

SECURITY DIMENSIONS OF SETHUSAMUDRAM SHIP CANAL PROJECT AND UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF SEA: INDIA – SRI LANKA CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: The proposed flagship project of SethuSamudram Ship Canal by the Indian Government will create an unavoidable by-pass that would inevitably divert the sea traffic through India's own maritime waters and would give India a firm grip on one of the world's most strategic and busiest sea-lanes. The project has designed envisaging benefits to India including avoiding circumnavigation of ships around Sri Lanka, providing India the fleet facility in its territorial waters and facilitating in mitigating threats from pirates and drug traffickers. Despite positive implications, the neighboring State Sri Lanka has recognized the project has environmental, societal, economic, political and military effects on its security. The SethuSamudram Ship Canal project has negative implications for neighboring Sri Lanka, including concerns over environmental, political, military, economic and livelihood issues. The study synthesizes the case with theory applying Barry Buzan's security dimensions analysis. Buzan's analysis helps to classify five security sectors under threat due to massive dredging of the canal in the Indian water. The study also considers the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea-1982 as a feasible instrument that both India and Sri Lanka can rely on.

KEY WORDS: Maritime Waters, Security, Threats, State, SethuSamudram Ship Canal

1. Introduction

For long time the maritime security has been interpreted narrowly as the maritime security of a state, protection of territory from seaward aggression or protection of national maritime interests. Recent years have seen an increasing focus on proliferation of mass destruction weapons and ballistic missiles, the remaining legacy of the Cold War, rapid military power build-up, territorial and sovereign disputes, confrontation surrounding maritime rights and benefits and illegal activities such as piracy and armed violence at sea (Hideaki, 2001). In the undividable liquid volume, the maritime security has been ensured by both national and regional efforts.

Treated as a bilateral maritime issue, the impacts of SethuSamudram Ship Canal Project (SSCP) initiated by the Ministry of Shipping, Government of India shall not be confined to its territory only. The canal is a 167 km long shipping route, and envisages the creation of a navigable canal from the Gulf of Mannar to the Bay of Bengal to suit different drafts namely, 9.15 m, 10.7 m and 12.8 m through dredging/excavation in Adams Bridge and parts of Palk