirst*.
- Gunasekara, R., Jayasinghe, R. & De Silva, K. (2016). 'Strategic importance of aircraft carriers to the Sri Lanka Navy'. *Maritime Security Review*, 1(1), 68–76.
- Hapugoda, A. (2020). 'Evolution of Sri Lanka Navy operations and its contribution to national security'. *Journal of Defence Studies*, 14(1), 1–26.
- Kumarage, A., Palihakkara, T. & Fernando, R. (2018). 'Modernizing the Sri Lanka Navy with ship-borne aircraft: A conceptual study'. *Journal of National Security*, 3(1), 31–44.
- Mehta, A. (2019). The strategic importance of Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port. *The Diplomat*.
- Ministry of Defence. (2021). Sri Lanka Navy. accessed 20 January 2025, <http://www.defence.lk/navy/>
- Nanayakkara, S. (2019). Importance of the navy for Sri Lanka's security. *Daily News*.
- Piumsiri, S., 2020. Sri Lanka Navy to deploy new Phantom 4 Pro+ drones for maritime surveillance. *Dronelife*.
- Sakhuja, V. (2001). Indian Ocean and the safety of sea lines of communication. *Strategic Analysis*, 25(5), 689–702.
- Seneviratne, D. (2017). 'Sri Lanka Navy looks to build its aviation wing'. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 54–55.
- Sri Lanka Navy (2021). Roles and functions of Sri Lanka Navy. accessed 20 January 2025. <https://www.navy.lk/en/roles-functions.php>
- UNODC. (2021). *Global Programme Against Money Laundering*. Vienna: United Nations.
- United Nations. (1982). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. New York: UN.



**DIGITALIZATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN SRI LANKA: EMERGING CYBERSECURITY
CHALLENGES**

Major M.H.M Imran*

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped governance systems, economic interactions, and national security environments across the world. Governments increasingly rely on digital infrastructures for administrative services, financial transactions, public communication, and development planning. While digitalization improves efficiency, connectivity, and economic productivity, it also introduces complex security vulnerabilities that challenge traditional conceptions of national security.

Historically, national security was primarily understood in terms of territorial integrity, military defense, and protection from external armed threats. However, in the twenty-first century, technological advancements have significantly expanded the scope of security concerns. Cyberspace has emerged as a new domain of strategic competition where state and non-state actors can disrupt political institutions, economic systems, and social stability without conventional military confrontation.

Sri Lanka has actively embraced digital transformation as part of its broader development strategy. Recent initiatives such as e-governance platforms, digital payment systems, smart city initiatives, and the Digital Sri Lanka 2030 strategy illustrate the country's ambition to modernize governance and strengthen the digital economy. While these developments offer considerable opportunities for economic growth and administrative efficiency, they simultaneously expand the country's cyber-attack surface and expose institutions and citizens to emerging digital threats.

This article examines the relationship between digitalization and national security in Sri Lanka. It argues that while digital transformation presents significant developmental benefits, it also introduces cybersecurity vulnerabilities related to governance fragmentation, digital misinformation, and weaknesses in technological infrastructure. Addressing these challenges requires the development of an integrated national cybersecurity strategy supported by stronger institutional coordination and regulatory frameworks.

* Major Imran Hussain is a Sri Lanka Army Commissioned Officer from The Gemunu Watch and currently serving as a Troop Commander at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University. (Correspondence: imran@kdu.ac.lk)



Digitalization and the Changing Nature of National Security

The concept of national security has evolved significantly in recent decades. Traditional security frameworks primarily focused on military capabilities and geopolitical threats. However, scholars increasingly recognize that security threats now extend into economic, informational, and technological domains.

Joseph Nye (2010) argues that cyber power has become a critical component of modern statecraft, enabling actors to influence political and economic systems through digital networks. Similarly, Manuel Castells (2010) highlights how the emergence of the “network society” has transformed global power structures, making information flows and digital infrastructures central to political authority and social stability.

In this context, cybersecurity has become an essential component of national security policy. Cyber-attacks can disrupt critical infrastructure such as financial systems, energy grids, communication networks, and government databases. Unlike traditional military threats, cyber threats often originate from decentralized networks and anonymous actors, making attribution and deterrence significantly more complex.

For developing countries such as Sri Lanka, the rapid expansion of digital infrastructure often outpaces the development of cybersecurity governance mechanisms. As digital services expand across public administration and economic sectors, the risks associated with cyber vulnerabilities become increasingly significant.

Sri Lanka’s experience reflects this broader global trend. The country’s growing reliance on digital technologies has created new opportunities for innovation and economic modernization, but it has also introduced new forms of strategic vulnerability.

Digital Transformation in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has made considerable progress in digital governance over the past decade. Government agencies have increasingly adopted digital platforms to deliver public services, manage administrative processes, and improve citizen engagement.

Major initiatives include the development of e-governance services, online tax platforms, digital identity systems, and electronic payment infrastructures. The government’s Digital Sri Lanka 2030 strategy further outlines plans to expand digital infrastructure, promote digital entrepreneurship, and strengthen technological innovation across multiple sectors.



These initiatives reflect the broader recognition that digital transformation is essential for economic competitiveness and governance efficiency. Digital technologies enable faster information exchange, improved transparency in administrative processes, and enhanced accessibility of public services for citizens.

However, rapid digitalization also introduces significant security challenges. As government systems become increasingly interconnected, vulnerabilities in one sector can potentially affect multiple critical systems simultaneously. Cybersecurity therefore becomes a foundational requirement for ensuring the resilience and sustainability of digital governance.

As highlighted in the original analysis of Sri Lanka's digital security landscape, the expansion of digital infrastructure has increased the country's exposure to cyber threats affecting government institutions, financial systems, and information networks.

Institutional Fragmentation in Cybersecurity Governance

One of the most significant challenges facing Sri Lanka's cybersecurity framework is institutional fragmentation. Multiple government institutions are responsible for managing different aspects of cybersecurity policy and implementation.

Key organizations include the Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team (SLCERT), the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), and the Data Protection Authority established under the Personal Data Protection Act. Each of these institutions performs important roles in cybersecurity monitoring, digital governance development, and data protection.

However, coordination between these institutions remains limited. The absence of a fully integrated national cybersecurity command structure can create gaps in policy implementation, information sharing, and crisis response mechanisms.

Comparative international experience demonstrates the importance of centralized cybersecurity coordination. Countries such as Estonia, widely recognized for their advanced digital governance systems, have developed integrated cybersecurity frameworks that combine national security institutions, digital infrastructure management, and emergency response systems within a unified governance structure.



Sri Lanka's current system remains largely reactive rather than proactive. Cyber incidents are often addressed after they occur rather than through systematic risk assessment and preventive security mechanisms. Strengthening institutional coordination and developing a centralized cybersecurity governance structure would significantly enhance national cyber resilience.

Digital Misinformation and Information Security

Another major security challenge associated with digitalization is the rapid spread of misinformation through online platforms. Social media networks enable information to spread quickly across large audiences, often without adequate verification or fact-checking mechanisms.

In politically sensitive or socially fragile contexts, misinformation can contribute to social polarization, communal tensions, and public distrust in institutions. Scholars such as Ronald Deibert (2013) argue that information warfare and digital propaganda have become important tools in contemporary political conflict.

Sri Lanka's experience demonstrates the potential security implications of digital misinformation. During periods of political instability or national crisis, online platforms have sometimes amplified rumors, false narratives, and communal rhetoric.

The aftermath of the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks illustrated how digital communication networks can accelerate the spread of misinformation and fear within society. Online platforms became channels for the rapid circulation of unverified claims and inflammatory narratives, which intensified social tensions during an already sensitive national moment.

In post-conflict societies, where historical grievances and identity politics remain significant, digital misinformation can act as a powerful force multiplier for social instability. Unlike conventional propaganda, digital misinformation spreads through decentralized networks that are difficult for governments to regulate without raising concerns about freedom of expression.

Addressing this challenge therefore requires a balanced approach that promotes digital literacy, encourages responsible platform governance, and strengthens mechanisms for identifying and countering disinformation campaigns.



Vulnerabilities in Digital Infrastructure

In addition to governance and information challenges, Sri Lanka's technological infrastructure also faces cybersecurity vulnerabilities. Several cyber incidents involving government institutions have highlighted weaknesses in digital security systems.

Cybersecurity experts have pointed to issues such as outdated software systems, irregular security audits, limited cybersecurity expertise, and insufficient monitoring capabilities within certain government institutions. These vulnerabilities increase the risk of cyber intrusions and data breaches.

As Sri Lanka expands its digital financial infrastructure and online government services, the potential consequences of cyber-attacks could become increasingly severe. Cyber threats targeting banking systems, digital payment networks, or national data repositories could have significant economic and political implications.

The 2016 Bangladesh Bank cyber heist, in which hackers attempted to steal nearly one billion dollars through the SWIFT banking system, illustrates the scale of potential cyber risks in the region. The incident demonstrated how sophisticated cyber operations can exploit vulnerabilities in financial infrastructure, even within highly regulated institutions. For Sri Lanka, strengthening cybersecurity infrastructure is therefore not only a technological issue but also a strategic national security priority.

Strengthening Cybersecurity Governance

Given these emerging challenges, strengthening cybersecurity governance must become a central component of Sri Lanka's national security strategy. Several policy measures could significantly enhance the country's cyber resilience.

First, Sri Lanka should further develop and operationalize a comprehensive national cybersecurity strategy that integrates the efforts of government agencies, military cyber units, private sector stakeholders, and academic institutions. Stronger institutional coordination would enable faster threat detection, more efficient information sharing, and more effective crisis response.

Second, legal and regulatory frameworks must be strengthened to address evolving cyber threats. The effective implementation of the Personal Data Protection Act and the full



operationalization of the Data Protection Authority will be essential for protecting sensitive information and ensuring accountability in digital governance.

Third, investment in cybersecurity capacity building is critical. Universities and research institutions should play a larger role in developing cybersecurity expertise through specialized training programs and academic research initiatives.

Finally, public awareness and digital literacy programs should be expanded to help citizens identify misinformation and protect their personal data in online environments. Cybersecurity is not only a technical issue but also a societal challenge that requires broad public participation.

CONCLUSION

Digitalization presents both strategic opportunities and significant security risks for Sri Lanka. The expansion of digital governance platforms, financial technologies, and communication networks offers important benefits for economic development, administrative efficiency, and global connectivity.

However, these developments also expose the country to new forms of cyber threats, including digital misinformation, cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure, and institutional vulnerabilities within cybersecurity governance systems.

Sri Lanka's experience demonstrates that national security in the digital age extends beyond conventional military defense. Protecting digital infrastructure, safeguarding information integrity, and strengthening cybersecurity governance are now essential components of national resilience.

By developing a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy, strengthening institutional coordination, and investing in technological and human capacity, Sri Lanka can maximize the benefits of digital transformation while mitigating the risks associated with emerging cyber threats.



REFERENCES

Cabinet Office of Sri Lanka (2025) National Cyber Security Strategy of Sri Lanka. Colombo: Government of Sri Lanka. Available at:

https://www.cabinetoffice.gov.lk/cab/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=49&lang=en&dID=13299 (Accessed on 3rd of September 2025).

Castells, M. (2010) *The Rise of the Network Society*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Daily FT (2024) 'Government unveils National Digital Economy Strategy', Daily FT, 24 April. Available at: <https://www.ft.lk/TOP-STORY/Govt-unveils-National-Digital-Economy-Strategy/26-760981> (Accessed on 6th of September 2025).

Deibert, R. (2013) *Black Code: Surveillance, Privacy, and the Dark Side of the Internet*. Toronto: Signal.

Digital Development (2024) National Digital Economy Strategy – 2030 (Sri Lanka). Available at: <https://www.digitaldevelopment.org/library/national-digital-economy-strategy-2030/> (Accessed on 15th of September 2025).

Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) (2025) Connected Government and Digital Transformation Initiatives. Available at: <https://www.icta.lk/connected-government/> (Accessed on 15th of September 2025).

Mind of Cyber (2025) Cybersecurity in Sri Lanka: Structure, Strengths and Challenges. Available at: <https://mindofcyber.com/cybersecurity-in-sri-lanka> (Accessed on 16th September 2025).

Ministry of Technology (2023) Digital Sri Lanka 2030: National Digital Strategy. Colombo: Ministry of Technology. Available at:

<https://www.icta.lk/icta-assets/uploads/2023/05/Annex-1-National-Digital-Strategy-2030.pdf> (Accessed on 20th September 2025).

Nye, J. S. (2010) *Cyber Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School.

Perera, A. (2024) 'Cybersecurity Challenges in Sri Lankan Government Websites', *Journal of Sri Lankan Technology*, 10(2), pp. 45–60.



Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team (SLCERT) (2025) National Cyber Security Strategy 2025–2029. Colombo: SLCERT. Available at:

[https://www.cert.gov.lk/wp-](https://www.cert.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/policies/National_Cyber_Security_Strategy_of_Sri-Lanka.pdf)

[content/uploads/policies/National_Cyber_Security_Strategy_of_Sri-Lanka.pdf](https://www.cert.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/policies/National_Cyber_Security_Strategy_of_Sri-Lanka.pdf) (Accessed on 29th September 2025).

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Maheshi Thellamurege



Maheshi Thellamurege holds a BSc in International Relations and Strategic Studies from General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University and is currently reading for the MSc in Conflict and Peace Studies at the University of Colombo. She serves as a Research and Programme Officer at the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS), where she contributes to policy-oriented research and regional initiatives on security and strategic affairs. Her research interests include maritime security, blue economy initiatives, irregular migration, climate action in South Asia, digital inequality, and political polarization. She has authored and presented research papers at KDU, RCSS, and other academic and policy-oriented platforms, with a focus on regional security dynamics and emerging non-traditional security challenges.

Squadron Leader WPTM Wijesingha



Squadron Leader Tharaka Wijesingha completed his primary and secondary education at D. S. Senanayake College, Colombo. He was enlisted as an Officer Cadet at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Engineering (Honours) degree. During his academic career, he has also obtained a Postgraduate Diploma in Defence Management and a Master of Science in Defence and Strategic Studies from the same university. Squadron Leader Tharaka Wijesingha is currently serving as a Staff Officer at the Defence Services Command and Staff College.

R. R. Abuthahir



Rukshana Rizvi is a Sri Lankan researcher and education professional specializing in political science, strategic studies, and international relations. She holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Political Science from the University of Peradeniya and a Master of Science in Strategic Studies and International Relations from General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University. In addition to her academic and administrative responsibilities, Rizvi is actively engaged in research focusing on human rights, conflict resolution, and international relations. Her primary research interests lie in examining the role of international organizations in conflict dynamics and humanitarian assistance, with particular reference to the Middle East.

Commodore Prasanna Hettiarachchi



Commodore Prasanna Hettiarachchi is an officer of the Sri Lanka Navy, serving since 1995. He has commanded ships and establishments and held key director-level appointments at Naval Headquarters. He holds a Master of Science in Security and Strategic Studies from General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, reflecting commitment to professional excellence.

Major MHM Imran



Major Imran Hussain is a Sri Lanka Army Commissioned Officer from The Gemunu Watch. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Management and Technical Science from General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University. He has completed his initial studies at Badulla Central College. He joined General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University on 17th September 2012 as an Officer Cadet in KDU Intake 30. After completion of the basic military training at KDU and Sri Lanka Military Academy (SLMA), he was commissioned to the rank of Second Lieutenant on 17th Sep 2014 and posted to the Gemunu Watch of Sri Lanka Army. He is a professional career guider, a motivational speaker and an event host who has been decorated with Competent Communicator and Advanced Leader Bronze awards from Toastmasters International, He was the first president of KDU Toastmasters from student community. During his tour of duty, he has held several important appointments and currently serving as a Troop Commander at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University.



General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University
Kandawala Road, Ratmalana 10390,
Sri Lanka

ISSN 2820-2198



9 772820 219009