

**Reflection on the Great Power Politics in Sri Lankan Foreign Policy:
Special Reference to China India Rivalry**

P. N. Priyadarshana¹

Abstract

Being a small nation Sri Lanka has long struggled to counterbalance its powerful neighbor India. This was often done by bringing in powers from outside of the region so it can fulfill its' economic and security needs without bending to India's will. As a result, China's involvement in Sri Lanka has been increasingly heavy since recent years. Along with the gradual transition of power to the Asian continent Sri Lanka's strategic importance has been enhanced while increasing the interests of outside powers in the island, especially China. Thus the recent geo-political tussles over Sri Lanka between India and China have focused on establishing power points in the island nation. These developments have caused internal disturbance as it has been perceived as a threat to sovereignty and the security of the country. It has become an undeniable factor that Sri Lanka needs to assure a healthy relationship with both the great powers, India and China for its' benefit. However the rivalry between the two nations has made it critical for Sri Lanka to balance the interests of the two nations to achieve its own interests. The study investigates the foreign policy of Sri Lanka from 2009 to 2017 and how the national interests of the country are reflected in the foreign policy formulation and implementation. It further identifies the challenges and vulnerabilities that Sri Lanka has to face as a small state amidst the India- China rivalry and their interest in the island. The Study takes a qualitative approach based on secondary data with foreign policy being the independent variable while alignment behavior being the dependent variable. Analysis of latest Sri Lankan foreign policy trends and prospects reflects that gaining foothold in Sri Lanka is critical to any power rising to secure Indian Ocean routes to the East and West. Therefore Sri Lanka must be careful not to allow one party to outpace the others. Fear of India that Sri Lanka will fall under control of a hostile nation and India's rival, China being the probable power to do so, make matters complicated. While minimizing the threat of domination, Sri Lanka has to continue to advance its ability to maximize the advantages of outside influence.

Key words: India-China rivalry, foreign policy, strategic importance, national interests

¹ BA (Special) International Studies, University of Kelaniya
nedaranirmani@gmail.com

