

Sri Lanka's Quest for Security in the Indian Ocean Region

Roundtable with the Konrad Adenauer
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*The opinions expressed in this presentation are solely those
of the presenter and do not necessarily reflect those of LKI.*

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Small States and Rules-based Order

- Small states thrive best under some form of rules-based order
 - The Netherlands and the Law of the Sea
 - Singapore's first address to UN General Assembly in 1965
 - Sri Lanka's 1971 proposal to declare Indian Ocean a 'Zone of Peace'
- However, small states themselves unable to bear costs of enforcing rules-based order
- Without support of larger powers, rules-based order will remain toothless

The Indian Ocean Context

- Indian Ocean region characterised by lack of capacity to enforce rules-based order
 - US seeking to shift responsibility for regional security onto regional partners
 - However, regional partners lack capacity to unilaterally guarantee regional security
 - Legacy of non-alignment – many Indian Ocean countries unwilling to let regional or extra-regional powers dominate in providing regional security
- Indian Ocean therefore an ‘ungoverned space’

Sri Lanka's Strategy: Multilateral Engagement

- Sri Lanka must engage with multiple actors to secure regional rules-based order
 - Sri Lanka already being active in this regard by pursuing idea of Indian Ocean Code of Conduct
 - Speculation that Sri Lanka's intensifying economic ties with China undermine its capacity for engaging multiple actors
 - Such speculation obscures important aspects of Sri Lanka's multi-pronged regional engagement

Sri Lanka's Strategy: Engagement with Regional Organisations

- Founder member of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – 1985
- Founder member of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) – 1997
- Founder member of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) – 1997
- Member of first Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) - 2008

Sri Lanka's Strategy: Economic Engagement

- Pursuit of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with regional states
 - Singapore – signed 23 January 2018
 - China – currently under negotiation
 - India – expansion of current FTA to Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement (ETCA)
- FTAs also being considered with Bangladesh and Thailand
- Belt and Road Initiative – Hambantota Port and Colombo International Financial City projects
- Member of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

Sri Lanka's Strategy: Security Engagement

- Sri Lanka currently Lead Coordinator of IORA's Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security
- Hosts UN Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime, also to host UNODC's Global Maritime Crime Programme in near future
- Dialogue Partner of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)
- Party to trilateral maritime security agreement with India and the Maldives

Sri Lanka's Strategy: Security Engagement

- Bilateral defence cooperation with India
 - Annual Mitra Shakthi joint military exercises since 2012
 - Annual Indo-Lanka Defence Dialogue since 2012
 - Four rounds of SLINEX joint naval exercises since 2005
- Bilateral defence cooperation with China
 - Joint military exercise 'Exercise-Silk Route' in 2015
- Bilateral defence cooperation with US
 - US trained and held joint exercises with first-ever Sri Lankan Marine batallion
- Hosting foreign naval vessels

Pursuing Rules-based Order in the Indian Ocean Region

- Sri Lanka must identify regional states/groupings best able to enforce regional rules-based order
- Quadrilateral security dialogue between US, India, Australia and Japan ('the Quad') an evolving mechanism
 - However, Quad still in very early stages – need to watch its growth closely
- Other platforms: IORA, IONS
- Sri Lanka could seek to strengthen existing normative statements (like IORA's Jakarta Concord)

Conclusion

- Sri Lanka's foreign policy geared towards multilateral engagement to secure rules-based order in the Indian Ocean
- Sri Lanka's multilateral engagement has included:
 - Engagement with regional organisations
 - Bilateral economic engagement (via FTAs)
 - Multilateral and bilateral security engagement
- Sri Lanka's options for pursuing regional rules-based order include
 - Seeking lower-level engagement with the Quad
 - Using other regional platforms (IORA, IONS)
 - Strengthening existing normative statements

Thank You!



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