The Sri Lanka-China-India Triangle: A Regional Power Transition

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The Sri Lanka-China-India Triangle: A Regional Power Transition

submitted to
Professor Aseema Sinha

by
Nandeeni Patel

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Abstract

In 2016, China became the largest importer of Sri Lankan goods and services, surpassing India. Since then, the Chinese government has signed significant trade, development, and security deals with the island nation. This thesis argues that Sri Lanka's domestic politics, centered around its decades-long civil war and consequent human rights concerns, have served as the crux of its triangular relations with two regional powers: India and China. The human rights issue, in tandem with Sri Lanka's agency as a small state, has drawn Sri Lanka to China. The China-Sri Lanka relationship which strengthened based on shared attitudes towards rights concerns, has now expanded to developing security and development ties. A regional power transition has occurred in South Asia because of Sri Lanka's foreign policy decisions to actively involve China in security and development matters. China's influence over South Asian small states like Sri Lanka has increasingly offset India's previous regional dominance in the South Asian neighborhood. China's increasing footprint in Sri Lanka, caused by Sri Lanka's domestic policy constraints, has consequently adapted India's foreign policy goals. India has responded to China's presence on the island nation by signing similar security and infrastructure deals. This thesis presents the framework for a triangular relationship that emphasizes how one nation's foreign policies indirectly affect another nation's foreign policies. The framework is assessed through a quantitative empirical analysis of annual events from 2013-2019. The triangular relationship is reinforcing and shapes the very nature of South Asian power dynamics. Now, India and China are equal-parts players in Sri Lanka, with both powers sharing strong security and developmental ties with the island nation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Chinese submarine Changzheng-2 and warship Chang Xing Dao docked at Hambantota Port, located in southern Sri Lanka, on October 31st, 2014 (Aneez and Sirilal 2014). Typically, this would not alarm any country. Over 230 warships have docked at the port from 2010-2014 to refuel (Aneez and Sirilal 2014). However, the frequency of naval dockings from China concerned India, the predominant regional power. India became particularly wary of China's closeness to Sri Lanka in 2017 when President Xi Jinping visited Sri Lanka and signed 27 Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with the island nation, including the development of the Hambantota Port and the area surrounding it (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021). With China’s growing investments, especially in infrastructure assets that can be crucial for both security and economic reasons, the port became a battleground of strategic interests between the two powers.

In 2017, Sri Lanka made headlines for renting out the Hambantota Port to the Chinese government on a 99-year lease (Abi-Habib 2018). Western powers accused China of engaging in debt-trap diplomacy, forcing Sri Lanka to give up to the port due to its inability to pay back loans. The New York Times noted that "though Chinese officials and analysts have insisted that China's interest in the Hambantota port is purely commercial, Sri Lankan officials said that from the start, the intelligence and strategic possibilities of the port's location were part of the negotiations" (Abi-Habib 2018). Several democracies, led by the United States and India, claimed that Sri Lanka's sovereignty was under attack (Pant 2017). Sri Lanka, China's officials, and several other scholars noted that China's actions in Sri Lanka, leading up to taking control of the port, were no different from Sri Lanka's relations with any other great power (Brautigam and
The rising influence of China in Sri Lanka, and Sri Lanka's reciprocation of China's commercial and security advances, has brought a new concern for India's regional dominance in South Asia. These developments related to the Hambantota port highlight an interesting puzzle: How is power transitioning in South Asia, and how is Sri Lanka influencing such a power transition?

Overview

This thesis argues that Sri Lanka's domestic politics, centered around its decades-long civil war and consequent human rights concerns, have served as the crux of its relations with regional powers India and China. The human rights issue, in tandem with Sri Lanka's agency as a small state, has drawn Sri Lanka to China. The China-Sri Lanka relationship strengthened based on a shared attitude towards human rights violations, has now cumulated to developing security and development ties. China took advantage of Sri Lanka's domestic constraints, particularly surrounding the human rights issue, to develop strong relations with the island nation. There has been a regional power transition in South Asia because of Sri Lanka's foreign policy decisions to actively involve China in security and development matters. China's influence over South Asian small states like Sri Lanka has increasingly offset India's previous regional dominance in the South Asian neighborhood. China's increasing footprint in Sri Lanka, caused by Sri Lanka's domestic policy constraints, has adapted India's foreign policy goals. India has reactively responded to China's presence on the island nation by signing similar security and infrastructural deals. Now, India and China are equal-parts players in Sri Lanka, with both powers having strong security and developmental ties with Sri Lanka. Figure 1 expresses this thesis's argument in a model, showing how the changing dynamics across
all three countries have created a triangular relationship. The triangular relationship emphasizes that one nation's foreign policy decisions indirectly affects another nation's foreign policy decisions. This triangular relationship is reinforcing and shapes the very nature of South Asian power dynamics.

Figure 1: Sri Lanka-China-India Triangular Relationship

Historical and Contextual Background

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, also known as the "pearl of the Indian Ocean," has long been a critical country in the international arena of power and trade (Blanchard 2018). Southwest of the Bay of Bengal and southeast of the Arabian Sea, Sri Lanka's location was of great strategic importance during the height of the ancient Silk Road and the modern Maritime Silk Road (Jonathan 1990). It was a critical stop for refueling during travel and trade engagements, connecting the West to the East in times of colonial navigation (Jonathan 1990). The first written records about Sri Lanka's
economic and cultural performance dates to about 3,000 years ago (Jonathan 1990). Sri Lanka's rich history, however, is over hundreds of thousands of years old, with evidence of ancient human settlements in the region going back 125,000 years ago (Jonathan 1990). The island nation's status as a central trade hub for luxury goods and spices attracted global traders in the early 15th and 16th centuries (Jonathan 1990). The country's allure, founded in its abundance of natural resources and economic opportunities, created the ideal environment to cultivate its ethnic and religious diversity. Today, Sri Lanka houses one of the most diverse populations (Blanchard 2018).

The Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British sequentially colonized Sri Lanka (Jonathan 1990). A national movement for independence from the British monarchy rose in the 20th century, and in 1948, Ceylon became a republic (Wickramasinghe 2014). In 1972, Ceylon officially became Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe 2014). Sri Lanka is one of

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**Figure 2: Sri Lankan Ethnic Groups**

Caption: Sri Lanka houses a wide array of nationalities. The majoritarian nationality are the Sinhalese. The minority nationalities include the Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils, who were politically and socially discriminated against and waged war on the Sinhalese-majority government for about 30 years.

Source: CIA World Factbook, 2012

The Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British sequentially colonized Sri Lanka (Jonathan 1990). A national movement for independence from the British monarchy rose in the 20th century, and in 1948, Ceylon became a republic (Wickramasinghe 2014). In 1972, Ceylon officially became Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe 2014). Sri Lanka is one of
the longest enduring democracies in Asia. Unfortunately, the nation has been thrust into a lengthy civil war on lines of nationality, causing a tumultuous history since its independence (Wickramasinghe 2014). Sri Lanka recently ended a 26-year civil war in 2009 when the Sri Lankan Armed Forces defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LLTE), led by ethnic minority Tamils (Jonathan 1990).

Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious diversity is critical to understanding the nature of the nation's domestic politics and foreign relations. As seen in Figure 2, the Sinhalese population holds a significant majority. Historically, Sinhalese Sri Lankan political parties have limited the political rights and representation of minorities like Sri Lankan Tamils (Jonathan 1990). The ongoing tension between the Sinhalese and the Tamils will lay the groundwork for a decades-long civil war, further elaborated in the third chapter. The civil war's resultant human rights concern will serve as the domestic constraint on Sri Lankan foreign relations. The human rights issue will open an avenue for growing China-Sri Lanka ties, expanding into strong security and trade relations. China's growing geoeconomic and geopolitical presence in Sri Lanka changes India's foreign policy goals. India adapts and responds to China's progress in Sri Lanka by confirming deals in response to Chinese deals. The adaptation of India's foreign policy goals defines India-Sri Lanka relations. This triangular relationship between Sri Lanka, India, and China is reinforcing; the decisions of one affect the decisions of others.

Sri Lanka's domestic institutions and involvement in foreign multilateral organizations show the nation's growing importance in international relations. Sri Lanka is a republic and unitary state with a semi-presidential system (Wickramasinghe 2014). Internationally, Sri Lanka is a member of the United Nations, the G77, the
Commonwealth of Nations, and the Non-Aligned Movement since the 1960s (Wickramasinghe 2014). Regionally, Sri Lanka was one of the founding members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985, with Sri Lankan diplomat Esala Weerakoon serving as its current Secretary-General (Pant 2017). Additionally, Sri Lanka is a vital member of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) (Pant 2017). Sri Lanka plays an important role both internationally and regionally partially due to its critical and changing ties with regional and globally-rising powers of India and China. This thesis will explore the nature of its triangular relationship with India and China and how Sri Lanka, as a small state, has the agency to change regional power dynamics in South Asia.

The South Asian Context

India, Sri Lanka's direct neighbor, plays a significant role given its proximity and dense linkages over centuries. India, known as the world's largest democracy, houses over one billion people and accounts for immense regional, linguistic, and religious diversity (Pant 2017). India gained its independence in 1947 from British colonialism after an intense nationalist movement (Guha 2008). India has been a secular federal republic since 1950 governed under a democratic parliamentary system (Guha 2008). India has become one of the fastest-growing major economies globally as a hub for major information technology services (Pant 2017). The country faces many socio-economic challenges, like pollution and malnutrition, that still haunt the country (Guha 2008). However, India continues to be a key player in international politics, serving as an
essential economic and political ally for major powers worldwide, including the United States of America.

There are several different models to explain power in South Asia. First is the Indian regional model, based on the South Asia doctrine (Maass 1994). This model is India-focused and has two main intentions: first, to emphasize the Indian-dominated structure of South Asia; second, to reduce extra-regional influence in South Asia as much as possible (Maass 1994). This model is conceptualized as three concentric rings, each balancing against each other, and therefore, stabilizing internal and external national security (Maass 1994). The innermost ring is the Indian state (Maass 1994). The second ring is the South Asian neighborhood, including Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Maldives (Maass 1994). The third ring is called the international circle, wherein all other countries fall (Maass 1994). India and other Western democracies envisioned the India-centric model to manifest. If it had played its cards right, India could have dominated over other small South Asian states easily. However, this model fails to see the South Asian neighborhood as having another power, as capable as India, come into the picture.

Another model is a multilateral one revolving around the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The SAARC model offers a means to view many imbalances, contentious issues, and power rivalries (Maass 1994). This model, in contrast to the geopolitical configurations, presents South Asia as a coherent region. Additionally, in contrast to the first Indian-dominated model, this model suggests that meetings and negotiations will be "among equals" (Maass 1994). This equality is most evident in the locating of SAARC headquarters in smaller states, currently in Kathmandu, Nepal.
(Maass 1994). The SAARC model is essentially a multilateral way to look at South Asia and its relational politics through an organizational lens. While Citha Maass focuses on SAARC, this model can be used to explain other multilateral cooperation like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in the late 20th century. The model for multilateral cooperation, like the India-centric model, is an ideal yet to be achieved. The South Asian region at present faces too many challenges to effectively solve contentious issues and sublimate power rivalries as envisioned.

Regionally, one of India's main foreign policy goals has been establishing its presence and power in the South Asian neighborhood. The India-centric model was not practical given South Asian small states' hesitance with India's geographic dominance. With the establishment of SAARC and other multilateral organizations, India was hopeful that it would be the foremost power in the region. Several obstacles have come in India's way on its path to regional dominance. Foremost, there has been a lack of cooperation for regional unity on behalf of Pakistan, India's northwest neighbor carved out of pre-colonial India during British departure from India. On lines of disputed religious and territorial claims, the India-Pakistan conflict has effectively prevented multilateral regional organizations like SAARC from being cooperative and productive. In 2016, a SAARC Summit was scheduled in Islamabad, Pakistan. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi canceled the summit after an Indian Army camp was attacked in Kashmir (Pant 2017). After India pulled out of the summit, numerous member countries including Sri Lanka, pulled out of the summit (Pant 2017). Again in 2018, India claimed that cross border-terrorist attacks, including the bombing of a shrine in Amritsar, were supported by
the Pakistani government (Tremblay and Kapur 2017). India, led by then Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj, continued the boycott against SAARC (Tremblay and Kapur 2017). Boycotts and cancellations have essentially crippled SAARC.

Not only have the regional institutions in South Asia failed to promote cooperation in the neighborhood, but the rise of China has been a growing threat to India's regional dominance. The emergence of China has complicated the simplistic structure of Maass's model and forced attention to the triangular aspect of the relationships.

The People's Republic of China, a great international power, borders India in the northeast. It houses the world's largest population, at around 1.4 billion people (Lanteigne 2019). The republic is a one-party state led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which has been in power since 1949 (Lanteigne 2019). China's rise took the world by surprise in the early 21st century. It has become the world's fastest-growing economy, the second-wealthiest nation in the world, and the world's largest manufacturer and exporter (Lanteigne 2019). The crux of China and India's conflict lies in a border dispute at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) (Lanteigne 2019).

India and China have had different interpretations of their shared border since India gained its independence (Lanteigne 2019). The 1962 Sino-Indian War was fought on the grounds of the disputed border when India gave refuge to the exiled Dalai Lama in the wake of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising (Pant 2017). There have been numerous agreements since 1962 to manage the border conflict. In 2017, the Doklam-Bhutan conflict consisted of over a two-month standoff (Tremblay and Kapur 2017). The Chinese government was trying to construct a road in the Doklam area in Bhutan. Indian
troops, in aid of Bhutan, objected to the construction (Tremblay and Kapur 2017). China agreed to halt road construction for the time being (Tremblay and Kapur 2017).

Recently, in June 2020, an intense border skirmish between India and China escalated to the point where both the People's Liberation Army (PLA), China's military body, and the Indian Army had casualties (Madan 2020). The Indian Army reports that PLA militants bludgeoned 18 Indian soldiers in the middle of the night (Madan 2020).

While neither country has claimed responsibility for the escalation, satellite images show that the PLA created new formations in areas where it was not present before (Madan 2020). There were several talks in Moscow with the Indian and Chinese Defense Ministries. The talks highlighted two conflicting ways of handling the border dispute, according to Tanvi Madan (Madan 2020). The Chinese do not want differences at the border to affect their broader relationship (Madan 2020). India, on the contrary, has said that the two countries signed agreements in the 1990s not to change the status quo, and those agreements were the foundation of the two countries have broader economic relations (Madan 2020). While China wants to separate New Delhi and Beijing's economic and political relationships, India believes that peace and tranquility at the border are prerequisites to progress in the larger relationship.
In addition to the border conflict, China has been threatening India's regional dominance through its development investments. Most recently, China's 2012 Belt and Road Initiative has arguably made several developing countries in Africa and Asia, like Sri Lanka, dependent on China's economic support (Blanchard 2018). This phenomenon was labeled in 2017 by Indian and American political pundits as "China's debt-trap diplomacy" (Behuria 2018). Debt-trap diplomacy occurs when governments borrow at an interest rate that exceeds the growth rate of their income, causing their current expenditure on items other than debt servicing to be increasingly reduced (Behuria 2018). Although some scholars believe that China has not engaged in debt-trap diplomacy (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021), there seems to be an imminent reason for concern for India. China recently surpassed India as Sri Lanka's largest trading partner (Sundaram and Chaudhary 2021). In 2000, Chinese imports represented 3.5 percent of Sri Lanka's
total imports (Sundaram and Chaudhary 2021). By 2017, this number rose to 20 percent (Sundaram and Chaudhary 2021). The narrative surrounding debt-trap diplomacy takes away from Sri Lanka's agency as a small state.

**Small States and Balance of Power**

In line with China's growing economic footprint, India and China's rise has had significant consequences for the South Asian region, including Sri Lanka. One of these significant consequences is a regional power transition, in which Sri Lanka, as a small South Asian state, has invited China into the South Asian balance of power. In IR theory, small states have been the objects, not the subjects of study (Neumann et al. 2006). According to Annette Baker Fox, it was not until World War II that small states like Norway and Spain were studied for the former's failure and the latter's success in avoiding the war. Neumann et al. suggest multiple ways to study the effects of small states on international relations, two of which include understanding their capabilities and their institutional roles. Capabilities are "material and nonmaterial resources that can serve as the basis for power" (Kauppi and Viotti 2020). Neo-realists who work with small states are inclined to study such phenomena through two lenses. First is bandwagoning, or when a small state strategizes to join coalitions and alliances of other states which are perceived as "great" or "winners" (Neumann et al. 2006). The second is balancing. Balancing occurs when a small state strategizes to join weaker coalitions to reach a balance of power (Neumann et al. 2006). The question arises: How has Sri Lanka “bandwagonned” with both India and China?

Small states in South Asia have unique regional power and influence in comparison to small states elsewhere. Small states, generally, are expected to balance
powerful actors by joining countervailing coalitions or bandwagon with the most powerful ones. For example, outside of South Asia, the Netherlands balanced against domination from a large regional power, France, in NATO, by drawing support from the United States in 1995 (Van Staaden 1995). On the flip side, Central America's reliance on the United States for almost all issues, including security and economic stability, serves as an example of bandwagoning (Paul 2019). However, T.V. Paul claims that small states in South Asia have managed to acquire a substantial amount of investment from rising regional powers India and China without falling into the strategic orbit of either.

This investment has two primary dimensions: security cooperation and infrastructural development. In terms of security cooperation, Sri Lanka garnered weapons from China in 2005 when India could not supply the Sri Lankan government weapons due to domestic tensions (Blanchard 2018). The southern state of Tamil Nadu, which has ethnic ties with Sri Lanka's Tamil population and LTTE, was firmly against the Indian government supporting the Sri Lankan government's war against its Tamil population (Pant 2017). More recently, Sri Lanka briefly allowed China to dock some naval submarines at the Hambantota port (Abi-Habib 2018). In the same time frame, Sri Lanka participated in a trilateral joint Coast Guard exercise with India and the Maldives called DOSTI, Hindi for "friendship" (India MEA 2021). The benefits Sri Lanka has received from Beijing, and New Delhi go beyond security cooperation.

In terms of development, Sri Lanka has received heavy monetary investment from both powers. A couple of months ago, Sri Lanka received COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE) from China (Kuruwita 2020). Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa took to Twitter to personally thank the Chinese government for their supplies and help during
these troubling times (Kuruwita 2020). Surprisingly, Sri Lanka denied China's COVID-19 vaccine and has decided to purchase its vaccines from India (Press Trust of India 2021). Sri Lanka's ability to reap benefits from both powers shows the immense power that small states in South Asia have. The small states' power, however, is not boundless. Paul argues that limited competition between India and China in an era of intensified economic globalization has allowed small states to maximize returns without upsetting any power. Weaker states, as seen by Sri Lanka, have developed an eclectic approach through asymmetrical strategies to extract resources from their larger neighbors, both of whom aspire to lead the international system.

Paul further argues that India and China's economic interdependence ultimately forces them to avoid conflict and hard balancing. Hard balancing seeks to "increase the relative power of a state against a powerful and threatening state through domestic military buildups and external alignments" (He and Fung 2008). Hard balancing sends the wrong signals to trading partners and reduces the possibility of economic interaction. Particularly the opportunity costs and trade-offs of war between India and China are unlikely to be afforded by either, but particularly India (Paul 2019). On the other side of hard balancing, which Paul does not present, is the idea of soft balancing. Soft balancing "focuses on undermining the relative power of the strong and threatening state through bilateral and multilateral coordination" (He and Fung 2008). While India and China may avoid hard balancing, both powers use their bilateral relations with other countries, especially small states like Sri Lanka, to countervail the other's power. This thesis suggests that domestic policy constraints affect Sri Lanka's asymmetrical strategy to extract resources from both powers. Both regional powers, India and China, have
responded to Sri Lanka's domestic constraints, like the human rights issue, in different ways.

**Domestic Politics**

Sri Lanka's domestic politics serves as the context of the triangular relationship between India, Sri Lanka, and China. Robert Putnam's (1988) two-level game theory serves as the theoretical framework for this argument. Sri Lanka's domestic win-set, shaped by its human rights violations, constrains its foreign policy. The human rights issue has distanced the island nation from India and has strengthened its ties with China. China has provided international protection to Sri Lanka in international courts and the United Nations to protect Sri Lankan political officials, including the Rajapaksa family, from prosecution for war crimes (UNHRC 2015). Sri Lanka-China relations work on a *quid pro quo* basis. China provides Sri Lanka international protection for its human rights abuses during the civil war, and Sri Lanka provides China access to strategic development and security deals.

Sri Lanka's domestic politics constraint, centered on its human rights issue, has impacted India-Sri Lanka relations. Tamil Nadu, a state in southern India, has close ethnic ties with the Tamil militants in Sri Lanka. The state wanted the Indian national government to ally with the Tamil militants instead of the Sri Lankan government (Pant 2017). India's domestic constraint prevented the national government from building strong ties with Sri Lanka, further pushing Sri Lanka to rely on China. Consequently, China-Sri Lanka relations have helped to shift the regional power equilibrium in South Asia.
Power Transition: Global and Regional

Sri Lanka's human rights issues and consequent domestic constraints have catalyzed the South Asian power transition. In 1981, AFK. Organski and J. Kugler believed that India and China would challenge established Western powers to lead the international arena (Organski and Kugler 1980). Both countries' growing populations, if adequately mobilized, could promote growth which would allow them to organize against larger powers effectively. India and China's rise has been documented for a while, with both countries drawing attention for their size and growing economies. What is less researched is how the rise of India and China has directly affected their relationships with smaller states in the South Asian neighborhood, unleashing regional competition and spillover effects from the emerging powers' conflict and competition.

In Organski's power transition, power is hierarchical. In a state of balance of power, countervailing coalitions effectively balance the larger powers. Tammen (2008) argues that a power transition goes beyond the balance of power for one reason: a power transition is centered on a change or shift in power. A balance of power is static and occurs when a power transition has stopped (Tammen 2008). A power transition essentially shifts the equilibrium (Tammen 2008). I will argue that there is a regional power transition occurring within South Asia, wherein the increasingly dominant presence of China in small states like Sri Lanka has eliminated India's hierarchical status and has created a countervailing threat to India's dominance in the region. This thesis demonstrates China's regional rise to power in South Asia by focusing on its bilateral relations with Sri Lanka, particularly emphasizing Sri Lanka's reciprocity to China to further its ties with the great power on geoeconomic and security fronts.
In response to China's increasing geoeconomic involvement in Sri Lanka, India has adapted its foreign policy goals. China took control of Sri Lanka’s Hambantota Port. Then, India purchased a controlling stake over Sri Lanka's Mattala International Airport. China took control of the Colombo Port City Project. Then, India won a controlling stake over the Eastern Container Terminal in Colombo. While most of China's projects in Sri Lanka have been successful, the Indian projects have failed. The power transition has changed India's foreign policy goals and has made China and India an equal-parts player in the island nation.

Methods

The analysis will assess bilateral relations between Sri Lanka-India and Sri Lanka-China on the objective indicators of infrastructural development, security cooperation, and discourse outcomes. The empirical chapters elaborate on an annual analysis of newspaper archives and Sri Lanka's Ministry of External Affairs annual reports. The primary data source was the Sunday Times archives, a local Sri Lankan newspaper. The analysis assessed any mention of China or India from 2013 onwards in the archives. 2013 was chosen as the starting time because it was sufficiently after the end of the war in 2009, and Sri Lanka's annual reports were only available from 2013 onwards. The coding of the events was as follows: positive or negative "security," "trade," or "tourism." For example, if a defense contract reneged or if there was a failed summit, that event would be coded as "negative security." If there were an increase in foreign exchange students or tourists, the code would label that event as "positive tourism." Each type of event held a different weight. A security event had a weight of 3, a trade event was a 2, and a tourism event was a 1. Different weights were attributed to
different events because security cooperation is more substantive and impactful regarding foreign policymaking and implementation than people-to-people relations. As shown in the empirical section, the graphs show the frequency and levels of cooperation, in the form of built or upheld agreements and competition, in the form of broken agreements, between China, India, and Sri Lanka.

The thesis is organized as follows. First, there will be an assessment of theoretical frameworks related to the triangular relationship. The theories explored include small state theory, two-level game theory, power transition, debt-trap diplomacy, and geoeconomics. Second, Sri Lanka's political history is outlined in the context of its civil war. The chapter will explain the conditions that led to the civil war and the critical importance of the war in shaping Sri Lanka's domestic constraints regarding its foreign relations with India and China. The third chapter assesses the China-Sri Lanka bilateral relationship since 2009, emphasizing how China became one of Sri Lanka's allies through a shared past of human rights abuses. The fourth chapter focuses on the India-Sri Lanka bilateral relationship since 2009, assessing India's domestic constraints regarding the Tamil question. The concluding chapter elaborates on the implications of the Sri Lanka-China-India triangular relationship and suggest that the ball is in Sri Lanka's court to determine the nature of both powers' relations with the small state.

The next chapter will highlight the theoretical frameworks that explain the factors that have facilitated a triangular relationship between Sri Lanka, India, and China. A particular focus will be on small state theory, two-level game theory, debt-trap diplomacy, and power transition in a global and regional context.
Chapter 2: Integrating Small State Theory and Regional Power Transitions

Introduction

This theoretical chapter will contextualize the consequences of the civil war in prominent theoretical frameworks. First, there will be an exploration of the importance of small states in international relations, emphasizing the unique power South Asian small states possess regarding balancing regional powers India and China. The conversation surrounding small states lends itself to creating a "triangular relationship" framework centered on Sri Lanka's foreign policy decisions with China and India. Second, there will be a discussion on Robert Putnam's two-level game theory to explore how Sri Lanka's domestic politics, centered around its civil war, have impacted its foreign relations with countries like India and China. Third, this chapter explores the construct of China's "debt-trap diplomacy" and its validity in the context of South Asian geoeconomics. Lastly, there will be a discussion on power transition in the global and South Asian regional order. These theoretical frameworks will contextualize a further exploration of Sri Lanka, India, and China's triangular relationship. Sri Lanka's foreign policy decisions have actively invited China into the South Asian power dynamic.

Small States

This section argues that small states are critical to understanding global and regional power-plays and that South Asian small states are uniquely situated in the context of balanced India-China competition to get concessions from both powers without upsetting either. International relations is a state-centric and power-centered discipline. In IR, small states are often referred to as objects and not subjects of international study (Neumann et al. 2006). According to Neumann et al., Hans
Morgenthau’s magnum opus *Politics Among Nations* (1948) should more appropriately be called *Politics Among Great Nations*. According to Morgenthau, "small nations have always owed their independence either to the balance of power, the preponderance of one protecting power or to their lack of attractiveness for imperialistic aspirations" (Morgenthau 1993). Despite past perceptions that small states only hold significance in relation to larger powers, Neumann et al. pose that small states gained traction in IR studies in the aftermath of World War II.

In *The Power of Small States*, Annette Baker Fox developed small state studies, inquiring into how governments of small and militarily weak states resisted the pressure of great powers in times of crisis. Fox (1960) analyzed how small states, like Spain and Turkey, avoided being pulled into World War II while other countries, like Norway, got entangled between larger powers like Germany and Britain. Norway's entanglement in the war was costly. The country lost millions of lives and endured economic and political instability as a result of its involvement. Fox (1960) argued that Spain's success and Norway's failure in World War II were rooted in Spain's ability to convince great powers that it was in their interest that the small state maintain neutrality. Her study considered both external and internal factors, arguing that the geostrategic neighborhood of small states played a role in the balance of power.

Subsequent research suggests that small states can mitigate the effects of structural constraints placed upon them by greater powers. There are three main strategies that Neumann et al. suggest. First, small states can avoid increasing interdependence by practicing isolationism. Isolationism requires avoiding interaction with world affairs (Neumann et al. 2006). Second, there are strategies to avoid high external dependence on
larger powers by enacting selective foreign policy that saves resources but increases one’s prestige (Neumann et al. 2006). High external dependence can be avoided through membership in international organizations like the United Nations or by having diverse trading partners. The latter avoids indefinite reliance on one power to be economically productive. Third, there are strategies to avoid foreign determination, including remaining neutral in times of conflict or promoting economic integration with other small states in the neighborhood (Neumann et al. 2006). For years to come, after World War II and decolonization, emphasis on the importance of small states has evolved to benefit small states. Thus, Neumann et al. point to three approaches in which the study of small states can be meaningful to international relations: lenses of capabilities, institutions, and relations.

First, through the lens of capabilities, power derives from strength and will, both of which occur when resources transform into capabilities. Capabilities are "material and nonmaterial resources that can serve as the basis for power (Kauppi and Viotti 2020). Neorealists who work in small states are inclined to study phenomena such as bandwagoning or balancing in the context of capabilities (Neumann et al. 2006). Small states can develop their capabilities by bandwagoning or joining coalitions and alliances of "winning" states. On the flip side, small states can develop their capabilities by balancing or joining weaker coalitions to reach a balance of power with a larger power.

Second, through the context of institutions, small states are seen through the lens of great-power negotiation (Neumann et al. 2006). Understanding institutions, or the informal and formal rules of the game, can provide context into the conditions that give certain small states more agency than others. "[L]arger states are more responsible for the
way in which the diplomatic dialogue is conducted and the way in which the system operates than smaller ones are” (Neumann et al. 2006). For example, the UN Security Council has five permanent members that collaborate to rule on the issues that other members, including small states, debate. The institutionalization of smallness and greatness matters for two reasons. First, since states are unequal in power, specific international issues are settled, while others are not (Neumann et al. 2006). Larger powers, essentially, have agenda-setting power in the international arena. Second, the norms of an institution determine how resources flow from great powers to everyone else (Neumann et al. 2006).

Third, and opposite to studying small states from the institutional context in which great-power bargains determine outcomes in already established arenas, is the lens of relations (Neumann et al. 2006). Through a relational lens, outcomes are determined by relations between states. Small states and great powers coexist (Neumann et al. 2006). Relations across similar powers and larger powers with small states tend to highlight the function of the international system at large (Neumann et al. 2006). Neumann et al.'s lenses provide a strategic framework to assess Sri Lanka's agency and critical role in initiating a power transition in South Asia after its civil war.

All small states, however, are not equal. Small states in the South Asian neighborhood hold unique power to seek rents from India and China without aggravating or bandwagoning with either regional power (Paul 2019). Paul argues that limited competition between India and China in an era of intensified economic globalization allows small states to maximize returns without upsetting any power (Paul 2019). Weaker states in South Asia, including Sri Lanka, have developed an eclectic approach through
asymmetrical strategies to extract resources from their larger neighbors who aspire to lead the international system.

India and China are not engaged in an intensive strategic rivalry, according to Paul (2019). Their managed rivalry and economic interdependence have given small states a window for bargaining (Paul 2019). In a larger global context, India and China's rise has been happening at a stage when economic globalization is a crucial dimension of international politics (Paul 2019). Globalization is "the expansion of socioeconomic and sociopolitical activities beyond the state on an international and trans-national scale" (Ripsman and Paul 2010). 40% of India's gross domestic product (GDP) and 37% of China's GDP depended on international trade, according to Sinha (2016). India and China's significant involvement in globalization makes globalization a critical factor in determining foreign relations with countries outside and within the South Asian neighborhood.

Globalization makes India and China economically interdependent. According to the Indian Commerce Ministry, China accounted for over 5% of India’s total exports and more than 14% of all imports in 2020 (Kapoor 2020). This data suggest that India runs a large trade deficit with China, the largest exporter to India. India and China’s economic interdependence ultimately forces them to avoid intensified conflict and hard balancing, like expanding the military and investing in weapons. Hard balancing sends the wrong signals to trading partners and reduces the possibility of economic interaction, according to Tanvi Madan (2020). Particularly the opportunity costs and trade-offs of war between India and China are unlikely to be afforded by either, but particularly India (Paul 2019).
Small states have taken advantage of India and China’s economic interdependence by developing high levels of trade links and security cooperation with both countries. The rising powers, in this context, are trying to outbid each other by giving economic concessions and asking for little in return (Paul 2019). As Xingi (2017) contended, the new regional order has offered smaller states “room to maneuver” and “upwards mobility.” The process of China and India dispersing economic concessions to small states fits in line with different approaches to studying small states.

From the institutionalist perspective outlined by Neumann et al. (2006), Paul (2019) argues that small South Asian states are an anomaly because, in most neorealist structural theories, small states do not have much power of their own. Small states, generally, are expected to balance powerful actors by joining countervailing coalitions or bandwagon with the most powerful ones. For example, during the Cold War, Korea, Turkey, Pakistan, Israel, and Egypt had to offer the US military bases given the US's military prowess and negotiating capabilities (Paul 2019). In the South Asian context, neither power has successfully gained an ally in the traditional sense (Paul 2019). Pakistan, for instance, is China's closest relation to an ally in South Asia. As a small state, Pakistan has developed strong relations with China to balance against neighborhood rival and rising power India (Madan 2020). While Pakistan largely sits outside of Paul’s model, Sri Lanka fits inside the model given its long history of accruing favors from both India and China.

According to Paul (2019), China's growing relationship with small states in South Asia began with a "peaceful rise" strategy. Led by paramount leader Hu Jintao in the mid-1990s, the strategy assured the international community that China's growing
military and economic presence would not be a threat to international security. The "peaceful rise" strategy transitions into a "peaceful development" strategy from the post-Cold War era to 2012 (Paul 2019). The "peaceful development" strategy was defined by intensified trade of manufactured goods, with China playing a relatively minor role in the security arena (Paul 2019). According to Paul (2019), China’s security role has only been prominent since the Tibet standoff in 2017, where there was an arms clash between India and China.

Paul’s suggestion that China’s security role changed in South Asia after 2017 undermines the critical role that China-Sri Lanka relations, particularly after the end of Sri Lanka’s civil war in 2009, have played in bringing China into the South Asian power dynamic. While Paul believes that China played a relatively minor role in the security arena, China’s role in Sri Lanka tells a different story. After India denied the Sri Lankan government military aid and assistance in 2005, China became Sri Lanka’s largest weapons exporter (Fernando 2010). China continues to train the Sri Lankan army, and annual parades highlighting new Chinese weapons occur in Sri Lanka to this day (Sri Lanka MEA 2013). As a small South Asian state, Sri Lanka facilitated China's security involvement in South Asia due to the island's domestic turmoil and lack of foreign assistance from western powers and India. It is critical to note that each power has different advantages regarding its influence on small South Asian states.

China has deeper pockets than India, with a foreign reserve valued at USD 3.23 trillion (Pant 2017). China's economic prowess has allowed the power to make billions of dollars of investments in states like Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, China has a 99-year lease over the critical and strategic Hambantota Port (Abi-Habib 2018). In addition to soft
power displays like the installation of Confucius institutes, which have been infringing on academic freedom and institutional autonomy in universities in small states, this display of economic power has made China a force to reckon with (Pant 2017).

While China's influence in South Asia remains primarily economic, India maintains its strategic advantage in geographic, historical, and cultural ties with most small states (Paul 2018). India pursues a mixture of limited hard balancing and soft balancing against China in South Asia. In terms of hard balancing, India partakes in the Malabar naval exercise with the United States (Pant 2017). India has also built and expanded its military capabilities and infrastructure on the border (Pant 2017). Additionally, India has expanded its nuclear capabilities, making it a strong nuclear power in South Asia along with Pakistan (Pant 2017). In terms of soft balancing in the region, India has developed ententes with Japan, ASEAN countries, and the US (Pant 2017). Largely, India has made no real hard balancing threats because India still has a desire to maintain non-alignment, according to Paul (2018). Paul (2019) emphasizes the India-China dynamic to determine both powers' relations with smaller states.

Paul (2019) notes that there have been many moments of cooperation and competition in India-China relations. In terms of cooperation, India and China have interacted with each other through several multilateral organizations, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, and the G-20 Summit (Paul 2019). The two have emerged as leading trade partners, and both have explored several joint ventures together, including oil exploration in African and Central Asian countries (Paul 2018).
In terms of competition, India has historically taken a “wait and watch,” or standby, approach. This approach suggests that benign policies will produce benign responses, and aggressive policies will generate hard balancing, according to Paul (2019). By 2016, India emerged as the sixth largest spender on defense and the top importer of weapons systems in the world (India MEA 2016). Despite these explicit expansions of capabilities, Paul (2019) suggests that the India-China relationship has yet to reach a full-fledged hard balancing competition, including the active involvement of small states.

While Paul (2019) is correct in highlighting the India-China dynamic as the context by which these powers build relations with smaller states, he does not consider that Sri Lanka, as a small state, has actively played a role in determining its relations with both powers. Not only are China and India’s relations with small states an extension of their competing interests, but small states are actively choosing to engage with both on their own terms as well. India and China are not simply acting upon small states like Sri Lanka, but these small states are reciprocating or not reciprocating with both powers through their own foreign policies. In the context of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka is not simply the object of India-China relations. However, Sri Lanka’s relations with both powers have actively shaped the India-China relationship. This reciprocation fundamentally establishes the notion of a triangular relationship.

A triangular relationship, in this context, gives small states more agency in that their actions have almost equal significance to those of the larger powers. Sri Lanka’s foreign policy decisions with China affect its relations with India and vice versa. Similarly, in agreement with Paul, India-China relations affect both powers’ relations with Sri Lanka. Thus, the framework for the triangular relationship between Sri Lanka,
India, and China gives Sri Lanka, as the small state, more agency in how it determines its relations with both powers and how its bilateral relations with both powers affect the larger India-China relationship.

Uniquely, India and China have partnered with small states but have not made military alliances with any, according to Paul (2019). Neither country has several military or naval bases in South Asian small states (Paul 2019). Domestic opposition to giving excessive concessions to either power plays a role in the ability of the ruling elites in smaller states to balance the two powers (Paul 2019). Paul (2019) adds that while smaller states are constrained by India's geographical proximity and historical ties, they can still balance India with China's high levels of economic assistance.

Paul (2019) suggests that there are no official military or naval bases held by either power in small states. However, the case study of Sri Lanka shows that there does not need to be official bases for there to be concerns about the strength of defense relations between two countries. As demonstrated in later empirical chapters, India and China have had strong defense ties with the small state at different times. After the Sri Lankan civil war, China has docked naval ships in Colombo, trained the Sri Lankan Army, and has gifted numerous warships to the small state (Sri Lanka MEA 2014). In response to increasing Chinese control over ports and infrastructure, India attempted to gain control of the Mattala International Airport and the Eastern Container Terminal in Colombo (India MEA 2019). These growing defense ties, particularly between China and Sri Lanka, are concerning to the same extent that an official military or naval base might be.
Looking ahead, Paul (2019) predicts that the ball is in China's court. Depending on the balance of power between India and China, if China chooses to take on a more aggressive policy towards India, it can wield more power. However, this thesis concludes that the ball is in Sri Lanka’s court to decide, as a small state, how it wants to shape its foreign relations with India and China. Paul (2019) argues that South Asian small states have unique bargaining power because of India-China competition. Thus, if India-China competition sustains in the way it has, Sri Lanka has more leverage than either power to decide whom it will seek more concessions from and at which rate it will seek concessions. A strong determinant of Sri Lankan foreign policy, however, is its domestic politics.

**Two-Level Game Theory**

Two-level game theory, first introduced by Robert Putnam in 1988, serves as a political model of international conflict resolution between states. This perspective highlights the deep connection between domestic and international politics. State executives are "chief negotiators" involved in some form of international negotiations (Putnam 1988). Chief negotiators need domestic approval of these negotiations at the ratification stage (Putnam 1988). Ratification can take many forms, both formal and informal (Putnam 1988). Ratification can look like a formal vote in parliament or a public approval rating (Putnam 1988). This section argues that Sri Lanka’s domestic politics serve as a constraint for Sri Lankan foreign relations with China and India.

The concept of win sets defines the theory, where the domestic win set is the driving force behind international negotiations (Putnam 1988). According to Putnam (1988), win-sets are "the possible outcomes that are likely to be accepted by the domestic
interest groups who either must ratify the agreements or provide some other form of
government backing.” International agreements only occur when there is an overlap in
win-sets of the states involved in international agreements (Putnam 1988). Essentially,
the desired outcome in a domestic win-set serves as the boundary or the scope of what
chief negotiators can accept internationally. The domestic win-set is a constraint.

While chief executives need domestic approval for international agreements, they
can also use international agreements to shape domestic agendas. For example, in the
context of Sri Lanka, the domestic government under Mahinda Rajapaksa needed
international protection from human rights scrutiny. The Sri Lankan government relied
on China to veto and vote against measures holding the Sri Lankan government
accountable for its human rights violations (UNHRC 2013). In response, the Sri Lankan
government expanded development and infrastructural contracts with the Chinese
government. It is in the Sri Lankan government’s interest to continue quid pro quo
relations with China on geopolitical matters and security relations to avoid international
persecution from human rights watchdog agencies. Thus, mutual adjustments persist in
two-level game theory wherein international agreements shape domestic politics, and
domestic politics shape international agreements.

The two-level game theory is applicable in explaining the triangular relationship
between Sri Lanka, China, and India because the domestic politics of Sri Lanka and India
have constrained international actors in critical ways. Sri Lanka, bearing the burden of a
tumultuous political history rattled with instability and civil war, must protect its
international reputation on the human rights issue. The human rights issue has effectively
constrained the Sri Lankan government from pursuing strong relations with any large
power outside of China, which shares a similar abuse of human rights in its history. India faced a domestic constraint surrounding southern Indian politics. Key south Indian political parties like Dravida Munnetra Kazagham were vehemently opposed to the threat of the national government, then led by the Indian National Congress, supporting the Sri Lankan government’s fight against the Tamil rebels (Manoharan 2011). The DMK served as the domestic constraint against the Indian government to be a full-fledged ally to the Sri Lankan government during Sri Lanka’s time of need. India’s lack of defense and economic support to Sri Lanka forced Sri Lanka to find a new weapons distributor in China (Pant 2017). China's relations with Sri Lanka and other developing countries in Central Asia and Africa have not gone without scrutiny. The Chinese government has been accused of debt-trap diplomacy by western powers and the Indian government.

**Debt-Trap Diplomacy**

The term “debt trap” originally refers to the consequences for a government for borrowing at an interest rate that exceeds the rate of growth of its income, causing its current expenditure on items other than debt servicing to be increasingly reduced (Behuria 2018). In the context of the singular term “debt trap,” the phrase “China’s debt-trap diplomacy” was coined in 2017 by Indian scholar Brahma Chellaney (Behuria 2018). The term was established to describe China’s new control of the Hambantota Port, further elaborated in the China-Sri Lanka empirical chapter. Sri Lanka’s Hambantota Port remained largely idle while China was persistently motivating a construction spree in the Hambantota area through these Chinese funds and labor (Behuria 2018). Chellaney argued that China advanced its political and military goals by supporting large-scale infrastructure projects and extending massive loans to the Sri Lanka government, most of
which Sri Lanka could not pay back due to the slow-growing economy (Behuria 2018). Since Sri Lanka could not re-pay its debt to China, Sri Lanka made considerable concessions to China. The concessions included Sri Lanka signing a 99-year lease agreement to China for the Hambantota Port in December 2017 (Abi-Habib 2018). By having imposed unpayable debt, Chellaney concludes that China gained control of Sri Lanka's natural assets and comprised the island nation's sovereignty. There have been multiple representations of China's debt-trap diplomacy.

Ashok Behuria (2018) explains how Sri Lanka walked into a debt trap with China by highlighting Sri Lanka’s post-conflict dilemma after 2005. In 2005, Mahinda Rajapaksa rose to power as a newly elected Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. His proactive strategy to wage war against the LTTE challenged Sri Lanka’s relationship with India (Behuria 2018). India, as explained above, has a large Tamil population in the south that was vehemently against the Indian national government extending support to the Sri Lankan government (Pant 2017). With a lack of support from India, Rajapaksa's government believed it was necessary to "engage and countervail" India (Behuria 2018). India was perceived as a threat because India had the power to undermine Rajapaksa’s military campaign by supporting the LTTE (Behuria 2018).

Further elaborated on in later chapters, international pressure on Sri Lanka due to human rights violations inflicted by the government on the Sri Lankan people brought Sri Lanka closer to China. While Sri Lanka was facing international pressure to investigate its military's violations, China's foreign ministry spokesperson, Hing Lei, released a statement urging "the international community to help develop a favorable external environment for the Sri Lankan government to stabilize the country’s internal situation
and accelerate economic growth” (Xinhua 2011). China’s support towards Sri Lanka was critical for the island nation’s post-conflict development amidst extensive controversies surrounding human rights violations.

Chinese engagement in Sri Lanka is complex. As previously mentioned, Chinese economic investment began in 2006. In 2006, a Sri Lankan state-run company signed an agreement for loans with the Chinese Exim Bank to construct the $1.35 billion Norochcholai Coal Power Plant (Reddy 2009). The plant, built by China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) under the supervision of the Ceylon Electricity Board, carried a 2 percent interest rate over 20 years (Reddy 2009). In 2008, Rajapaksa received Chinese loans amounting to $361 million to construct the Hambantota Port (Reddy 2009). The path of dependency on Chinese capital Rajapaksa initiated in 2005 is likely to remain the cornerstone of post-conflict development in the short and long term for Sri Lanka (Behuria 2018).

The Chinese investment model in Sri Lanka shares a common pattern with Chinese investment in other developing countries. The Chinese Exim Bank (CEB) and the China Development Bank (CM) act as intermediaries in agreements between financial bodies and developing countries (Xu and Carey 2015). The loans come in two forms: preferential buyer's credit and concessional loans. These loans come with high-interest rates and tend to have a repayment period of up to 25 years with a grace period between 3 to 6 years (Xu and Carey 2015). Unlike multilateral agencies that attach extensive political and economic conditions to their aid and loans, China expects nothing other than honoring their repayment conditions (Xu and Carey 2015). China has an almost no-strings-attached policy. Developing countries like Sri Lanka, accused of anti-democratic
activities like human rights violations, tend to prefer Chinese loans over loans from the World Bank or the IMF (Behuria 2018).

Chinese investment in countries like Sri Lanka has been perceived as a threat to domestic democratic politics. The concessional loans, primarily operated by the China Exim Bank, "mix diplomacy, development, and business objectives" (Behuria 2018). They are also strategically given to increase Chinese exports. China is essentially setting up a market line of credit with developing countries like Sri Lanka, where China “provides a financial lifeline to repressive governments that might otherwise be forced to bow to sanctions of governance conditionality” (Behuria 2018). Such is the case in Sri Lanka, where the corrupt Rajapaksa government held onto power for ten years. Now, Mahinda Rajapaksa and his younger brother, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, are back in power since 2019, partly due to Sri Lanka's post-conflict economic success facilitated by Chinese loans.

Rajapaksa’s government’s internal contradictions came to light when Sri Lanka’s debt burden overshadowed economic recovery in the post-conflict period after 2009 (Behuria 2018). Rajapaksa offered the Chinese government 20 hectares of land in the Colombo Port City project on a freehold basis (Reddy 2009). However, the World Bank restricted such an offer on the grounds of corruption (Reddy 2009). After Rajapaksa's government in 2010, Maithripala Sirisena's new government was in considerable debt.

The new 2015 government inherited a debt-ridden Sri Lanka from Rajapaksa (Behuria 2018). The total government debt was 11.4 percent of 2016-2017 GDP (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2017). Debt was around $66.2 billion by December 2017, of which $29.2 billion, or 44 percent of all debt, was external debt (Central Bank of Sri Lanka
Unable to pay the external debt promptly, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe claimed that the government was exploring the "possibility of some infrastructure projects becoming public-private partnerships, in which part of the debt will become equity held by Chinese companies" (Behuria 2018). This debt-equity swap was most prevalent in the Hambantota port, addressed in a later chapter. While several Indian and American scholars suggest that China has engaged in "debt-trap diplomacy" with numerous developing countries, some Chinese scholars suggest otherwise.

Xu Shaomin and Li Jiang (2020) argue that China has not engaged in debt-trap diplomacy; instead, China's debt-trap diplomacy is a false narrative conceived by an Indian scholar and perpetrated by the Western media. Since 2017, American politicians have been using the terms "debt trap" and "debt diplomacy" to characterize China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Singh 2020). For example, in a letter to Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, 16 American senators “urged the government to take measures to counter China’s debt diplomacy” (Shaomin and Jiang 2020). Even a bill introduced in the House called the "China Debt Trap Act" urged countries to ignore China's loan offer (Singh 2020). The authors argue that the phrase "China's debt-trap diplomacy" is a projection of Western anxiety over China's rise (Shaomin and Jiang 2020). They believe that China’s Belt and Road Initiative has not engaged in debt trap policies for three reasons.

Foremost, developing countries are in urgent need of China's infrastructure investment and experience. China has offered loans to developing countries with bad credit or countries that have not been helped by multilateral or western agencies like the International Monetary Fund (Shaomin and Jiang 2020). China believes it has laid a good
foundation for economic growth and has stimulated modernization for developing countries so that they can strive to maintain their independence (Shaomin and Jiang 2020). In China's eyes, they offer opportunities to equalize economic development, particularly in countries that are overwhelmed by poverty traps like civil war or geographical and natural resources constraints (Shaomin and Jiang 2020).

Second, China's outbound investment and financing do not serve political purposes but focus on long-term economic benefits. In a recent address, Chinese President Xi Jinping noted that the Belt and Road Initiative does not see to further "selfish political gain in investments" for China (Shaomin and Jiang 2020). China insists that the BRI has no political conditions attached to it; rather it only seeks to provide low threshold loans so that developing countries can have the opportunity to break away from the economic control of the West (Shaomin and Jiang 2020). For example, the China Merchants Port Holdings Company, which aided in the construction of the Hambantota Port, believes they built the port according to the "Shenzen Shekou" model (Singh 2020). This model seeks to stimulate urban development by first investing in port development. The goal is for developing countries like Sri Lanka to develop "special economic zones" that can help them realize their economic potential. In China's eyes, special economic zones are a win-win situation (Shaomin and Jiang 2020).

Third, the model of resources-for-infrastructure helps promote local economic development. The authors suggest that if China were engaging the countries in a strategic debt trap, China would not be renegotiating repayment methods for countries unable to pay China back in time (Shaomin and Jiang 2020). China has renegotiated USD 50
billion of Chinese loans in the past ten years, with term extensions, refinancing agreements, and debt relief (Singh 2020).

Lastly, the authors argue that China is not the only creditor of many countries in debt risks, including Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has always had a high government to debt ratio. Sri Lanka has accepted Chinese loans since 2006; however, it is not Sri Lanka’s primary creditor (Shaomin and Jiang 2020). The authors further that the “external core factor” for debt in most developing countries has little to do with China’s BRI and more to do with "US financial hegemony" (Shaomin and Jiang 2020). China maintains that its intentions have never been to trap Sri Lanka, rather serve up "equal globalization and shared development" in an era of anti-globalization attitudes and trade protectionism (Shaomin and Jiang 2020). The empirical chapter on China-Sri Lanka’s will extend both Behuria, and Shaomin and Jiang, and Singh's arguments to show that elements of both arguments exist in the case of Sri Lanka. China seems to have political intentions with its Sri Lankan investments. However, the Sri Lankan government's mismanagement of finances has also made the government incapable of paying dues on its Chinese loans. Whether China is engaging in explicit "debt-trap diplomacy" seems to be unclear. While the prevalence of Chinese "debt-trap diplomacy" is doubtful, strategic geoeconomic investments are explicit on the part of China and India.

**Geoeconomics**

According to Kanishka Jayasuriya (2017), the term geoeconomics can broadly be defined as the interplay between economic and geopolitical factors, referring to either the geopolitical consequences of economic policy or the economic consequences of geopolitical trends and national power. Edward Luttwak (1990), who initially conceived
of geoeconomics, believes that the waning of the Cold War reduced the importance of military power and increased the importance of commercial tools. In Sri Lanka, the long lease of land and associated sale of equity in the Hambantota Port to serve Chinese interests has led to a series of international strategic ramifications. The Chinese lease of the Hambantota Port shows how geoeconomics strategies affect regional political and strategic order.

Jayasuriya (2017) suggests three main reasons why Luttwak's conception of geoeconomics is incomplete. First, Luttwak separates economic forces from geopolitical forces, disregarding how both are intertwined (Jayasuriya 2017). Geopolitics and geoeconomics work hand-in-hand. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by China, is an economic and security initiative (Jayasuriya 2017). Second, Luttwak's conception dismisses the relevance of territoriality in new geoeconomic spaces such as "Eurasia" (Jayasuriya 2017). These territories’ cartography plays a significant role in shaping navigation and consequently economic and security concerns. Third, Luttwak's geoeconomics insufficiently explains the effect of domestic politics and state institutions on strategies (Jayasuriya 2017). According to Jayasuriya (2017), geoeconomics is about the domestication of external conflict and the emergence of commercial intermediaries that result in foreign economic strategies.

On the other hand, David Scott (2008) believes that the logic of geography in the context of geopolitics is essential to understand the "great game" between India and China. Scott (2008) argues that globalization has not replaced regionalism, and geoeconomics has not replaced geopolitics. While Scott (2008) concedes that some
cooperation between both countries is evident from a liberalism-functionalism perspective, geopolitical realism shapes the dynamic India-China relations.

Scott (2008) defines geopolitics in a broad sense as the ways in which geography affects politics. Scott (2008) suggests that “in the abstract, geopolitics traditionally indicates the links and causal relationships between political power and geographic space...in concrete terms the geopolitical tradition [is also defined by the cooperation between] naval and terrestrial capabilities” (Scott 2008). India and China are in a battle to ensure that both have the necessary strategic space to continue their rise in power. Both states are engaging in "mastering space" directly and indirectly. This process of mastering space has resulted in competition (Scott 2008).

In the Indo-China relationship, there are three major fields at play: military-security, economic, and diplomatic. In terms of military and security, both China and India have made efforts to encircle the other. According to Nalapat (2006), the containment of India has been “China’s Great Game.” An emerging India “means a strong competitor for China from South, West, Southeast and Central Asia to the Indian and Pacific Oceans where their interests and influences will clash” (Nalapat 2006). Thus, China has deployed geopolitical policies, like BRI, to encircle India.

China's perceived spatial threat to India manifests through four avenues: its land frontier, its land links with India's neighbors, its maritime presence in the Indian Ocean, and its maritime links with India's neighbors. The different avenues highlight China's power projection "strategic proxies" like Sri Lanka (Nalapat 2006). China has played a prominent role in Sri Lanka. For example, China has initiated oil exploration in Sri Lanka and invested in port development and bunker facilities in cities like Hambantota.
Additionally, growing bilateral trade and increased military cooperation with Sri Lanka "are causes of worry to Indian policymakers" (Scott 2008). Hambantota forms part of "China's strategic triangle" around India and signals China's involvement in India's "backyard" (Scott 2008).

India’s response to China’s efforts to encircle the subcontinent is twofold: first, India builds up its own nuclear capabilities; second, India attempts to encircle China by land and sea (Nalapat 2006). This expansion in capabilities includes improving infrastructure along the disputed northern border with China for commercial passage (Scott 2008). The infrastructure improvements can also benefit future deployment of military power (Scott 2008).

China may have land superiority over India, but India most likely has a maritime edge (Nalapat 2006). Recent infrastructure developments include command centers in Mumbai and Vishakhapatnam with two relatively new deep-sea port facilities (Scott 2008). These facilities should increase India's influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) by giving India easy access to the Persian Gulf and Strait of Malacca (Scott 2008). These new command centers will also give India more power to interfere with China’s access to the Persian Gulf and Strait of Malacca (Scott 2008). This development is a critical threat to China, given that the country relies on its trade with Gulf countries for essential natural resources like petroleum (Scott 2008). China and India attempt to balance one another bilaterally and multilaterally.

According to Scott (2008), globalization has not erased regionalism, and Sino-India geopolitics prove that. China and India have engaged in vigorous diplomatic efforts to undermine one another through regional organizations. SAARC, founded in 1985, was
geographically dominated by India (Scott 2008). In 2005, India lobbied to allow Afghanistan to enter the organization (Scott 2008). Pakistan, against the proposition, suggested that Afghanistan could only enter SAARC if China were given observer status as well (Scott 2008). China’s new presence in SAARC attempted to resist India’s regional position of institutional dominance (Nalapat 2006). The multilateral setting observed great power politics. Japan and India share common concerns of Chinese territorial encroachment and expansionism. India soon balanced China's observer status by pushing for Japan to have observer status in SAARC (Scott 2008).

Similarly, India and China have both gone to establish several regional organizations at the expense of the other. For example, BIMSTEC, set up in 1997, which includes Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan, and Nepal, intentionally does not include China (Scott 2008). Likewise, the India-led Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, established in 2000 between several Southeast nations, does not include China, although China has Mekong tributaries (Scott 2008). The exclusion was mutual. China set up the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program, which includes countries like Thailand and Vietnam, but does not include India (Scott 2008).

Economically, both countries have become increasingly interdependent. Scott (2008) argues that “from Beijing's point of view, globalization not only helps China's economic development, but also helps restore the balance of power to the international system, gives space for multi-polar state relations, aids containment of American unipolar preeminence, and gives breathing space for China's general ascent to Great Power status.” India’s perspective with developing its economic ties with China is like that of China (Nalapat 2006). The Manmohan Doctrine made India’s economics-driven strategy
explicit. The doctrine states that India wants to leverage “economic and technology growth [to] realize its desire to be a reckonable world player” (India MEA 2006). Critical to such an ascent is collaboration with China, at least on economic fronts. In this sense, globalization clashes state identities and changing geopolitical interests shaped by state location and state access to vital resources (Scott 2008).

Since 2005, economic relations between India and China have primarily developed. After 2010, some of India’s high-tech companies like Infosys and Satyam Computer Services expanded to China to take advantage of China’s cost-effective mechanisms (Scott 2008). China, then, encouraged its manufacturers to expand their markets to India for products like steel and cars (Scott 2008). These economic exchanges were predicted to change the nature of the India-China relationship for the better. Scott (2008) writes that on paper, “the potential is there for cross-border relational trade hopes to replace cross-border security fears.”

Further, increased cultural relations, tourism, and infrastructural cooperation have also played a critical role in Sino-India relations. In 2006, China and India agreed to reopen the Nathu La Pass, a trade route between India and Tibet (India MEA 2006). The Qinghai-Tibet Railway Service also began, bringing in tourists and military supplies from China to India. Infrastructural cooperation has coincided with natural resource-sharing (India MEA 2006).

Energy security has been essential to both power’s national security. In 2005, India imported 70 percent of its oil (India MEA 2007). China, which has once exporting oil, has now been importing around 50 percent of its oil needs due to major economic growth (Scott 2008). China, which is heavily dependent on oil imports from the Middle
East, relies on the Indian Ocean to bring the oil to China. India and China compete to access and control resources like oil and gas that travel through the Indian Ocean. The competition for energy resources is evident as, "one of the major military objectives of China is to secure its energy sea-line in the Indian Ocean… to attenuate the strategic control of … India” (Scott 2008). This competition has sometimes manifested in cooperation.

There were several early instances of energy cooperation between India and China in the early 2000s. For example, India acquired 20 percent of a large oil field in Iran. Fifty percent of the Iranian oil field was owned by Sinopec, China's state-run oil company (Scott 2008). Similarly, a large Indian oil company, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, purchased 25 percent of Sudan's Greater Nile oil field operated by the China National Petroleum Corporation (Nalapat 2006). These interactions led to a bilateral agreement in 2006, wherein both countries agreed to cooperate in securing crude oil reserves overseas. This agreement was seen as "the start of a new era of energy geopolitics focused on Asia” (India MEA 2006). This early cooperation, however, is short-sighted.

Scott (2008) believes that the vision of an "Asian Oil and Gas Community" is unlikely because China is not a reliable partner for India. There are two significant concerns associated with China's reliability. First, China still has concerns regarding its sovereignty (Scott 2008). Thus, China often chooses to preserve itself at the cost of other countries, including its allies. Second, China still seems ready to cut bilateral deals (Scott 2008). The 2006 Agreement between India and China was just signed when an Indian oil
ministry official discovered that Myanmar agreed to sell gas, from a field partly owned by an Indian company, exclusively to China (Scott 2008).

Faced with each other, both China and India have similar policies. India's "Great Game" vis-à-vis China is a hedging strategy. The strategy is one of co-engagement with elements of containment and bilateral engagement (Nalapat 2006). Both are hoping to gain enough energy, resources, and time to complete their rises.

India and China's geo-economic strategies are essential in understanding both powers' relations with Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has been a "battleground state," where India and China's competition has extended. Referring to Paul’s (2019) argument about the unique power of South Asian small states, Sri Lanka does not actively have to seek concessions from India and China. Instead, India-China geo-economic competition gives more agency to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka now has the power to decide which country it will lean on, given that both powers need Sri Lanka's goodwill. China needs Sri Lanka's support to encircle India in the IOR, and India needs Sri Lanka to maintain its regional hegemony. Sri Lanka's active foreign policy decisions, centered on the human rights issue after its civil war, have brought China into the South Asian regional power dynamic and initiated a regional power transition in South Asia.

**Power Transition**

The third lens provided by Neumann et al. (2006), centered on relations between countries, requires an exploration of global and regional orders. In the context of the global order, AFK. Organski's (1968) power transition theory is helpful. Under the power transition theory, the equilibrium is war, and the preponderance is peace (Organski 1968). Under the balance of power, the preponderance is war, and the equilibrium is peace.
(Organski 1968). Essentially, Ogranski (1968) argues that a balance of power is more likely to generate instability, while a preponderance of power is more likely to produce peace and stability. The main difference between both conceptions of power is how they perceive hierarchy and satisfaction. In power transition, the dominant, most great, and a few middle and small powers are satisfied (Organski 1968). A small number of great powers and most middle and small powers are dissatisfied (Organski 1968). Under these conditions, the weaker states do not dare attack larger powers, while the stronger state does not need to attack. In this state, peace endures. This section explores the implications of Organski’s (1968) power transition theory to argue that a global power transition has shifted power to China. Additionally, a regional power transition in South Asia has diminished India's regional hegemony due to China's increasing influence and rise to power in the South Asian neighborhood.
Figure 4: Balance of Power and War
Source: Tammen, 2008
**Figure 5**: Balance of Power and Peace

Source: Tammen, 2008
Organski (1980) believed that India and China would be new challengers to this inverted pyramid of power. He argued that China and India would eventually become major world powers and become the two sole world powers leading the international system (Organski 1980). According to the model and Figure 6, China and India are both “dissatisfied nations” at the moment (Organski 1980). Between the two, China would dominate international politics because of more robust and organized domestic institutions (Organski 1980). Organski (1980) believed that both countries' large and growing populations could promote growth if adequately mobilized, which would allow them to compete with industrialized, western powers.

China has become the global power that Organski (1980) predicted it would be. The Chinese economy has undergone radical changes concerning economic reforms and capabilities in the last 50 years. China's gross domestic product grew at an average rate of 9.3 percent from 1979 to 1993, a time frame when the world experienced an average growth rate of 2.6 percent (Hynes 1997). China has also embarked on an ambitious
military modernization program making the People's Liberation Army (PLA) the world's largest military (Hynes 1997). China's economic growth has fueled military investment, as Chinese defense budgets report a 200 percent increase in military spending from 1988 onwards (Hynes 1997). Evidently, China's rise to becoming one of Organski's "dominant powers" is substantiated. The global power transition, in favor of China, has severe consequences for regional orders as well. However, Organski's preponderance theory fails to hold up in some regard.

Power transition is not a direct foil to the balance of power and fails to stand when applied to real-world scenarios. Raju Thomas (2004) argues that one of Organski's preponderance theory's problems is in how he conceptualizes preponderance and peace. Per Organski (1968), the preponderant power is not supposed to initiate a war against a weaker state. However, preponderant powers often do attack weaker states. For example, NATO conducted an assault in Serbia, killing over 1,000 troops and 500 civilians, in 1999. NATO bypassed the UN Security Council and attacked Serbia. This bypass and disregard of the UN demonstrated a key failure of the "preponderance-equals-peace theory" wherein NATO, as the preponderant power, disregarded peace (Thomas 2004). This lack of respect for institutions was demonstrated again in 2003 when the United States unilaterally attacked Iraq in its “war against terror” (Thomas 2004). Since the "preponderance-equals-peace theory” has failed to stand in many instances, Organski’s (1968) power transition is more helpful in understanding the context in which powers rise or fall in global or regional orders (Thomas 2004).

Organski’s (1968) power transition theory is based on an analysis of military and economic power centered on a zero-sum game. Power is hierarchical in this model.
Countervailing coalitions effectively balance the larger powers in a state of balance of power (Organski 1986). Tammen (2008) argues that a power transition goes beyond the balance of power for one main reason: a power transition is centered on a change or shift in power, while a balance of power is static and occurs when a power transition has stopped. A power transition essentially shifts the equilibrium. This thesis argues that there is a power transition occurring within South Asia, wherein the increasingly dominant presence of China has eliminated India's hierarchical status and has created a countervailing threat to India's dominance in the region. This thesis demonstrates China's regional rise to power in South Asia by focusing on its bilateral relations with Sri Lanka, particularly emphasizing Sri Lanka's reciprocity to China to further its ties with the great power on security and development fronts.

**Conclusion**

The next chapter will highlight the historical background of Sri Lanka with a particular focus on the domestic conditions that led to the decades-long civil war and the consequences of the civil war on Sri Lanka’s agency and foreign policy choices.
Chapter 3: History of Sri Lanka: Civil War

Introduction
The political history of Sri Lanka is critical to understanding the nature of the domestic and international pressures it faces today. Sri Lanka's tumultuous post-independence politics, civil war, consequent domestic unrest, and international scrutiny surrounding human rights abuses have fundamentally shaped Sri Lanka's relationships with India and China. This chapter primarily highlights the conditions that led to Sri Lanka's domestic unrest, which manifested in a decades-long civil war that led the island nation to depend on India or China at different conjectures. The conjectures show moments of great intensity between the three countries, where the actions of one have impacted the actions of another. This chapter also lays the foundation of Sri Lanka's relations with China and India. A historical lens of the triangular relationship will explain how the relationship developed after 2009 during Sri Lanka's post-conflict development phase. First, there will be an analysis of Sri Lanka's independence from British colonialism and the consequent domestic turmoil it encountered due to the diverse interests of its population. Then, the chapter will highlight the political and social conditions that initiated a 26-year long civil war in Sri Lanka between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government. The domestic conflict, comprised of four phases, increased the Sri Lankan government's dependence on foreign aid, particularly in the realm of weapons distribution and human rights protection. This chapter will conclude by highlighting the personalities of Mahinda Rajapaksa and Maithripala Sirisena, both Sri Lankan prime ministers, during the post-conflict development phase. Their differing political inclinations towards India and China played a large role in Sri Lanka's oscillation between both powers.
Colonization and Dominion

Prior known as Ceylon, Sri Lanka endured a tumultuous political history that laid the foundation for a civil war across lines of ethnic and religious diversity (De Silva 1981). Imperial forces colonized Sri Lanka in the 16th century along with other countries in the Global South. Ceylon saw a succession of Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms, with over 181 monarchs, before its local kingdoms were overwhelmed by European colonialism (De Silva 1981). Ceylon was under the rule of several colonial forces, starting with the Portuguese in the 16th century (De Silva 1981). The Portuguese lost their possession of the island after the Eighty Years' War (De Silva 1981). The British became the predominant and sole colonial force in Sri Lanka after the Kandyan Wars (De Silva 1981). The British and the former Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka fought against one another. By 1815, the island was entirely under British rule (De Silva 1981). In 1948, Ceylon, which later transitioned its name to Sri Lanka, gained independence from British colonialism (De Silva 1981). Independence, however, did not give Sri Lanka complete freedom from British rule. Sri Lanka remained a Dominion of the British Empire until 1972 (De Silva 1981).

Dominion status began in February 1948 with several military treaties giving the British control of the armed forces' upper ranks (Jonathan 1990). The British also controlled several air and sea bases in Sri Lanka (De Silva 1981). While the British maintained a lesser presence on the island during its dominion status, Sri Lanka faced internal political and ethnic turmoil of its own (Jonathan 1990).

Sri Lanka's domestic political history is critical to understand the island nation's consequent foreign policy decisions after its decades-long civil war. Ethnic tensions
exacerbated the political instability caused by British colonialism. By 1953, five years after Sri Lanka became a Dominion of the British Empire, Sri Lanka had endured the governance of three Prime Ministers (Jonathan 1990). In 1953, John Kotelawala, a senior politician of the time, rose in the ranks. He brought forth the pressing issue of Sri Lanka's national language (De Silva 1981). The majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil population in Sri Lanka were having conflicts over political legitimacy because the status of Sinhala and Tamil as languages were politically and legally distinct (Shastri 2001).

Consequently, forms of discrimination against the Tamil population varied. There was state-sponsored colonization of traditional Tamil areas by Sinhalese peasants, and Tamil-language media was banned (Jonathan 1990). In 1956, the Senate was abolished (Jonathan 1990). Sinhala was established as the official language, and Tamil was the secondary language (Jonathan 1990). 1956 also saw the passage of the exclusive and discriminatory Sinhala Only Act (Jonathan 1990). The Sinhala Only Act established Sinhala as the preferred language for commerce and education (De Silva 1981). Sri Lankan political institutions legitimized ethnic divisions in the early 1950s (Jonathan 1990). This political isolation led to the first major riots between Tamils and Sinhalese in 1958 and laid the foundation for the 1960 Socialist Uprising.

**1960 Socialist Uprising**

The 1960 Socialist Uprising was a major event in Sri Lankan history, highlighting a conflict of interests and a longstanding trust deficit between the Sri Lankan people and government. Inspired by Marxist ideology, Rohan Wijeweera launched the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (Jonathan 1990). He recruited students and unemployed youth from rural areas, primarily from the lower castes of Karava and Durava, to reinforce the pro-
Beijing branch of the Ceylon Communist Party (Jonathan 1990). The indoctrination program for these young people included the "Five Lectures," which emphasized issues like Indian imperialism, economic crises, failures of Sri Lanka's present communist and socialist parties, and the need for a sudden and violent seizure of power (De Silva 1981). The prominence of Wijeweera in the face of ethnic tensions and mistrust regarding the government's ability to protect all Sri Lankans fundamentally highlights the disconnect between the Sri Lankan government and Sri Lankan people elaborated on in later chapters.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) expanded rapidly between 1967 and 1970, gaining major support from students (Jonathan 1990). The group rose to prominence in the social sector and was also getting politically involved in elections (Jonathan 1990). The JVP's political tactics were rather aggressive and violent (Jonathan 1990). The JVP was notorious for kidnapping and striking security forces throughout the island (Jonathan 1990). The party was also caught manufacturing their bombs (Jonathan 1990). The discovery of JVP bomb factories made the government take the JVP seriously (Jonathan 1990). After an accidental explosion at one of JVP's bomb-making factories, the government arrested Wijeweera (Jonathan 1990). However, the JVP continued to show more aggression. The government was non-aligned, but the JVP leaned more toward Chinese communist thought and against "Indian imperialism" (De Silva 1981). In the rise of JVP, one can observe many Sri Lankans perceiving China favorably. The non-aligned government was keen on seeking favors and maintaining friendly relations with both the Indian and Chinese governments (De Silva 1981). Events like the 1960 Socialist Uprising
would only escalate to larger attacks against the Sri Lankan government by the Sri Lankan people.

**1971 Uprising**

The government conflicted with the JVP. The 1971 conflict with the JVP, which would eventually lead to anti-Tamil riots and the laying foundation of the LTTE’s fight for Tamil Eelam, shaped the duration and intensity of the Sri Lankan civil war. After two weeks of fighting between the communist insurgents and the government in 1971, the government regained control (Shastri 2001). The cost of the victory was high. Over 10,000 insurgents died in the conflict (Jonathan 1990). A frightened and unprepared Sri Lankan government was paralyzed (Jonathan 1990). The government issued an emergency rule for six years following the 1971 JVP uprising (Jonathan 1990).

JVP was dormant for a while (De Silva 1981). As a result, the United National Party's 1977 government broadened the scope of its political tolerance towards the party (De Silva 1981). The government released Wijeweera from prison, and he soon re-entered political competition (Jonathan 1990). Initially, the JVP claimed to represent oppressed Tamil and Sinhalese populations; however, after Wijeweera entered politics, the group became a Sinhalese nationalist organization opposed to a compromise with the Tamil insurgency (De Silva 1981). JVP was inciting violence with anti-Tamil riots (De Silva 1981). The party in its entirety was banned from politics in the early 1980s (Jonathan 1990).

While the JVP was lashing out against the minority Tamils with intense anti-Tamil demonstrations, several Tamil political parties formed in response to the Sinhala-majority discrimination (Shastri 2001). The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), one
of the most prominent parties, was established and launched its fight for a separate state of Tamil Eelam that would grant Tamils greater autonomy (Jonathan 1990). Outside of TULF, more violent factions were advocating for more radical aggression against the Sri Lankan government (De Silva 1981). These frustrations, rooted in Tamil discrimination, led to the 1983 Civil War. An analysis of the evolution of Sri Lanka’s political institutions is critical to understand the deep-rooted, politically legitimized, and systematic discrimination of Sri Lankan Tamils by the government.

1972 Socialist Republic

Sri Lanka's political institutions have played a large role in shaping the government's unstable relationship with its people. The ethnic tensions, facilitated by the state's exclusionary policies, resulted in a civil war. The Sri Lankan decades-long civil war has shaped the island nation's foreign policies towards India and China, wherein the island has relied on either or both powers at different times due to the consequences of the war, particularly concerning its human rights record. However, through all its internal strife and larger external pressure, Sri Lanka is the only small state in the South Asian neighborhood to have maintained a form of democracy and civilian government since its independence (Shastri 2001). Pakistan and Bangladesh have endured tumultuous political systems, with both countries occasionally falling into military rules (Shastri 2001). The Maldives has also encountered several military coup attempts, while Nepal, a country historically accustomed to autocracies, has had difficulty transitioning into a democratic system (Shastri 2001). Sri Lankan political institutions encountered several important changes in 1972.
In 1972, Sri Lanka changed its status to a republic, where it adopted a constitution. J.R. Jayawardene came into power, pledging a free-market economy and free rations to all citizens (Shastri 2001). Jayawardene significantly altered Sri Lankan governance by adapting the constitution. The new amendments to the constitution replaced the previous Westminster style of government and implemented a new presidential system with a powerful chief executive modeled after the French (Shastri 2001). The President has a six-year term (Shastri 2001). The President has the power to appoint, pending parliamentary approval, a Prime Minister that would preside over the Cabinet (Shastri 2001). Jayawardene became the first president under this new constitution.

Notably, the 1978 Constitution, which transitioned Sri Lanka from a parliamentary to a semi-presidential system, adopted under Jayawardene, attempted to include Tamil needs at face value (Shastri 2001). Under his leadership, the UNP and TULF held several conferences to resolve Sri Lanka's ethnic strife (Shastri 2001). While Sinhala remained Sri Lanka's official language and the language of administration, Jayawardene's government intended to promote Tamil to "national language" status (Shastri 2001). Tamil could now be used in several administrative and educational circumstances (Shastri 2001).

Additionally, Jayewardene eradicated the standardization policy of the previous constitution. The standardization policy admitted university students in proportion to the number of applicants (Shastri 2001). While the intended policy hoped to help rural students gain access to college, the policy made college admission more challenging for the Tamil population (Shastri 2001). For example, the baseline requirement for a Tamil
student to go to medical school was 250 points out of 400 (Shastri 2001). However, for the Sinhalese student, it was 229 points (Shastri 2001). This structural inequity in the college admissions system became a barrier for Tamil students to access higher education (Shastri 2001). Jayawardene made significant changes to the constitution regarding access to education and handled good optics towards his government. He offered several high-level cabinet positions, including the Minister of Justice, to Tamil civil servants (Shastri 2001).

While the Tamil population seemed to gain more rights, protection, and representation under Jayawardene, the protections were more symbolic than substantial. The UNP's changed party manifesto, which referenced an increased use of the Tamil language in the private and public sector, had given the party over five-sixths control over the Parliament (Shastri 2001). After the UNP won the electoral majority, the "Tamil problem was sent to the back burner" (Shastri 2001). Instead of moving with a sense of urgency, Jayawardene "sought to paper the cracks by appointing Tamil ministers to his government, coopting Tamils to other positions, and rendering another token concession at the altar of rising Tamil tempestuousness" (Shastri 2001). The TULF and the larger Tamil population were not blind to Jayawardene's token concessions.

In response to the lack of substantial help, the LTTE pursued its goal for Tamil Eelam (Jonathan 1990). The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were a militant separatist group in Sri Lanka fighting for Tamil Eelam, or an independent state for Tamils, since the early 1970s (De Silva 1981). According to some LTTE militants, the government's efforts were a little too little, a little too late (Shastri 2001). The LTTE was escalating its attacks throughout the country. The LTTE assassinated a Jaffna police inspector in 1978
The national government then declared a state of emergency and dispatched troops to Jaffna (Wickremesinghe 2014). The troops had six months to eradicate the threat of terrorism in Jaffna (Wickremesinghe 2014). The lack of legitimate political representation for Sri Lankan Tamils increased the trust deficit between the people and the government.

The government’s relationship with the Tamil people was increasingly challenging to repair. The government passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) in 1979, which allowed for arrests without warrant for unspecified "unlawful activities" and permitted detention for up to 18 months without producing the suspect before a court (Human Rights Watch 2018). The act ensured heavy repercussions for those charged with abducting, murdering, or generally causing any aggressive harm on an individual with sentences starting at seven years in jail (Human Rights Watch 2018). International bodies accused the Sri Lankan national government of misusing the act, targeting Tamil people, and putting them in jail with little evidence (Human Rights Watch 2018). As a result, the International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International, and other human rights organizations strongly condemned the act, labeling it incompatible with democratic ideals.

The PTA, 1979, known for targeting Tamils, further deepened the trust deficit between the Tamil population and the government. The LTTE’s actions against the Sri Lankan army incited Sinhalese nationalism. When the LTTE killed 13 Sri Lankan soldiers, Sinhalese citizens went on a riot of their own (Jonathan 1990). Sinhalese nationalists destroyed Tamil shops, residences and brutally beat Tamil civilians (Jonathan
The national government was accused of being largely observant and inactive when communal violence increased (Jonathan 1990).

The rising ethnic tensions were becoming challenging to ignore or hide. The government released an initial death toll of around 400 civilians (De Silva 1981). However, modest death tolls from independent organizations claimed that at least 3000 Sri Lankan citizens died during the initial phase of communal violence (Human Rights Watch 2018). Additionally, approximately 18,000 Tamil residences were destroyed, with 150,000 Sri Lankan Tamils seeking asylum in countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Human Rights Watch 2018). While the Sri Lankan government did little to help the Tamil population at the time, a few Sinhalese families were brave enough to open their homes to Tamil neighbors to protect them from rioters (Human Rights Watch 2018). The rise in deaths shows an escalation in the scale of the violence occurring in Sri Lanka.

Despite institutional changes that expanded Tamil riots and governmental actions, including the passage of the PTA, the tragedies associated with terrorism on behalf of Tamil rebel groups and Sinhalese nationalists increased. The Four Four Bravo incident in 1983 was the turning point that signified the transition from smaller-scale communal violence to the first phase of the Sri Lankan civil war and one of the largest scale humanitarian crises in the world (Wickremesinghe 2014).

**Eelam War I (1983-1987)**

The Four Four Bravo incident signaled the beginning of the 1983 Civil War. Fifteen troops of the Sri Lankan Army were ambushed in Jaffna by LTTE members (Jonathan 1990). This incident reinvigorated anti-Tamil sentiments and led to the Black
July riots, where civilians murdered between 400 and 3,000 Tamils in Sinhalese-majority areas (Wickremesinghe 2014). The LTTE took advantage of the anti-Tamil riots and began recruiting members of deceased Tamil civilians at an exponential rate (Wickremesinghe 2014). While LTTE recruitment increased, so did the threat of elongated violence (Wickremesinghe 2014).

In May 1985, Tamil guerillas launched the Anuradhapura massacre, an attack on the Sri Maha Bodhi shrine (Wickremesinghe 2014). The shrine is a sacred site for Buddhists that hosts the world's oldest living human-planted tree (Wickremesinghe 2014). The attack on the Sri Maha Bodhi shrine followed a massacre that killed 150 civilians, including women, children, and monks (Wickremesinghe 2014). The LTTE seized a bus and indiscriminately opened fire with automatic weapons against residents (Wickremesinghe 2014). The Anuradhapura massacre was the largest massacre of Sinhalese civilians by the LTTE (Wickremesinghe 2014). The LTTE's rise to prominence and increasing threat to civil society and stability in Sri Lanka posed consequences for Sri Lanka's neighboring countries.

**Sri Lanka-India Relations in the Context of Eelam War I**

Indian intervention in the first Sri Lankan Civil War became inevitable because the war posed a serious threat to India’s “unity, national interest, and territorial integrity” (Pant 2017). The threat originated from two sources. First, there was the threat of China and other external powers using Sri Lanka’s domestic unrest as a means to establish themselves in the country (Pant 2017). Second, the LTTE’s goal of a sovereign Tamil Eelam comprised of an all Tamil-inhabited area in Sri Lanka and southern India posed a threat to India’s territorial integrity (Pant 2017).
Initially, the Indian government under Indira Gandhi expressed support of the Tamil secessionist movement (Rotberg 2010). India made several commitments to the LTTE, including providing the separatists' sanctuary and supporting training camps for Tamil fighters in Tamil Nadu, a south Indian state (Rotberg 2010). India's support for the Tamil fighters, of which LTTE was the strongest, was rooted in southern Indian states' insistence on the national government to help Tamils in Sri Lanka (Pant 2017). Most, if not all, Sri Lankan Tamils are originally from southern India or of Indian origin. With this in mind, Indira Gandhi's government made it very clear to Sri Lankan president J.R. Jayewardene that India would send peacekeeping forces in support of the Tamil liberation movement if diplomatic solutions failed (Rotberg 2010).

After Indira Gandhi’s assassination, her son and successor Rajiv Gandhi maintained relatively good relations with the Sri Lankan government (Pant 2017). Gandhi pushed for a diplomatic solution to the Tamil question while providing covert aid to Tamil rebels (Rotberg 2010). However, India’s initial fear about external forces and additional countries intervening in Sri Lanka was manifesting.

With the help of Pakistan, Israel, Singapore, and South Africa, the Sri Lankan government rearmed itself for its anti-insurgent role against Tamil secessionists in 1985 (Wickremesinghe 2014). Within two years, the violence had reached an all-time high. In 1987, Operation Liberation, also known as Vadamarachchi Operation, was launched against LTTE strongholds in Jaffna (Wickremesinghe 2014). Operation Liberation was one of the Sri Lankan government's most intensive campaigns comprised of nearly four thousand troops, supported by helicopters and ground attack weapons (Rotberg 2010).
Operation Liberation marked divergence between the Sri Lankan government's interests and the Indian government's interests.

In response to Operation Liberation, India launched Operation Poomalai on June 4, 1987 (Pant 2017). Initially, Operation Poomalai was supposed to be a convoy of ships to northern Sri Lanka that would provide humanitarian aid and assistance to the Tamils (Wickremesinghe 2014). However, the Sri Lankan navy successfully intercepted Indian naval ships and sent them back to India (Wickremesinghe 2014). After its initial failure, Operation Poomalai became known as Eagle Mission 4, an Indian Air Force mission that airdropped supplies to the Tamil Tigers in the Jaffna area (Wickremesinghe 2014). India was not only incentivized to intervene in the Sri Lankan Civil War because of pressure from southern Indian states but also external pressure from the international community (Pant 2017). India was particularly concerned about Pakistan and Israel's growing involvement in support of the Sri Lankan government (Pant 2017).

Additionally, India was facing pressure from the western liberal order to assert itself as a democratic, regional powerhouse that can be a reliable ally for countries like the United States (Pant 2017). Concerned about its credibility, India had to make a successful move. As civilian causalities in Sri Lanka grew, the Sri Lankan government's blockade in Jaffna was deemed a humanitarian crisis (Wickremesinghe 2014). Operation Poomalai was a symbolic act of support towards the Tamil rebels since India only dropped supplies amounting to a little over 25 tons, an amount insufficient to sustain the Tamil population in Jaffna for a long period (Wickremesinghe 2014).

India, however, made sure that the operation ran smoothly. New Delhi summoned the Sri Lankan Ambassador to the office of then Minister of Indian External Affairs. K.
Natwar Singh. Singh informed the ambassador of Operation Poomalai (Destradi 2010). New Delhi also gave the Sri Lankan ambassador a firm warning: if Sri Lanka interfered with the air force operation, as they did with the naval operation, India would launch a full-force military retaliation against Sri Lanka (Rotberg 2010). Eagle Mission marked the diverging interests of the Sri Lankan and Indian governments.

After Operation Poomalai, Sri Lanka accused India of violating its sovereignty (Destradi 2010). Differing foreign and domestic policy demands constrained the Sri Lankan government faced with the possibility of an active Indian presence in Sri Lanka and a war-weary population at home (Destradi 2010). Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene offered to host talks with Rajiv Gandhi on India's future foreign policy actions and the domestic war strategies of Sri Lanka (Shastri 2001). Gandhi agreed to discuss matters with Jayewardene. The Sri Lankan government removed the siege on Jaffna with the start of the first round of negotiations (Destradi 2010).

The negotiations between the Indian and Sri Lankan governments brought forth the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. The accord, signed on July 29, 1987, brought a truce to the Sri Lankan Civil War. The truce required Sri Lankan troops to withdraw from northern Sri Lanka and demanded all Tamil rebel groups to disarm. The accord was a significant step towards peace and stability in Sri Lanka. The accord acknowledged "the imperative need of resolving the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka and the consequent violence, and for the safety, well-being, and prosperity of people belonging to all communities of Sri Lanka" (Premdas and Samarasinghe 1988). The accord had four objectives. First, it preserved Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Premdas and Samarasinghe 1988). Second, it acknowledged that Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and
multi-lingual plural society comprised of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, and Burghers (Premdas and Samarasinghe 1988). Third, it recognized each ethnic group's linguistic and cultural identity (Premdas and Samarasinghe 1988). Fourth, it recognized that the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka were areas of historical habitation of Sri Lankan Tamil-speaking peoples (Premdas and Samarasinghe 1988). India and Sri Lanka also agreed that neither would allow its territory to be used against the security interests of the other (Premdas and Samarasinghe 1988). The signing of the 1987 accord also formally inducted the presence of Indian Peace Keeping Forces in Sri Lanka (Manoharan 2011).

The accord attempted to resolve the conflict between the Tamil minority and Sinhalese majority by adopting the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution and enacting the Provincial Councils Act of 1987 (Manoharan 2011). Both of these acts expedited the process of devolution, by which local governments were created and gained more power to enact policies that catered to their region (Manoharan 2011). Devolution in the form of federalism was perceived as the missing piece of the puzzle by which Tamils could live in the north with a more localized set of laws and regulations catered to their needs (Pant 2017).

The 13th Amendment was significant for solving the Tamil question. The 13th amendment led to the creation of provincial councils, assuring that all nine provinces in Sri Lanka had the right the self-govern (Wickremesinghe 2014). Provincial governments at the local level addressed issues like education, health, agriculture, housing, land management, and policing (Wickremesinghe 2014). The 13th amendment was one of the most contentious policies enacted by the Sri Lankan government. The amendment faces
opposition from two parties, both for different reasons. On the one hand, both Sinhala nationalist parties, including the JVP, saw the 13th amendment as too much power-sharing and a sign of Indian imperialism (Wickremesinghe 2014). The JVP primarily saw the 13th amendment as an imposition by a neighbor with hegemonic influence (Wickremesinghe 2014). On the other hand, the LTTE and other Tamil political parties did not think that the 13th amendment was substantial enough for lasting change (Wickremesinghe 2014). However, some Tamil groups like the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) of the northeast saw the 13th amendment as a starting point to better develop Tamil-Sinhala relations (Wickremesinghe 2014). The lack of bipartisan support for the 13th amendment set up the devolution process for failure.

Unfortunately, Tamil-Sinhala relations worsened. After the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and the presence of Indian Peacekeeping Forces, the prospect of Tamil autonomy reinvigorated Sinhalese nationalism and anti-government violence (Manoharan 2011). A new Sinhalese nationalist group, commonly conceived of as an off-spring of JVP, the Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya (DJV), came into prominence (Destradi 2010). The DJV pursued violent means for political ends (Destradi 2010). The DJV claimed responsibility for the August 1987 assassination attempt against Sri Lankan Prime Minister J.R. Jayewardene and President Ranasinghe Premadasa (Destradi 2010). The DJV also launched a major campaign trying to intimidate the ruling party by murdering more than 70 members of Parliament within the span of four months (Destradi 2010). With the Indian Peacekeeping Forces departing the island in 1990, the DJV's violence brought a renewed sense of fear that Sri Lankan domestic politics would continue to be tormented by instability (Destradi 2010).
Eelam War II (1990-1995)

The 13th amendment's devolution of power incited more Sinhalese nationalism, anti-Tamil sentiments, and increased demonstrations of violence across political factions (Wickremesinghe 2014). Violence increased partially because the 13th amendment's enactment of provincial councils posed a threat to the national government (Wickremesinghe 2014). The Chief Minister of the then-North and East Provincial Council, Vartharaja Perumal, released a 19-point demand on behalf of Sri Lankan Tamils (Destradi 2010). The demands included more local control over educational standards and business frameworks (Destradi 2010). Perumal and his councilmembers threatened that the North and East Provincial Council would unilaterally declare independence if the demands were not met (Destradi 2010). President Premadasa quickly dissolved the North and East Provincial Council given the threat of independence and potential violence presented by Perumal (Destradi 2010).

The provincial council's dissolution happened alongside the LTTE's resurgence to power in the north (Rotberg 2010). After the Indian Peacekeeping Forces left in 1990, the LTTE established many government-like functions in the north (Rotberg 2010). The LTTE also terrorized Sinhalese and Muslim farmers to depart the northern part of the island (Rotberg 2010). At the same time, the JVP occupied the national government's focus at the federal level. The JVP was yet again banned from politics (Rotberg 2010). After the national government handled the JVP, the government launched an offensive strike, named Eelam War II, to re-take Jaffna in the northern peninsula (Rotberg 2010).

The second phase of the war saw immense violence and brutality. In June 1990, the LTTE killed 600 policemen in the Eastern province even after the police
surrendered (Rotberg 2010). The government placed a strict embargo on food, medicine, and other necessary supplies from entering Jaffna (Destradi 2010). The LTTE did not respond to the embargo well. Instead, the LTTE went on murdering civilians, including killing 166 Muslim civilians in Palliyagodella (Destradi 2010). Kidnappings and killings were everyday matters in the North and the East (Destradi 2010). In October 1990, the LTTE expelled 72,000 Muslims from the Northern provinces, only allowing the Muslim refugees to take what they could carry in their hands (Destradi 2010). The violence executed by both the government and the LTTE during the second phase of the war would make reconciliation and long-term political stability in Sri Lanka challenging (Rotberg 2010).

Despite international calls for India to intervene again in the Sri Lankan conflict, India refused to intervene in matters of Sri Lankan governance (Pant 2017). Indian support for the LTTE dropped drastically in 1991, when an LTTE female suicide bomber, Thenmozhi Rajaratnam, assassinated ex-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (Pant 2017). Also, the Sri Lankan government was not performing as strongly as it had expected. The morale of the national government was low after three senior-level officials were killed in a bomb blast (Destradi 2010). In 1993, the LTTE successfully assassinated then Sri Lankan President Premadasa (Destradi 2010). A lack of morale and concerns about the LTTE's strategic prowess proved critical for the LTTE's success in the second phase of the war, where hundreds of Sri Lankan soldiers and civilians were either missing or dead (Destradi 2010).

The 1994 Presidential election initiated the next phase of the war (Wickremesinghe 2014). The leading United National Party (UNP) was defeated during parliamentary elections, bringing to rise the People's Alliance party led by Chandrika Kumaratunga (Wickremesinghe 2014). During a campaign rally for the presidential election, the LTTE conducted a bomb attack, murdering the party's highest-level leaders (Wickremesinghe 2014). Amidst this uncertainty, Kumaratunga stepped up and won the presidential seat in a landslide victory (Wickremesinghe 2014). Kumaratunga subsequently signed a ceasefire with the LTTE in 1995 (Wickremesinghe 2014).

The LTTE, notoriously and unsurprisingly, broke the ceasefire by bombing two gunboats of the Sri Lankan navy (Rotberg 2010). The government launched Operation Riviresa, a successful and calculated effort to regain control of northern Sri Lanka (Rotberg 2010). After seven weeks of fighting, the government raised the national flag inside the Jaffna Fort in 1995 (Rotberg 2010). Estimates suggest that 2500 soldiers and rebels were killed, with another 7,000 wounded (Rotberg 2010). Fighting continued for several years, with the LTTE winning some operations and the national government others (Rotberg 2010). By the end of 2000, LTTE had control over Jaffna again (Rotberg 2010). At this point, the war had taken a severe toll on Sri Lankan civilians, with millions missing or presumed dead (Rotberg 2010).

Negotiations for Peace (2002-2006)

Exhaustion from war fueled a desire for peace. The United States was also getting involved with the Sri Lankan government, providing the national government funds against their own "war on terror" (Manoharan 2006). Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe signed agreements with the United States, getting critical assistance
with regards to military technology, training, and general monetary aid for military enhancement (Manoharan 2006). The United States Pacific Command’s assessment team also ran an operation for one month in 2002, giving several recommendations to the Sri Lankan military forces about possible actions against the LTTE if peace negotiations fell through (Manoharan 2006). The recommendations included the use of cluster bombs to target LTTE-heavy areas (Manoharan 2006). While the United States provided aid based on the Sri Lankan government's counter-terrorism efforts, other European countries were also proving critical for Sri Lanka's path to peace.

At the end of 2001, Norway brought the LTTE and Sri Lankan government to the negotiating table (Wickremesinghe 2014). The LTTE pledged to halt attacks against government forces, and the government agreed to a ceasefire and lifted the embargo of critical resources on rebel-held territory, including Jaffna (Wickremesinghe 2014). In February of 2002, Sri Lanka and the LTTE signed a Memorandum of Understanding which established a permanent ceasefire agreement with Norway as the mediator (Wickremesinghe 2014). The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission was created in collaboration with other Nordic countries to ensure that agreement with the ceasefire (Wickremesinghe 2014). The government soon lifted the ban against the LTTE and resumed direct negotiations with the group (Wickremesinghe 2014).

There were six sessions of peace talks, starting in September 2002 and ending in March 2003 (Rotberg 2010). Thailand, Norway, Germany, and Japan hosted peace talks (Rotberg 2010). The peace talks were monumental, the LTTE dropped their insistence for Tamil Eelam or an independent Tamil state (Rotberg 2010). Additionally, both sides
exchanged prisoners of war for the first time since 1983 (Rotberg 2010). The progress was yet again short-lived.

The LTTE dropped out of peace talks in April 2003, citing that they were not receiving the benefits of peace or actively included in reconstruction decisions (Rotberg 2010). They issued their own proposal, titled the Interim Self-Governing Authority, which demanded the national government to give the LTTE major control over northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka (Rotberg 2010). This proposal was not received well by the national government, which declared a state of emergency and held elections (Rotberg 2010). The people elected Mahinda Rajapaksa, a hardliner against the LTTE, to office in 2004 (Wickremesinghe 2014).

While there was a transition in power in the national government, the LTTE split into two factions. During this time, the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission cited that the LTTE had over 3000 infractions against the ceasefire while the Sri Lankan Army had around 300 (Manoharan 2006). The Sri Lankan Army (SLA) rightfully argued that the LTTE was ruthlessly murdering civilians (Manoharan 2006). In contrast, the rebels argued that the government was backing paramilitary groups against the LTTE, which was also true (Manoharan 2006). A trust deficit on both sides of the war increased animosity between the rebels and the government and ultimately led to the fourth and final phase of the war.

**Eelam War IV (2006-2009)**

The fourth phase of the conflict, beginning in 2005, ended in May 2009 (Wickremesinghe 2014). Nineteen years after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the SLA mounted a major military offensive in the north and eradicated the LTTE in northern Sri
Lanka (Pant 2017). The Sri Lankan military operation, led by General Sarath Fonseka, finally brought an end to a 26-year battle against Tamil rebel groups by seizing back key areas that the LTTE controlled (Wickremesinghe 2014). India did not explicitly oppose the operation (Pant 2017). During this period, the Indian National Congress governed India (Pant 2017). The party’s leadership included Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Rajiv Gandhi's widow, party leader, Sonia Gandhi (Pant 2017). The Indian government was much more active in the first three phases of the Eelam War than in the last phase (Pant 2017). In the last phase, China took on a much stronger role to support the Sri Lankan government (Blanchard 2018).

China played a larger role in the last phase of the war due to the LTTE's declining popularity in India and international pressure on India to avoid giving aid to Sri Lanka given its human rights record (Pant 2017). India's inability to aid Sri Lanka in the last phase of the war was critical because it occurred when the Rajapaksa government discovered LTTE's air prowess and immense defensive capabilities (Pant 2017). India made it clear, when Sri Lanka asked them for more aid, that it would not send offensive weapons like radars (Pant 2017). Similarly, other western countries like the United States suspended military aid to Sri Lanka over human rights concerns (Pant 2017). Consequently, Rajapaksa decided to lean on China in the defensive sphere to make up for the national government's gap in resources (Blanchard 2018). China's involvement in the last phase of the war would define the China-Sri Lanka relationship during Sri Lanka's post-conflict development phase.

China began sending military equipment to Sri Lanka (Behuria 2018). In 2007, Sri Lanka signed a USD 37.6 million deal to buy Chinese ammunition for its army and
nearly and purchase fighter jets to counter the LTTE's air power (Wickremesinghe 2014). China also encouraged Pakistan, its closest ally in South Asia, to sell more arms to Sri Lanka and train Sri Lankan pilots to fly the new fighter jets gifted by the Chinese government (Wickremesinghe 2014). China's critical military aid also increased the intensity of the war.

The cost of the war, in terms of finances and lives, was immense. Shortly after the operation, Sri Lankan Defense Minister Gotabaya Rajapaksa noted that 6,261 members of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces lost their lives, while another 30,000 were seriously wounded between 2006 and 2009 (Wickremesinghe 2014). On the other side, around 22,000 LTTE fighters lost their lives in the battle for Tamil Eelam (Wickremesinghe 2014). However, most notably, between 80,000-100,000 Sri Lankan civilians lost their lives between the national governments and the Tamil rebel's war (Wickremesinghe 2014). The loss of civilians posed the greatest threat to the Sri Lankan government's legitimacy in the eyes of the international spectators.

Sri Lankan civilians, both Sinhalese and Tamil, were victims of alleged war crimes committed by the national government and the Tamil rebels. These war crimes were said to have escalated in the latter phase of the war in 2009 (Wickremesinghe 2014). These crimes included: attacking civilians, executing combatants and prisoners, disappearances and abductions backed by the Sri Lankan government, shortages of necessities like food and clean water for civilians trapped in war zones, and child recruitment by the Tamil Tigers (UNHRC 2015).

In response to its treatment of the Tamil rebels and minorities, human rights watchdog agencies have scathed the Sri Lankan government since 2009 (UNHRC 2015).
The UNROW Human Rights Impact Litigation Clinic, Human Rights Watch, and Permanent People's Tribunal have raised allegations that the Sri Lankan government committed nothing short of genocide against the Tamil people (UNHRC 2015). In 2013, the Permanent People's Tribunal, a tribunal born from the Charter of Algiers to protect truth, memory, and moral reparation, unanimously ruled that the Sri Lankan government was guilty of committing the crime of genocide against the Tamil people (Wickremesinghe 2014). The accusations of genocide against the Sri Lankan government and upper-level government officials, most of whom share kinship, would prove critical in developing the China-Sri Lanka relationship.

As seen in the China-Sri Lanka empirical study to follow, the human rights issue serves as the crux of the relationship between China and Sri Lanka. The domestic human rights issue, having turned international, cumulated to trade and security cooperation between the two countries. The trade and security cooperation reinforced China-Sri Lanka ties, wherein human rights and trade and security cooperation could not be separated. While the post-conflict period has been critical for developing China-Sri Lanka relations, Sri Lanka's internal crises along the lines of religion and ethnicity have yet to be fully resolved.

**Post-Conflict Period (2009-onwards)**

After the Civil War ended, there was yet another missed opportunity for the Sri Lankan national government to reconcile the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority. While elements of local control from the 13th amendment remain, empirical analyses of local control in Sri Lanka suggest that the national government has undermined democratic processes (Wickremesinghe 2014). According to Pant (2015), a "militarized
development process imposed a top-down strategy at the expense of incorporating local voices and ideas." The armed forces were involved in all levels of civilian developments (Rotberg 2010). All political and social projects had to be approved by the military before implementation (Rotberg 2010). The International Crisis Group (2010) also posed that "instead of giving way to a process of inclusive, accountable development, the military is increasing its economic role, controlling land and seemingly establishing itself as a permanent, occupying presence." The national government has not only undermined the devolution process but has also limited religious freedom.

While ethnic tensions and the trust deficit between the people and the government increased after the war, so did religious tensions. The Bodu Bala Sena, a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist organization, launched a large-scale anti-Muslim campaign (Wickremesinghe 2014). The Sena put pressure on the national government to abolish the Halaal certification process and ban the niqab, a veil covering for Muslim women (Wickremesinghe 2014). Rajapaksa's blatant mishandling of social and religious tensions is suspected of having increased voter turnout from Tamil and Muslim populations against his candidacy and in support of his opponent and former Cabinet member, Maithripala Sirisena, in 2015 (Wickremesinghe 2014).

Controversy has marked Mahinda Rajapaksa's governance. In 2015, Rajapaksa pushed up the date for elections by a full sixteen months because he thought he was guaranteed a win (Pant 2015). Rajapaksa's confidence stemmed from his government's defeat of the LTTE and the immense post-conflict economic growth Sri Lanka experienced (Pant 2017). The Sri Lankan economy grew 6.4 percent between 2003 and 2012 (Wickremesinghe 2014). While the economic growth was primarily private-sector
driven, public investment went to large infrastructural projects, including post-war reconstruction efforts in the North and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka (Wickremesinghe 2014). Changing the date of the 2015 elections was not the only undemocratic act Rajapaksa committed; he removed term limits for presidents in 2010 and engaged in large-scale corruption ranging from nepotistic to authoritarian practices (Pant 2017).

Further outlined in later empirical chapters, the accusations of corruption stemmed from signing infrastructural and defense contracts on a *quid pro quo* basis with countries like China. From accusations of corruption to an inability to definitively "solve the Tamil question," the Sri Lankan people voted Mahinda Rajapaksa out in 2015 (Wickremesinghe 2014). The Sri Lankan electorate consequently brought Maithripala Sirisena into the office of the President of Sri Lanka (Wickremesinghe 2014).

While the Rajapaksa government leaned more on China for support regarding human rights concerns and post-conflict development, Sirisena's government leaned more towards India than Rajapaksa's government (Pant 2015). Sri Lanka elected Sirisena into office around the same time that India elected Narendra Modi as Prime Minister (Pant 2017). Sri Lanka under Sirisena was more willing to respect India's wishes with regards to post-conflict development (Destradi 2010). For instance, India had been pushing since 2009 for the urgent resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Destradi 2010). India also wanted the Sri Lankan government to expedite rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in northern and eastern Sri Lanka (Destradi 2010). Lastly, India wanted a more meaningful devolution of powers to local governments, building on the 13th amendment compromise of 1987 to create safe conditions for resettlement (Destradi
2010). Sirisena was willing to make amends on all these fronts, a guarantee that was never assured from the Rajapaksa government (Destradi 2010).

This historical chapter highlighted the conditions that led to the 26-year-long civil war in Sri Lanka. The war, fueled by domestic tensions, fundamentally shaped Sri Lanka's foreign policies and relations with China and India. Having come out of the war with immense debt and a lack of international respect regarding its government's war crimes, Sri Lanka relied on China to avoid international scrutiny and finance post-conflict development projects. Sri Lanka's growing ties with China after 2009 brought China into the South Asian power dynamic and helped initiate a regional power transition. As the civil war ended, a South Asian power transition began. The following chapters will analyze the nature of the relationship between Sri Lanka and China, and Sri Lanka and India after 2009. The Sri Lanka-China relationship began with China serving as a military supplier. However, in the last 12 years, the relationship has become a multi-dimensional one in which both countries share intense ties on development and security fronts. The Sri Lanka-India relationship, in which India is considered the "big brother," has a long legacy. Now, India and China are equal-parts players in Sri Lanka, with both holding almost equivalent amounts of influence. The next chapter will highlight the Sri Lanka-China relationship through an empirical study of competition and cooperation from 2013-2019. The analysis shows how Sri Lanka's human rights violations during the civil war have served as the crux of the Sri Lanka-China relationship and the consequent South Asian power transition.
Chapter 4: China-Sri Lanka Relations

Introduction

The historical chapter outlined the conditions that led to the decades-long Sri Lankan Civil War, beginning in 1983 and ending in 2009. This chapter demonstrates how Sri Lanka, as a small South Asian state, has given unique power due to balanced India-China competition, has invited China into the South Asian power dynamic. The chapter presents an analysis of Sri Lankan foreign policy actions on development and security dimensions from 2013-2019. 2009 marked the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War. However, conducted analysis highlights the 2013-2019 time frame because Sri Lanka's Ministry of External Affairs only has reports from 2013 onwards. This chapter will show how two Sri Lankan Prime Ministers, Maithripala Sirisena and Mahinda Rajapaksa, furthered Sri Lankan ties with China after the civil war ended in 2009. The Rajapaksa government, in power from 2005 to 2015, was particularly pro-China, signing multimillion-dollar defense and development contracts with Chinese corporations often under suspicious and politically motivated circumstances (Wickremesinghe 2014). The Sirisena government, in power from 2015 to 2019, was voted in by surprise with hopes of reducing Sri Lanka's dependency on China, maintained a balanced approach with India and China (Pant 2017). The Sirisena government attempted to cancel or halt several deals with China, but to no avail, given Sri Lanka's dire financial situation (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021). The crux of Sri Lanka-China ties has been their shared experiences, especially with international human rights scrutiny. Sri Lanka's domestic human rights violation became an international issue with key multilateral organizations like the United Nations threatening to sanction the island nation if it did not pursue a proper internal investigation. The domestic human rights issue, having turned international,
cumulated to trade and security cooperation between the two countries. The trade and security cooperation reinforced China-Sri Lanka ties, wherein human rights and trade and security cooperation could not be separated.

The central case study analyzes Sri Lanka's human rights record and how that has served as the crux of the China-Sri Lanka relationship. The government's war crimes during the civil war raised alarms from international human rights watchdog agencies. Sri Lanka relied on China for international protection and slowly gave more infrastructural and defense deals to the power in return. This chapter begins with a historical analysis of different strategies that explain Sri Lanka's importance to China, including the Maritime Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the String of Pearls strategy. While it is probably unlikely that China engaged in deliberate debt-trap diplomacy with Sri Lanka (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021), the Sri Lankan government deliberately invited China into its commercial and security landscape at the cost of its citizens' interests. Then, this chapter analyzes how China has attempted to encircle India through building close cooperation with Sri Lanka, especially in the context of China's Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Following the central human rights case study is an annual empirical analysis from years 2013-2019 of significant events in the China-Sri Lanka relationship related to trade and security. The chapter concludes with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and how Sri Lanka's economy receded drastically because of its dependency on China.

**Methods**

The empirical analysis assessed Sri Lanka's Ministry of External Affairs annual reports and newspaper analysis. Any mention of China from 2013 onwards in The
Sunday Times was analyzed. The coded events included positive or negative "security," "trade," or "tourism." For example, if a defense contract reneged or if there was a failed summit, that event would be coded as "negative security." If there was an increase in foreign exchange students or tourists, that event would be coded as "positive tourism."

Each type of event held a different weight. A security event was weighted as a 3, a trade event was a 2, and a tourism event was a 1. The events were given such weight because security cooperation is more substantive and impactful regarding foreign policymaking and implementation than people-to-people relations. As shown in the empirical section, the graphs show the frequency and levels of cooperation, in the form of built or upheld agreements, and competition, in the form of broken agreements, between China and Sri Lanka.

**Historical Context**

China and Sri Lanka's relations date back to the 4th century A.D. However, the Rubber-Rice Pact of 1952 was a significant turning point in the relationship (Blanchard 2018). Around 1952, the price of rice in the world market rose severely after the Korean War (Kelegama 2014). Sri Lanka tried to secure American economic assistance to purchase rice. However, Washington D.C. was unwilling to sell at a lower price or provide any aid to purchase rice at market prices (Kelegama 2014). At the same time, the United States released large amounts of rubber from their stockpiles to bring down the market price of rubber, a good that Sri Lanka primarily exported (Kelegama 2014). China initially offered to sell rice to Sri Lanka, but Sri Lanka's non-alignment status made the government wary of trading with a communist bloc country (Kelegama 2014).

Eventually, the Sri Lankan financial crisis was stark enough for then Prime Minister R.G.
Senanayake to exchange Sri Lankan rubber for Chinese rice (Kelegama 2014). While there was initial political resistance in Sri Lanka regarding trading with a communist country, China was a generous trade partner (Kelegama 2014). China was selling rice below the market price and was purchasing rubber at above the market price (Kelegama 2014). Sri Lanka's positive experience with China and China's support of Sri Lanka in a moment of need laid the groundwork for strong relations. China was already proving itself reliable, especially when western powers like the United States were unwilling to help. The Rubber-Rice Pact was the start of a strong relationship that was overshadowed due to the actions of other regional players, like India, in the latter half of the 20th century.

China played a minor role in Sri Lanka for most of the 20th century (Pant 2017). China found its stronghold with Sri Lanka in the early 2000s, when yet again, the island was not receiving the help it sought from India and its western allies. Mahinda Rajapaksa's government decided to launch an intensive offensive campaign against the LTTE in 2005 (Wickremesinghe 2014). India, Sri Lanka's largest trade partner, and weapons exporter at that time, made it clear that it could not send more offensive weapon systems to Sri Lanka out of human rights concerns (Pant 2017). There was also intense domestic pressure from southern Indian states like Tamil Nadu on the Indian government's foreign policy, which were actively concerned about the security of Sri Lanka Tamils (Pant 2017). The Sri Lankan government was in need. The Chinese government signed a USD 37.6 million deal to sell Chinese ammunition and ordnance for the Sri Lankan army and navy (Kelegama 2014). Thus, China became an indispensable partner in Sri Lanka's war against domestic terrorism. China's arms transfer included
fighter aircrafts, armored personnel carriers, anti-aircraft funds, grenades launchers, and missiles (Pant 2017). The arms deal signed in 2005 established China-Sri Lankan military and security cooperation. With Chinese military supplies to Sri Lanka at an estimated USD 100 million per year since 2005, Sri Lankan defense forces remain formidable to domestic enemies (Kelegama 2014). According to the Sri Lankan local newspaper, the Sunday Times, almost every military parade held since the end of Sri Lanka’s civil war has shown endless lines of Chinese hardware without which victory against the LTTE would have been impossible (Woody 2018).

Sri Lanka's recent relations with China have developed into a strong partnership rooted in growing economic and security ties. In 2016, China surpassed India, becoming the largest import source for Sri Lanka (Moramudali 2019). Chinese imports to Sri Lanka in 2016 accounted for 21.7 percent of Sri Lanka's total imports, valued at USD 4.13 million (Moramudali 2019). China has also loaned around USD 7 billion to Sri Lanka from 2004 to 2017 in business development and construction projects (Moramudali 2019). Chinese projects in Sri Lanka include the Colombo Port City project and the Lotus Tower in central Colombo, one of the tallest towers in South Asia (Moramudali 2019). Sri Lanka is an important ally of China. The island nation plays a critical role in the global power's military strategies such as the Maritime Silk Road, Belt and Road Initiative, and the String of Pearls.

**Maritime Silk Road, Belt and Road, and the String of Pearls**

As mentioned in the second chapter, the literature surrounding China-Sri Lanka relations has gone back and forth on whether China has engaged in debt-trap diplomacy with Sri Lanka. The international scholarly community, mostly from the United States
and India, has painted China-Sri Lanka relations rooted in China's exploitation of the small island nation for its resources and strategic location (Behuria 2018). While that may be true to some extent, the empirical analysis in this chapter highlights two new features of the China-Sri Lankan dynamic. First, to some extent, Sri Lanka has actively invited China into its sphere of influence, and Sri Lanka has itself engaged in fostering a dependent relationship with China. Second, while China may not be solely to blame for its presence on the island, the newspaper database analysis highlights a conflict of interest between the Sri Lankan government and its people. The presence of China in Sri Lanka is a consequence of the Sri Lankan government's active reciprocation to increase trade, security, and cultural cooperation with China, often at the expense of its citizen's interests.

Concerns of China's debt-trap diplomacy rise from the great power's ambiguous initiatives that lie at the intersection of investment and diplomacy. At the core of China's interest in Sri Lanka is its Maritime Silk Road Project. The project is a geoeconomic strategy to boost infrastructure connectivity through Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean (Kelegama 2014). The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Project (MSR), announced in 2014 by President Xi Jinping, seeks to meet the needs of developing nations that had a lack of infrastructure investment (Kelegama 2014). The Center of Strategic International Studies (CSIS) reports that China needs Sri Lanka in its MSR because Pakistan is too politically unstable to serve as its stronghold in the South Asian region (Green 2018). Sri Lanka, known as the "pearl of the Indian Ocean," serves China for many purposes, including access to the Gulf for oil resources and encircling the
Indian subcontinent (Green 2018). The MSR is the sea route of the Belt and Road Initiative (Green 2018).

The Belt and Road Initiative is a development strategy the Chinese government adopted around 2014. The goal, it seemed, was to increase the ease with which consumers and producers could connect with Chinese markets. BRI prompted Chinese investment in over 70 countries, including Sri Lanka. "The One Belt and One Road are the two wings of the China Roc (a mythical bird). Once they are constructed, the China Roc can fly higher and farther," said Xi Jinping at the initiative's announcement (Ye 2020). Min Ye argues that the strategy essentially amounts to a mobilization campaign marked by ambitious "political rhetoric and ambiguous policy measures" (Ye 2020). Fragmented state actors within China self-interpret the strategy by proposing and implementing programs in their power and interest (Ye 2020). In this context, an autocratic leader like Xi coordinates a fragmented state by promoting a "cohesive" strategy (Ye 2020). The BRI and MSR are two robust economic initiatives that have captured the attention of governments and scholars.

The ambiguity surrounding the intentions of the MSR and BRI remains. The BRI and the MSR implementation make some scholars concerned about the nature of Chinese investment in countries like Sri Lanka. Minxin Pei (2020), in a presentation to college students in December 2020, noted that the true purpose of the BRI remains unknown even seven years after its inauguration. Recent analysis on MSR initiatives highlights scholarly concerns about China's intentions in Sri Lanka. The CSIS suggests that China's MSR projects are neither purely military nor purely commercial (Green 2018). The Chinese state has not explicitly stated the intentions of the BRI as its means to further its
diplomatic interests in developing countries (Green 2018). Instead, the state suggests that it is simply handing out credit to nations to promote global development (Green 2018). The MSR and BRI coincide with the String of Pearl’s strategy (Green 2018).

China’s String of Pearls is a geopolitical strategy to expand Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) (Kelegama 2014). Geographically, the IOR includes several strategic points like the Strait of Mandeb, the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Lombok Strait (Kelegama 2014). The maritime centers around this region include Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Somalia (Kelegama 2014). The term "String of Pearls" was first used by an internal U.S. Department of Defense report in 2005, referring specifically to the network of Chinese military and commercial facilities along the IOR (Green 2018). The Indian strategic community views the String of Pearls and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as a threat to Indian national security (Green 2018). The three strategies outlined, MSR, BRI, and the String of Pearls, require Sri Lanka's active participation and goodwill so that the Chinese government can maintain its strategic dominance regionally and continue its rise globally.

**Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**

China has engaged in its String of Pearls strategy through many methods, one medium being multilateral organizations. China has encouraged Sri Lanka's participation in several multilateral organizations, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Green 2018). Sri Lanka became a Dialogue Partner to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2009 when Rajapaksa's pro-China government was in office (Kelegama 2014). The SCO is a security, political, and economic alliance founded in 2001 by China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan (Kelegama
Military exercises are regularly conducted among members to promote cooperation and coordinate against terrorism for regional stability (Kelegama 2014).

The SCO largely follows the direction of China's foreign policy as member states are actively involved in China's Belt and Road Initiative (Green 2018). Sri Lanka recently applied in 2019 to become a full member but has not yet received approval (Green 2018). Sri Lanka is building strong relations with China by giving China more infrastructural deals and defense contracts. The cumulated trade and security agreements increase Sri Lanka's prominence in the international community through multilateral organizations like the SCO.

**Case Study: Human Rights**

Sri Lanka and China have built a strong relationship on many fronts, like multilateral organizations. However, the primary binding factor has been their shared history of human rights abuse allegations and consequent international scrutiny. Other scholars like Harsh Pant (2017) highlight the importance of the domestic human rights issue that brought Sri Lanka and China together. The literature, however, does not pose an in-depth analysis of the chronology of events that have made human rights abuses the crux of the China-Sri Lanka relationship.

Mahinda Rajapaksa's 2009 government was tasked with the immense responsibility of ending a 26-year civil war that ravaged between the minority Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Sri Lankan government (Wickremesinghe 2014). Mahinda Rajapaksa's brother, then-Defense Secretary and now-President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, led an assault on the LTTE. The assault guaranteed the Sri Lankan government victory over the LTTE in 2009 (Wickremesinghe 2014). Before 2009, the Rajapaksa government had
been under scrutiny for grave human rights violations and war crimes against the LTTE, according to international human rights watchdogs like the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC 2012).

While the UNHRC (2012) had also accused the Tamil Tigers of war crimes during the conflict where over 100,000 people died under their rule, the present-day Gotabaya Rajapaksa government has much more at stake than the Tigers. The Tiger's network has been compromised, decentralized, and underground since 2009 (Pant 2017). Rajapaksa's government is currently in prime positions of power, with key military officials accused of war crimes still in office or leading the army (Human Rights Watch 2021). The Rajapaksa government must effectively narrate the human rights issue as a domestic issue to maintain the family’s political power and reputation.

2009 Resolution

On May 18th, 2009, the Sri Lankan Civil War ended with the defeat of the LTTE (Pant 2017). On May 26th, 2009, the UNHRC hosted the 11th special session of the HRC titled "The human rights situation in Sri Lanka" (UNHRC 2009). The United Nations encouraged Sri Lanka to take the help of the UNHRC and its member countries to move towards the political resettlement of all people, especially the Tamil minority population, the disarmament and rehabilitation of child soldiers, and the assurance of security for internally displaced peoples (UNHRC 2009). The resolution praised the government for its swift victory and refused to investigate war crimes against both the government and the LTTE (UNHRC 2009). Notably, China was in favor of this resolution (UNHRC 2009). The Sri Lankan government, at that moment, was successful in avoiding inquiry into human rights violations.
Sri Lanka successfully avoided international scrutiny in 2009 by painting the humanitarian crises as a "domestic matter that does not warrant outside interference" (Pidd 2009). The Sri Lankan human rights minister of the time, Mahinda Samarasinghe, said that the passage of the U.N. resolution was a "strong endorsement of the Sri Lankan president's effort to rout terrorism, and the successful handling of the world's biggest hostage crisis" (Pidd 2009). Further, Sri Lanka's ambassador in Geneva said that European nations pushing for more accountability for the Sri Lankan government had failed with a "punitive and mean-spirited agenda" against his country (Pidd 2009). The Sri Lankan government was painting itself as the victim under the threat of domestic terrorism perpetrated by the LTTE.

The Sri Lankan government was adamantly against an international human rights investigation into its war crimes because high-level government officials, many of whom are still in office, would have no protection from indictment. The Rajapaksa government was actively engaged in burying war records. Mahinda Rajapaksa said that the country needs to move on from "old allegations" (Ethirajan 2019). Sri Lanka's foreign policy rhetoric has been strategically focused on painting the civil war as an issue of domestic terrorism and western nation's insistence for an investigation as a means for more prominent nations to keep Sri Lanka from developing.

In this quest, Sri Lanka sought the help and partnership of China. China was interested in helping Sri Lanka avoid its human rights challenge as it had its own domestic challenge in the form of repression of the Uighur population in Xinjiang (Maizland 2021). China’s critical 2009 vote to free the Sri Lankan government of any responsibility for its war crimes was the beginning of China’s extension of support to the
Sri Lankan government. China would continue to defend Sri Lanka from U.S.-backed resolutions in the UNHRC to ensure that Sri Lanka’s human rights issue is successfully framed as a domestic terrorism issue for the international community. China was Sri Lanka’s needed counter-pressure against India, the U.S., and the larger international community. The U.S., India, and other western powers were particularly concerned about the Sri Lankan government’s war crimes because of domestic pressure from the Tamil diaspora.

**Tamil Diaspora**

The Tamil diaspora played a prominent role in pushing the international community to probe the Sri Lankan government's human rights violations against its Tamil population during and after the civil war. The Tamil diaspora had established funding networks for the LTTE while the civil war was ongoing (Wayland 2004). When defeat was near for the LTTE, the Tamil diaspora in several countries, most notably in Canada, took to the streets (Wayland 2004). The diaspora was protesting in 2009 against the alleged genocide of Sri Lankan Tamil people (Wayland 2004). It was part of a global outcry by the diaspora to end the Sri Lankan Civil War, investigate war crimes by the government, and restore civil rights for Tamils in Sri Lanka (Wayland 2004). However, after the defeat of the Tigers and the disarray of centralized organization, the fight for Tamil Eelam was gloomy (Wayland 2004). The LTTE's loss, however, has not weakened support for Tamil Eelam in the diaspora (Wayland 2004).
Figure 7: Tamil Diaspora uses social media to gather support for Tamil Eelam and Sri Lankan war crimes accountability
Source: Instagram

Figure 7 shows a social media post of the Basement Gang, a group of popular dancers, doing a routine on a Tamil song. The comments section of the post is flooded with cries from the diaspora, asking the Basement Gang to use their social media influence to shine a light on the "genocide against Tamils" in Sri Lanka. The diaspora continues to fight for the constitutional and human rights of Sri Lankan Tamils through new and different avenues, including social media. While the diaspora continues to fight for Tamil Eelam, Tamils in Sri Lanka remain exhausted with a lack of options for success (Wayland 2004). The present-day Tamil diaspora continues to advocate for Sri Lankan
Tamil rights because it believes that reconciliation efforts have failed. The diaspora was particularly disappointed with the failure of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), 2010.

**2010: Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC)**

In May 2010, Mahinda Rajapaksa called for the establishment of the LLRC. The LLRC investigated the conditions that lead to the failure of the February 2002 ceasefire agreement (Keenan 2011). The commission had to present lessons learned from those events and recommend institutional, administrative, and legislative measures to promote national unity (Keenan 2011). The commission's report was controversial. The commission concluded that the Sri Lankan military did not deliberately target civilians, but the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) repeatedly violated international humanitarian law (Government of Sri Lanka 2011). According to the report, the military gave the "highest priority" to protecting civilians, whereas the Tamil Tigers had had "no respect for human life" (Government of Sri Lanka 2011).

The report was heavily criticized for its intention to shift most, if not all, blame for war crimes away from the Sri Lankan government and to the LTTE. International human rights groups, including the UNHRC, criticized the commission and its report for "its limited mandate, alleged lack of independence, and failure to meet minimum international standards or offer protection to witnesses" (Human Rights Watch 2013). The biased and failed LLRC report was the government's first attempt to curate a narrative that exonerated the Sri Lankan government from accountability by painting the civil war as an issue of domestic terrorism. The government's multi-faceted approach to painting the human rights issue as a domestic issue gained further traction in 2012.
2012 Resolution

In 2012, another vote in Geneva at the UNHRC held Sri Lanka accountable for its post-war human rights efforts. The resolution, "promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka," passed, representing international dissatisfaction with Sri Lanka's efforts three years after the war (UNHRC 2012). China voted against the resolution (UNHRC 2012). India and the U.S. voted in favor of the resolution and against the interests of the Sri Lankan government (UNHRC 2012). The Sri Lankan government framed the issue of the civil war as an issue of domestic terrorism, again. When Sri Lankan human rights advocates testified in support of the resolution, Sri Lankan state-run newspaper Ceylon Daily News attacked them. The media source suggested that the Sri Lankan advocates were LTTE-supported and were acting to "betray Sri Lanka" (UNHRC 2012). The campaign to make the human rights issue an internal issue of domestic terrorism was multi-faceted with active participation and uniformity in government statements and the media. The Sri Lankan media government and its media outlets curated a domestic terrorism narrative by labeling the human rights advocates, and those who spoke in opposition to the government's narrative, as anti-national terrorists.

2013 Resolution

A year later, in 2013, a U.S.-sponsored resolution was put forth in the UNHRC against Sri Lanka over the government's war crimes. The resolution was an international cry for an independent and credible investigation into Sri Lankan war crimes after the Sri Lankan government failed to conduct one of their own (UNHRC 2013). Once again, the U.S. and India voted against Sri Lanka, and China voted in favor of Sri Lanka (UNHRC 2013). 2013 was a pivotal year for Sri Lanka-China relations. A few days before the UNHRC votes, a high-level Chinese official visited Sri Lanka to inaugurate the
Hambantota International Airport (China MFA 2013). In May, Mahinda Rajapaksa personally visited China (China MFA 2013).

Rajapaksa's May 2013 visit culminated with a letter published in a Sri Lankan government newspaper, reporting that China "resolutely opposes any move by any country to interfere in Sri Lanka's internal affairs under any excuse" (Sunday Times 2013). The statement was an implicit reference to increasing pressure on Sri Lanka from the United States and other western countries to investigate the killing of civilians during the Sri Lankan civil war. News about the war crimes was relatively quiet for two years after 2013. While Sri Lanka was optimistic that it could avoid the war crimes issue in the U.N., the UNHRC was silently conducting its investigation in Sri Lanka. The UNHRC, led by then-UN High Commissioner of Human Rights Zeid Raad Al Hussein, released a detailed report of its troublesome findings.

2015 U.N. Report
The 2015 U.N.-released report accused both sides of the civil war, the government and the Tigers, of war crimes in 2009. The report had several findings. First, there were numerous unlawful killings by both sides (UNHRC 2015). Second, tens of thousands were subject to enforced disappearances over decades (UNHRC 2015). Third, there was "brutal use of torture" by security forces, particularly during the immediate aftermath of the conflict (UNHRC 2015). Fourth, there was extensive sexual violence against detainees by the security forces "with men as likely to be victims as women" (UNHRC 2015). Fifth, there was forced recruitment of adults and children by the rebels (UNHRC 2015). The 2015 report attempted to highlight the extent and severity of the
war crimes during the civil war by showing both sides' lack of respect for human life and international laws governing war.

In response to the report, Sri Lanka promised a local inquiry but refused to allow a special court with foreign judges to inquire about the war crimes (Keenan 2011). The island nation agreed to establish an office for missing persons as part of its post-war obligations (Keenan 2011). Sri Lanka agreed to create domestic legal mechanisms to investigate its alleged war crimes and reparations for victims only after the United States agreed to be less strict about enforcing accountability measures on Sri Lanka (Keenan 2011). As of 2021, the domestic plans to establish the office for missing persons and to assure repatriations are non-existent, according to Alan Keenan, a senior Sri Lanka analyst at the International Crisis Group.

**2020 and 2021**

While the United States eased up on some measures, the Trump administration was steadfast in letting Sri Lanka know where it stands in terms of the human rights issue. In February 2020, the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo assured that the United States' stance against Sri Lankan human rights violations was clear (Mendis and Reichenbach 2020). The American government imposed sanctions on Lt. General Shavendra Silva, the current Sri Lankan Army Commander, by denying both him and his family entry to the United States. "The allegations of gross human rights violations against Shavendra Silva, documented by the United Nations and other organizations, are serious and credible," Pompeo said in a 2020 statement. He urged the Sri Lankan government to "hold accountable individuals responsible for war crimes" (Mendis and Reichenbach 2020). While Pompeo may have distanced the United States from Sri Lanka
with these sanctions, Sri Lanka has little to worry about given the economic and security reassurance China has given the island nation.

China was recently granted a three-year term on the UNHRC in October 2020, days after an official Chinese visit to Colombo. Beijing offered to further defend Sri Lanka's human rights record at the highest levels in November 2020 during official talks (Markar 2020). Yang Jiechi, China's top foreign policy official, told Gotabaya Rajapaksa that "China promises to defend Sri Lanka's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity at international fora including the United Nations Human Rights Council" (Markar 2020). China's seat at the UNHRC is critically important because the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights plans to present a critical report of Sri Lanka's post-war record on accountability and reconciliation (Markar 2020). "China was there before 2015, helping the Sri Lankan government at the UNHRC from behind the scenes," said Sherine Xavier, director of an independent human rights watchdog agency, "Now they will do it openly, from the front" (Human Rights Watch 2020).

The human rights issue continues to play a large in China-Sri Lanka relations. In February 2021, Michelle Bachelet, UN Human Rights Chief, demanded an "international criminal court probe into Sri Lanka's Tamil separatist conflict, and sanctions against top generals and others accused of war crimes" (Human Rights Watch 2021). There was also a UNHRC resolution, adopted on March 23rd, to "collect, analyze, and present evidence of international crimes committed in Sri Lanka for use in future prosecutions" (Human Rights Watch 2021). Many western countries, including Germany and Canada, backed the resolution (Human Rights Watch 2021). In response, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena stated that the current accusation against Sri Lanka was "politically
motivated," not explicitly stating what those motivations were (Human Rights Watch 2021). In support of Sri Lanka, the spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Wang Wenbin, stated, "[China] appreciates Sri Lanka's efforts to encourage human rights and economic development, to conserve vulnerable groups and advance national reconciliation, and fight against terrorism" (Mishra 2021). Wenbin added, "[China is] against applying double standards or utilizing the same to interfere in the affairs of the other nations." He then cited the U.N. charter and urged member states to respect a nation's sovereignty and political independence (Human Rights Watch 2021). A multilateral organization like the U.N., according to China, should leave internal matters, like the Sri Lankan human rights issue, for respective countries to solve for themselves.

Sri Lanka's human rights records fall in line with times the country was closer to China or closer to the West. The human rights issue compelled Sri Lanka to invite China into its sphere of influence for protection against international scrutiny. Pompeo's recent sanctions against Silva come when the U.S. chooses to be harder on Sri Lanka for accountability. The following empirical analysis shows that between 2015-2019, when Maithripala Sirisena's government was in office, and Sri Lanka's foreign policy was more balanced, the U.S. was offering diplomatic backing to Sri Lanka at the UNHRC. The U.S., in collaboration with the British government, supported a Sri Lankan resolution that took a conciliatory attitude to the island nation's post-war efforts (UNHRC 2015). In the wake of a new Rajapaksa government under Mahinda Rajapaksa's brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the Chinese have taken over the role of protecting Sri Lanka at the U.N. When the Sirisena government was in office, the United States was more supportive in the human rights issue, and India has been more involved, at least in the beginning of 2015,
with regards to security and trade development. When the Rajapaksa family has been in office, China has been more supportive of the human rights issue and more involved with financial investment.

Figure 8: Timeline of Sri Lankan Governments and Human Rights Record

The Rajapaksa family has more of a stake in human rights protection than former President Sirisena. The Rajapaksa family was in power, under eldest brother Mahinda Rajapaksa, from 2005 (Wickremesinghe 2014). The Sri Lankan government was accused of most of its war crimes under Mahinda Rajapaksa's tenure (Wickremesinghe 2014). Additionally, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the younger brother and now-President, was the defense minister who led the 2009 final assault against the LTTE (Wickremesinghe 2014). As noted in the history chapter, the United Nations estimate that 7,000 civilians were killed and another 16,700 were wounded between January and May 2009 (UNHRC 2012). The Sri Lankan Army murdered an additional 1,000 civilians in the last week of fighting (UNHRC 2012). There is blood on the hands of the Rajapaksa family. Thus,
both Rajapaksa governments, more than the Sirisena government, are incentivized to keep close relations with China to avoid international persecution for their war crimes.

This phenomenon essentially highlights the essence of China-Sri Lanka relations established in the following annual empirical analysis. When the Rajapaksa government has been in power, particularly between 2007 and 2015, China-Sri Lanka relations have strengthened. Rajapaksa’s government was increasingly reliant on China’s diplomatic support to ward off war crime charges. The Chinese also offered almost unlimited funds for development at a lower cost than international multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Behuria 2018). When Sirisena’s government was in power, from 2015-2019, Sri Lanka-China relations were more tense, with Sri Lanka relying more on the U.S. and India than China for investment and security purposes. At the core of Sri Lanka’s foreign policy has been the priorities of its domestic government.

The following section poses a detailed analysis of newspaper coverage by Sri Lankan local newspaper, Sunday Times, from 2013 to 2019. The 7-year annual analysis demonstrates how Sri Lanka's post-war human rights crisis laid the foundation for increased trade and security interdependence with China. China demonstrated to Sri Lanka that it was an all-weather friend. Regardless of the extent of the international scrutiny Sri Lanka would face for human rights violations, China would support Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka reciprocated China's critical support in the form of increased trade and security contracts for years to come.
Annual Empirical Analysis

The literature surrounding China-Sri Lanka relations focuses on the significant conjectures that define the relationship. For example, scholars like Ashok Behuria (2018) focus on the Hambantota Port to explain what seems to be an exploitative relationship at face value. In Sri Lanka, the narrative of Chinese "debt-trap" diplomacy may not exist. While Deborah Brautigam (2021), Meg Rithmire (2021), and several Chinese experts explain that China has not engaged in debt-trap diplomacy from a conjectural approach, the following sections highlight the China-Sri Lanka through an empirical lens. The empirical lens affirms that China may not have deliberately engaged in debt-trap diplomacy and highlights the fraught tension between the interests of the government and the people. For each year starting with 2013, Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs' annual reports and the archives of the Sri Lankan newspaper, Sunday Times, were mined for articles relating to China. The articles were coded in terms of positive and negative developments in trade, security, and tourism. The graphs represent trends in trade, security, and tourism for each year starting with 2013.

2013

Figure 9 shows that China-Sri Lanka relations were highly cooperative, marked by significant progress in trade and security measures. Concerns about Chinese investment in Sri Lanka began in 2013, with the inauguration of several Chinese commercial projects. China-Sri Lanka relations were marked by President Mahinda Rajapaksa sending his congratulations to new Chinese President Xi Jinping, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2013). Several members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo and the CPC Central Committee visited Sri Lanka in 2013 (China MFA 2013). In March 2013, the CPPCC Vice Chairman
Luo Fuhe attended the inauguration ceremony of the Hambantota International Airport, a development project undertaken by Chinese companies in collaboration with the Colombo Port and Colombo Airport highway (China MFA 2013).

2013 was a critical year for Xi and Rajapaksa to develop a strong relationship. It demonstrated China's BRI intentions in Sri Lanka with the signing of the Strategic Cooperative Partnership. In May 2013, President Rajapaksa visited China, meeting with President Xi Jinping to sign the Strategic Cooperative Partnership (China MFA 2013). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China reports that the SCP 2013 was a compilation of ten cooperation agreements in the areas of the economy, trade, agriculture, and finance. "China will support Sri Lanka to develop capabilities in satellite communication, space technology, and maritime industries," said Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in a meeting with Rajapaksa (China MFA 2013). One of the most notable agreements signed included a new USD 2.2 billion loan for infrastructure projects (China MFA 2013). The countries agreed on USD 1.5 billion investment in the private sector for an express highway to improve connectivity (China MFA 2013). China and Sri Lanka also agreed to extend a railway in southern Sri Lanka and established a plan to develop the Colombo Port (China MFA 2013).

Economically, 2013 was another successful year for Sri Lanka and China. Bilateral trade between China and Sri Lanka reached USD 3.621 billion, increasing about 14.3 percent from 2012 (China MFA 2013). In terms of security, the SCP 2013 concluding with a joint statement on behalf of China and Sri Lanka to "cooperate in defense technology, personal training, and other fields" (China MFA 2013). Keqiang also
suggested that China will provide defense technology to Sri Lanka and train Sri Lanka's army (China MFA 2013).

The Rajapaksa government was keen on building a strong relationship with China, as demonstrated through the signing of the SCP and its related agreements. Global interest rates from international institutions like the IMF were much higher than those that China offered (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021). Thus, strong relations with China would launch Sri Lanka towards unseen development in a post-conflict period. The development, sponsored by the Chinese government, was essential for the Rajapaksa government to paint an image of Sri Lanka as "speedily recovered" from the war (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021). The focus on an economic recovery led Sri Lanka to acquire more debt than the island nation could repay (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021). Rajapaksa's actions, primarily rushing Chinese-funded projects without a clear understanding of the Sri Lankan government's ability to pay back China, put Sri Lanka in a financially vulnerable place.

**Figure 9: Cooperation, 2013**
In 2014, Sri Lanka set up three consulates in China in Shanghai, Chengdu, and Guangzhou (Sri Lanka MEA 2014). Most significantly, in 2014, Xi Jinping formally visited Sri Lanka after two decades and left having signed 27 MOUs (Sri Lanka MEA 2014). China became the biggest investor in the post-war island nation, committing to building motorways, a power station, and an airport (Goodman 2014). China and Sri Lanka are "trustworthy and reliable with each other," and China is willing to be a good partner that can weather storms together," Xi said in a 2014 meeting (Goodman 2014).

According to the Sri Lanka Ministry of External Affairs annual report, the visit furthered the Strategic Cooperative Partnership signed by both countries in 2013. The Diplomat reported that Mr. Xi, during his visit, inaugurated the final phase of a coal-fired power plant constructed by a Chinese manufacturing company, China Machinery Engineering Corporation (Bastians and Harris 2014). Mr. Xi and President Rajapaksa also agreed to work on the Colombo Port City Project, a $1.3 billion plan to build an artificial island off the coast of Colombo (Bastians and Harris 2014).

Economic relations between China and Sri Lanka developed even more in 2014. The total trade between China and Sri Lanka in 2014 was valued at USD 4.041 billion (Jiao 2014). China and Sri Lanka began talking about a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), rooted in Sri Lanka's support for China's Maritime Silk Road project, reported the China Daily (Jiao 2014). The talks had completed six rounds of negotiation before being dropped in 2017 due to disagreements surrounding the level of trade liberalization the FTA would grant (Behuria 2018). China wanted 90 percent of goods to tariff-free, reported the Diplomat (Goodman 2014). Sri Lanka's International Trade Ministry stated
in June 2019 that talks for an FTA had initiated again. However, no developments have been reported to the World Trade Organization (WTO), according to the Asia Regional Integration Center (Behuria 2018).

In terms of security, Mr. Xi's visit sparked a conversation about China's MSR, which involved the Maldives and Sri Lanka in the IOR (Bastians and Harris 2014). The Maritime Silk Road seeks to encircle India and control port access along sea lanes linking the energy-rich Persian and economic centers in eastern China (Bastians and Harris 2014). Essential to China's maritime project was the Colombo Port City Project, which Mr. Xi inaugurated during his September 2014 visit (Bastians and Harris 2014).

Soon after Mr. Xi's visit, a Chinese submarine docked at Colombo, increasing concern of China's expanded military footprint on the island nation (Aneez and Sirilal 2014). The submarine port was the Chinese-built and Chinese-run Colombo International Container Terminal (Aneez and Sirilal 2014). However, even more worrisome was that the authoritative media of the Chinese People's Liberation Army reported that the submarine would be docking again on its return voyage and that another submarine was planning to make a stop in Colombo the following month (Aneez and Sirilal 2014).

The event was concerning for several reasons. First, there is confusion regarding the actual date the submarine docked at the Colombo port. The official statement claims that the submarine docked in Colombo on September 15th, 2014, or the day before Mr. Xi arrived for his formal visit (Aneez and Sirilal 2014). However, China Military Online claimed that the submarine and its support ship arrived in Colombo from September 7-14th, 2014 (Aneez and Sirilal 2014). If the Chinese newspaper is correct, then the submarine arrived in Sri Lanka before the visit of Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe and not
during the formal visit of Mr. Xi (Aneez and Sirilal 2014). The docking of the Chinese submarine during a Japanese visit would be a clear threat to the efforts made by Japan and India to keep China out of the South Asian sphere of influence.

Before the end of 2014, Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa had a meeting with Indian Defense Minister Arun Jaitley and National Security Adviser Ajit Doyal in New Delhi (Press Trust of India 2014). According to the Sunday Times’s Editorial Board (2014), Jaitley and Doyal informed Rajapaksa that the "docking of a Chinese submarine at the Colombo Port in September was of serious concern to India's national security." Sri Lanka swiftly responded to India's concerns. A week after the meeting, Sri Lanka Vice Admiral Jayantha Pereira, Chief of Naval Staff, ruled out any Chinese military presence in Sri Lanka, citing that "India's security is our security" (Editorial Board 2014).

Sri Lanka's words to India were simply just that—words. Two other Chinese naval vessels quietly came and went through Sri Lanka two months after India and Sri Lanka's meeting. Submarine Changzheng-2 and warship Chang Xing Dao came and left without international or regional recognition (Aneez and Sirilal 2014). Typically, the Sri Lankan Government issues a media statement to announce the arrival of foreign warships (Aneez and Sirilal 2014). This time, there was no such public announcement, according to Sunday Times (2014). The government’s lack of media transparency with the arrival and departure of Chinese vessels in 2014 prompts worry about the power dynamics in the Sino-Lanka relationship. Sri Lanka seems to have shifted its allegiances away from non-alignment to aligning with whichever power can grant the island nation more trade and security resources.
Several local Sri Lankan newspapers, including the Sunday Times, believe that the Sri Lankan government under Mahinda Rajapaksa was no longer balancing between India and China; instead, the island nation was putting forth a pro-China policy (Editorial Board 2014). Rajapaksa's willingness to consistently allow China to build in Sri Lanka and use its ports for strategic purposes shows that Sri Lanka invited China into its borders as an act of small state-agency rather than the Chinese government's strategic debt-trap diplomacy.

Mahinda Rajapaksa was incredibly confident in winning the 2015 election, so he pushed the election date (Pant 2017). He believed that the economic development he revitalized in Sri Lanka, through the help of his close ties with China, would be enough to satisfy his electorate. The electorate, however, needed change. Maithripala Sirisena was elected to the office of Prime Minister of Sri Lanka in 2015, bringing an end to a pro-China era (Pant 2017).

Figure 10: Cooperation, 2014
2015: Tensions rise over the suspended port project

2015 marked a swift change in Sino-Lanka relations in comparison to 2014. In 2015, the Rajapaksa government was out, and the new Maithripala Sirisena government was in office. The Rajapaksa government, which ended the civil war, was voted out of office due to corruption concerns, particularly in taking bribes from Chinese companies (Blanchard 2018). Sirisena ran his election campaign on the message that he did not want Sri Lanka to be excessively dependent on any one power (Pant 2017). His deep concern was rooted in a fear that Sri Lanka was losing its sovereignty to Chinese economic and security interests in the island nation (Pant 2017). When in power, Sirisena ordered a review of Beijing-financed projects and loans (Tiezzi 2015). Sri Lankan Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake even said that "Chinese companies operating in Sri Lanka were corrupt" (Barry 2015). Accusations of corruption launched wide-scale investigations. The Sirisena administration suspended the construction of the Northern expressway until an investigation was conducted determining whether the Rajapaksa administration had inflated the project's costs (Barry 2015).

The election of Sirisena fundamentally highlights the rising tension between public interests and governmental actions. Sri Lankan citizens, living in a post-conflict economy, had limited economic opportunities due to the presence of Chinese workers and construction sites (Barry 2015). While one of the many reasons Sirisena was elected was to limit Sri Lankan dependence on Chinese resources, Sirisena’s ability to fulfill that promise was constrained by the dire financial situation his predecessor had left for him (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021).
To balance against a rising dependence on China and show that Sri Lanka did not have a pro-China policy, President Sirisena made his first official visit as Prime Minister to India (Gunaratne and Berkshire Miller 2015). Sirisena was quick, however, to visit China to restore a balanced relationship with both countries. Sirisena visited China in March 2015 at the Boao Forum to further negotiate the 2014 bilateral FTA and renegotiate USD 5 billion worth of Chinese-funded projects (Sri Lanka MEA 2015). In Mr. Xi's opening remarks, he said China considers Sri Lanka a strategic partner and wants to "again promote and elevate the China-Sri Lanka relationship to fulfill an important purpose" (Dominguez 2015). Sirisena's visit to China was important given that he decided to scale back ties with China by halting construction and launching investigations (Dominguez 2015).

The promotion and elevation of China-Sri Lanka relations largely depended on Sri Lanka's decision to re-start Chinese construction projects. Sirisena halted a USD 1.4 billion port project in Colombo (Tiezzi 2015). The port city construction was essential for Beijing's MSR and BRI policies to improve connectivity in South Asia because it would provide China a reliable port for refueling amongst other strategic interests (Tiezzi 2015). Sirisena's office suspended the project, citing concerns over its environmental impact (Tiezzi 2015). When cleared of the environmental concerns, the Sirisena government gave the go-ahead for the project to continue (Tiezzi 2015). Unsurprisingly, the decision to resume construction of the project came days before a high-ranking Chinese official was visiting Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka MEA 2015). A few weeks later, however, the Sirisena government asked to halt the port construction until the Sri Lankan government completed a probe into alleged wrong-doing in the awarding of the contract (Tiezzi
The Sirisena government claimed that the previous Rajapaksa government did not follow proper procedures when approving the project (Tiezzi 2015). In a couple of days, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, interviewed by the South China Morning Post, said that the project was viable and that all procedures were in place when the contract for the port city was finalized (Barry 2015).

China, in response to the halted port project, was not quiet. The Chinese government began publishing full-page advertisements highlighting the virtues of the project (Dominguez 2015). The government also began issuing public statements urging the Sri Lankan government to honor signed contracts. The Chinese government further warned the Sri Lankan government that there would be "adverse consequences to Sri Lanka's international credibility in obtaining foreign investment should the project be stopped" (Dominguez 2015). The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said China expects Sri Lanka will “keep in mind its own profound interest, promote the practical cooperation and properly deal with the related project between the two countries” (Dominguez 2015). Sirisena’s visit was important for Sri Lanka to continue dialogue over the FTA, while China urged the revival of the Colombo port project (Tiezzi 2015).

China's actions in 2015 demonstrated Sri Lanka's consequences for potentially limiting China's influence on the island nation. As seen in the human rights case study, the human rights issues brought Sri Lanka and China closer. China's support of the Sri Lankan government in the face of international scrutiny would be essential for the Sri Lankan government to maintain its legitimacy. Thus, the Sri Lankan government's increasing trade and security dependence on China is unavoidable, largely inescapable.
Even if the Sirisena government tried to balance against China at the beginning of his term, his government would probably be unable to keep China at bay for long given the international trade and security relationship the countries have established.

**Figure 11: Cooperation, 2015**

In 2016, the utmost priority between the countries was improving the Sri Lankan economy through investments and development assistance in the form of aid and grants (Samatha 2016). Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe visited China in April 2016 to further discuss cooperation between the two countries (Sri Lanka MEA 2016). Wickremesinghe said, “Sri Lanka and China share similarities in various fields such as economic restructuring” (Samatha 2016). The Chinese President, Xi Jinping, expressed a similar view when stating that there is a need to "integrate development strategies" and that China is "willing to work with Sri Lanka to consolidate traditional friendship, expand reciprocal cooperation, and push forward strategic partnership of cooperation to a new high" (Dasgupta 2016). In this context, Sri Lanka will “cooperate with Chinese
companies to promote major projects” (Dasgupta 2016). This press release highlights an important message: the pressure that the Chinese government put on the Sri Lankan government through targeted advertisements and public statements was successful on behalf of China. Sri Lanka, although under the leadership of China-weary Sirisena, would not be able to maintain its economic development without China.

China and Sri Lanka also released a joint statement on the ways in which the China-Sri Lanka relationship planned on developing in the coming year. The two sides agreed to continue building upon their FTA. According to Wickremesinghe, both countries "finalized comprehensive economic strategy for the next two decades" (Samatha 2016). Several MOUs were signed to increase cooperation. China agreed to start developing Sri Lankan roads under the China Development Bank-funded priority roads project 3-Phase II (Samatha 2016). This project aimed to develop roads of approximately 130 kilometers in length in Central and Sabaragamuwa provinces (Samatha 2016). Another MOU was signed between the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and the China Development Bank (CDB) to "maintain the financial stability of the country by enhancing the liquidity of the market and promoting the development of agriculture and infrastructure in Sri Lanka" (Samatha 2016).

The Sri Lankan Prime Minister also made significant progress in terms of the contentious Colombo Port City Project, which President Sirisena had suspended due to environmental and corruption concerns. Before leaving for China, PM Wickremesinghe interviewed with Chinese newspaper Xinhua, saying, "the Port City will become a special financial and business district of Sri Lanka which will have its own laws. There will be a separate financial and legal system operating in the Port City where people can come and
transact business internationally" (Dasgupta 2016). The PM hinted that the project would continue as he sees a future for the Port City and its integral role in developing Sri Lanka's business and financial sectors (Dasgupta 2016). PM Wickremesinghe’s visit was critical to establishing the foundation of cooperation in 2016.

The changed policy towards the Port City, however, demanded a renegotiated deal. The China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) demanded compensation for the project's suspension (Samatha 2016). The Sri Lankan government had to pay $125 million for losses (Samatha 2016). PM Wickremesinghe was quoted saying that the "the CCCC may have to re-evaluate what is more worth, the compensation of USD 125 million or the status of a financial and business district" (Dasgupta 2016).

The government also noted key changes that would have to be considered with the project. First, China would not receive the land on a free-hold basis but a ninety-nine-year lease (Samatha 2016). Second, the project would be implemented in several stages so that environmental and community concerns particularly associated with the local fishermen would be addressed before completing the project (Samatha 2016). While the project was getting re-started, reports suggested that Sri Lanka faced pressure to give in to Chinese demands about the port out of financial obligations to the Chinese government (Dasgupta 2016).

The Port City Project was renegotiated for Sri Lanka to get debt relief from China (Dasgupta 2016). Sri Lanka, in 2016, had USD 8 billion in debt to China (Dasgupta 2016). The debt accumulated mainly under the Rajapaksa government, which engaged in various projects with China. PM Wickremesinghe said, "Sri Lanka will try to turn this debt into equity" (Dasgupta 2016). The Sri Lankan government was also willing to give
up equity stakes in loss-making projects like another international airport or deep-sea port in the south (Samatha 2016). Evidently, Sri Lanka's debt has been significant for China-Sri Lanka relations.

This 2016 dilemma highlights the core of Western media’s “debt-trap diplomacy” concerns. While PM Wickremesinghe reassured Sri Lankan reporters that the Sri Lankan economy would grow, the fear of being "debt-trapped" by China was evident in Sri Lanka's willingness to continue a project out of financial concerns. The government was unable to manage loan repayments effectively. Brautigam and Rithmire (2021) suggest that China may not have engaged in debt trap diplomacy because it was willing to renegotiate the terms for loan repayment. Sri Lanka owes more to other countries and agencies, like Japan, than China.

At face value, it seems as if China is the malicious actor that trapped Sri Lanka in debt. However, focusing on small state agency, Sri Lanka willingly invited China into its trade and security spheres out of a need for post-conflict development in the face of high global interest rates and protection from international human rights scrutiny. The Sri Lankan government still needed to avoid international persecution for war crimes. Such a human rights investigation would diminish the Sri Lankan government's credibility and ability to move on, both economically and politically, from the civil war. Sri Lanka's increasing debt was the cost of such economic development and international protection. Sri Lanka mismanaged its funds, but that says more about Sri Lanka's agency and failures than China's foreign policies.
2017 marks a critical turning point in China-Sri Lanka relations centered around the Hambantota Port. The Sri Lankan government sold the Hambantota Port in southern Sri Lanka to the China Merchants Port Holdings Company (CMPort) in early January (Sri Lanka MEA 2017). President Sirisena met with Chinese Ambassador Yi, where the President raised concerns over corruption allegations related to the Hambantota deal (Schultz 2017). The Sri Lankan government was concerned that it did not have adequate influence over negotiations (Schultz 2017). Thus, President Sirisena appointed one of his economic advisors, Dr. Sarath Rajapatirana, to the Committee of Ministry of Secretaries (Schultz 2017). This committee was tasked with formulating an agreement for the port (Schultz 2017). The committee and CMPort reached a comprehensive deal.

The deal agreed upon is as follows. The Sri Lankan government consented to sign over an 80 percent stake in the port to a single Chinese company, CMPort, for 99 years (Behuria 2018). The Sri Lanka Ports Authority will maintain 20 percent equity (Behuria 2018). CMPort will pay the Sri Lankan government USD 1.4 billion and agree to
consider a request from the SLPA for royalties when port utilization reaches "a mutually-agreed level of performance" (Behuria 2018). The latest framework is not in Sri Lanka's favor. CMPort is not bound to pay any dividend from the port for 15 years (Behuria 2018). Additionally, the Chinese company enjoys tax-free benefits at least until 2032 (Behuria 2018). The deal was a clear departure from previous public-private partnerships (PPPs) the SLPA has signed in the past.

Sri Lanka did not benefit from the Hambantota deal. The amount proposed to be paid by CMPort was decided because the amount was 80 percent of the cost of constructing Hambantota Port during Phases I and II (Patrick 2017). However, the 80 percent figure did not consider the value of the 50-kilometer radius of land around the port, which CMPort was also receiving (Patrick 2017). "But what the company agreed to was to pay (as an investment) a portion of the construction cost of Hambantota Port Phase I and II," Ports Minister Arjuna Ranatunga said, "There is no connection between the amount they are investing and the extent of land" (Patrick 2017). Instead of calculating the land cost as a separate input, the concession agreement included it in the amount pledged to CMPort (Patrick 2017). The agreement also states that if Sri Lanka reduces the extent of land granted to the company, the investment amount would be lowered (Patrick 2017). Sri Lanka had to give up the land for little in return. The deal’s shortcomings were evident to the Sri Lankan people and those observing from the outside.

There were corruption allegations surrounding the role of specific Sri Lankan ministers during the process of evaluating and selling a stake in the port. The government's coalition partner Jathika Hela Urumaya accused these ministers of visiting
China and receiving a commission for fixing the project (Patrick 2017). China was indeed quick to deny such accusations (Patrick 2017). Chinese Ambassador Wang Yi explained the transaction and assured the media that no such accusations of corruption were valid (Patrick 2017).

Additionally, the Sri Lankan public went to the streets to protest the Sri Lankan government's mishandling of the Hambantota Port (Panda 2017). The Sri Lankan Lands Ministry surveyed 15,000 acres earmarked for CMPort under the privatization deal agreed upon by the government and the Chinese company (Panda 2017). The Sri Lankan people were deeply concerned by the massive land acquisition (Panda 2017). The project was going to lead to the loss of homes and livelihoods for thousands of Sri Lankans residing in the area (Panda 2017). Additionally, the legal framework of the agreement between CMPort and the Sri Lankan government had no guarantee for employees of the Magampura Port Management Company (Panda 2017). Not only were citizens going to be left without their homes and land, but they would also be stripped of their wages. The protests were so severe that the Lands Ministry had to suspend the survey temporarily (Panda 2017). Sri Lankan government officials, however, made it clear that the project would proceed and that they would offer compensation for any private property seized by this acquisition (Panda 2017).

While the government temporarily dismissed the civilian protests, the protests highlight the disconnect and increasing frustrations between the Sri Lankan government's actions and public interest. Instead of protecting homes and livelihoods, the government focused more on long-term financial stability and China's allyship. The importance of China for the Sri Lankan government to avoid international scrutiny for its human rights
abuses was so immense that the government had to prioritize long-term interests vested in China over short-term public interests. The frustration amongst the Sri Lankan public because of the government's financial dependence would only grow as the island nation awards more commercial and military contracts to China.

The Hambantota deal is considered the most remarkable example of China's "debt-trap" diplomacy in Sri Lanka. However, not only does this conception of BRI in Sri Lanka undermine Sri Lanka's agency and ability to make its own decisions, but it also takes Sri Lankan foreign debt out of context. In 2015, Sri Lanka owed more debt to the World Bank, Japan, and the Asian Development Bank than China (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021). In 2017, Sri Lankans had to repay USD 4.5 million in debt (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021). Only 5 percent of that debt could be attributed to Hambantota (Brautigam and Rithmire 2021). Although a major loss for Sri Lanka, Hambantota was neither the primary reason for Sri Lankan debt nor the sole reason for Sri Lanka's close ties with China.

2017 was also the year that the Sri Lankan government closely surveilled Chinese projects. Since 2009, public suspicion over the quality of Chinese infrastructure in Sri Lanka has increased. In 2017, the Sri Lankan government paid around IRS 4.1 billion to a Chinese contractor for the Gin-Nilwala Diversion Project (Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources Management 2017). However, contractors were paid large sums although no work had been conducted (Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources Management 2017). The Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources Management and the contractor in question were subject to an investigation by the Financial Crimes Investigation Division (FCID) for the mishandling of finances (Ministry of Irrigation and
The lack of transparency surrounding some Chinese projects made it easier for Western media to paint all Chinese projects, like Hambantota Port, as a "debt trap," corrupt transaction.

In March, a Sri Lanka-China trade agreement was close to being finalized in the face of opposition for local manufacturers. The agreement was reached between Sri Lanka and China under Sri Lanka's Tariff Liberalization Program (TLP) to cover 90 percent of tariff lines and trade value to reach 90 percent liberalization within 20 years (Department of Commerce 2017). Local manufacturers were protesting against certain agreements in the tariff plan that were favorable to China (Shepard 2017). For example, the CEO of Sri Lankan company Samson Sportswear, Ranjith Hettiarachchi, expressed concern to the Department of Commerce that since footwear does not carry any duty, Chinese shoes will flood the Sri Lankan market and overwhelm the local industry (Shepard 2017). China would effectively distort the footwear market by selling shoes at a price significantly below local market prices. A bottom-up push introduced a labeling system with minimum retail prices and importer details to assuage locals' concerns (Shepard 2017).

2017 sounded the alarm on Sri Lanka's increasing economic dependency on China. Political commentators were quick to note that China's new control over Hambantota Port added another "pearl" to its "string" (Abi-Habib 2018). However, the alarm did not slow down opportunities for cooperation even under a Sirisena government. The Chinese embassy organized numerous programs in different Sri Lankan provinces to promote the Belt and Road Initiative and increase Chinese investment in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan PM attended a Belt and Road Forum for international cooperation (Sri Lanka
The two countries also signed numerous MOUs. Some MOUs included a framework agreement for loan consultancy services for a water supply project, a wildlife project, and developing sister city relations between Monaragala and Jishan cooperation (Sri Lanka MEA 2017). Sri Lanka continued to invite China into its sphere of influence and the South Asian power dynamic by giving the power more trade and security contracts, even at the cost of public interest.

Figure 13: Cooperation, 2017

2018

2018 was similar to 2017 in terms of cooperation. There was significant progress for Chinese contractors, but Sri Lankan media and experts were becoming increasingly wary of China's presence on the island (Woody 2018). In terms of economic cooperation, Sri Lanka facilitated and organized the Belt and Road International Production Capacity Cooperation Promotion Center (Sri Lanka MEA 2018). A key seminar was held at the Kingsbury Hotel Colombo with the Deputy Finance Minister Eran Wickramarathna as chief guest (ColomboPage 2018). The seminar also organized a visit to Colombo Port City in collaboration with its developers (ColomboPage 2018). While most years after
2009 have been crucial for developing economic ties, 2018 was particularly important for developing defense ties, according to the 2018 Ministry of External Affairs annual report.

The Chinese government provided aid and resources for military enhancement in personnel training, joint training, and maritime security (Woody 2018). The Chinese government constructed the Sri Lanka Military Academy (SLMA). It later gifted the academy to the Sri Lankan army after discussions with the Office for International Military Cooperation (OIMC) and the Ministry of National Defense (Yurou 2018). Construction began in October 2014 and was entirely supervised and built by China's Academy of Military Science of the PLA (Yurou 2018). The Commandant of the Sri Lanka Military Academy said, "the new building would strengthen the longstanding cordial relationship between the Chinese People's Liberation Army and the Sri Lanka Army" (Yurou 2018).

The Chinese government also gifted a navy frigate to Sri Lanka with the intention of continuing to train the Sri Lankan military (Woody 2018). At the end of 2018, Senior Colonel Xu Jianwei, an official at the Chinese Embassy in Colombo, claimed that the Chinese government would continue to offer training courses for the Sri Lankan military (Woody 2018). The announcement of the gift of a navy frigate was accompanied by a Chinese Navy ship arriving for a four-day "goodwill" visit to Sri Lanka in October (Woody 2018).

While defense and security relations developed at high levels, the media and the public were becoming increasingly wary about the role of China in Sri Lanka's everyday life (Ramachandran 2018). Local companies were filing complaints and protesting China's influence in Sri Lanka, arguing that Chinese companies controlled over 40
percent of local construction industries (Ramachandran 2018). Chinese products, from kites to shoes, were taking over Sri Lankan markets (Ramachandran 2018). Simultaneously, Chinese construction was increasing. Three major infrastructural advancements included: a Chinese company receiving permission to pursue a major landfill project, Sri Lanka taking a USD 1 billion loan from a Chinese bank to start a railway project, and another Chinese company receiving permission to build 40,000 eco-friendly homes for war-affected people (Woody 2018). The Sirisena government tried its best to rid Sri Lanka of its dependence on China. However, Sri Lankan debt to China, both financially and with regards to protecting Sri Lanka from international human rights scrutiny, played a large role in making China's presence in Sri Lanka felt by all.

Figure 14: Cooperation, 2018

2019

2019 picked up on trends from 2018, where relations developed, but with an increasing outcry from the public about China's presence on the island. In 2019, the China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC), builder of the Lakvijaya coal power plant, received a contract valued at over IRS 4.6 billion to expand its coal yard (Wijedasa
CMEC single-handedly plays a large role in infrastructural development in Sri Lanka. The corporation supports the Greater Kurunegala Water Supply and Sewage Project and the Jaffna Kilinochchi Water Supply and Sanitation Project (Wijedasa 2019). It has also successfully competed for other key contracts, including ones for turbine maintenance.

As noted earlier, questions rose about the quality of Chinese projects and the integrity of Chinese companies. According to the Sunday Times, the China Railway Construction Corporation Ltd (CRCC) and its owned subsidiaries, including the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, were debarred by the World Bank for fraudulent practices, according to the Sunday Times (Wijedasa 2019). This Chinese company received permission to construct a multimillion-dollar port highway project in Sri Lanka (Wijedasa 2019). As a result of its fraudulent practices, the company lost its eligibility to participate in World Bank-financed projects until released from certain obligations (Wijedasa 2019). This incident highlights the Sri Lankan government's inability to hold Chinese contractors accountable to mutually and internationally accepted standards. Sri Lanka needed China as a partner to solve the human rights issue and supply weapons. Thus, the low-quality of construction was negligible for the Sri Lankan government.

Security cooperation was largely successful in 2019. While the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry has not publicly released an analysis of their 2019 objective indicators, several goals suggest that the Ministry was looking forward to strengthening ties with China by furthering the Belt and Road Initiative and joining Chinese military exercises (Sri Lanka MEA 2019). A company of 110 Sri Lankan Navy personnel, comprised of 92
sailors and 18 officers, went to China to undergo a month-long specialized training onboard a Chinese frigate (Zhou 2019). The Sri Lankan Navy expected the frigate as a gift after the exercise (Zhou 2019). The increasing security ties between both countries suggest that Sri Lanka's dependence on China is not limited to commercial development and human rights protection but has expanded into militaristic training. Having proved itself as an all-weather friend through Sri Lanka's human rights issue, China has become one of Sri Lanka's most indispensable partners, if not the most important.

While the government's relations with China were growing, there was increasing dissatisfaction amongst the citizenry over China's presence on the island. In 2019, there were around 30,000 semi-skilled and unskilled Chinese workers in Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka MEA 2019). There were strategic bomb attacks at Chinese-operation construction sites (Zhou 2019). Chinese companies, involved in as much as 40 percent of construction in Sri Lanka, recalled some of their key staff back to China (Zhou 2019). Most Chinese blue-collar workers refused to show up to work out of safety concerns (Zhou 2019). The bombings represent the frustration of Sri Lankan residents who became displaced and lost their livelihood because of Chinese contracting. Sri Lanka is battling a conflict of interest between a government that needs to manage its debt and a people who are trying to make a living.
Conclusion

In 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sri Lanka faced major economic losses due to China's absence. Sri Lanka's tourism industry suffered a hefty blow with the absence of Chinese tourists. 1300 Chinese nationals traveled to Sri Lanka daily in 2019, according to Immigration Controller General Pasan Ratnayake (World Bank 2019). By January 28th, 2020, numbers were down to 90 tourists a day before coming to a complete stop in March (World Bank 2019). Another large industry impacted by COVID-19 was the local apparel industry (World Bank 2019). According to the Sri Lanka Apparel Exporters Association, Sri Lanka ships the majority of its raw material for its apparel manufacturing companies from China. With Chinese operations on pause, numerous Sri Lankan factories have reduced their work times or ceased operations until China begins exporting materials again (World Bank 2019). Sri Lanka's dependence on China is not a theme of the past but a concern for the future.
China-Sri Lanka relations, in recent years, have been characterized by many themes. Scholars studying this bilateral relation, like Harsh Pant (2015 and 2017) and T.V. Paul (2018 and 2019), focus on the larger events that define China-Sri Lanka relations until the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009. This analysis, however, looks at China-Sri Lanka relations through an empirical lens of post-conflict development. This chapter's analysis argues four points. First, it shows how different domestic governments in Sri Lanka have been more pro-China than others. The Rajapaksa government has been more pro-China than the Sirisena government. Second, Sri Lanka's human rights issue has served as the crux of modern-day China-Sri Lanka relations, where the issue has reinforced trade and security ties at the cost of Sri Lankan finances. Third, the Sri Lankan government has willingly made the trade-off between debt and China's resources. Sri Lanka has not been the victim of "debt-trap" diplomacy but has put itself in a debt position by consistently inviting China into its trade and security spheres with limited conditions attached and a lack of accountability to hold China to high standards. Fourth,
the Sri Lankan government values China's support, both domestically and internationally, over the short-term interests of its citizens. This increasing public frustration has put a rift between the government and the people. While China-Sri Lanka relations show how Sri Lanka has actively brought China into the South Asian power dynamic, it is critical to assess how India-Sri Lanka relations have shaped the South Asian power transition.

India and Japan have been working together to balance against China's influence in Sri Lanka. Most recently, in January 2021, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced Sri Lanka's re-engagement in an investment project to develop a deep-sea terminal next to the Chinese-run Colombo International Container Terminal, according to Al Jazeera (2021). While Sri Lanka insists that its ports will not be used for military purposes, India and Japan's efforts to invest in port-building seem to directly respond to the fear that China is gaining an increasing naval advantage in the Indian Ocean. The following examination looks at the ways in which India-Sri Lanka relations have responded to India's domestic, geopolitical, and geoeconomic concerns.
Chapter 5: India-Sri Lanka Relations

Introduction

India and Sri Lanka are geographically close neighbors, with only a small portion of the Indian Ocean separating the two (Bullion 1996). The two countries have a long history together, including a shared colonial experience under British rule (Pant 2017). While colonialism has facilitated similar world views on the part of both countries, some differing strategic imperatives and national interests have constructed foreign policies that have been at odds with one another (Pant 2017). This empirical chapter assesses India-Sri Lanka relations by looking at cooperation and conflict from the end of British colonialism in India, around 1947, to the recent period up to 2020.

First, this chapter will begin with a pre-ethnic conflict to post-ethnic conflict historical analysis of critical conjectures that have shaped modern-day bilateral relations. The brief historical overview will highlight the influence of Putnam's two-level game theory on Sri Lanka-India relations. The domestic win-set of both countries, specifically Tamil Nadu's pressure on the Indian national government and Sri Lanka's human rights issue, has hindered bilateral relations at several moments. Second, an empirical analysis of cooperation and conflict from 2013 to 2019 shows the direction the bilateral relationship has taken after the war ended in 2009. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the chosen dates are after the end of the civil war. The Sri Lanka Ministry of External Affairs has also made publicly available annual reports for these years. The 7-year analysis shows that Sri Lanka's security and trade relations with India and China are now relatively equal. Where once India had a powerful voice in the region, China is now an equal-parts and almost more significant business partner and weapons distributor. In this shift, Sri Lanka’s actions and choices are important to consider. Sri Lanka has
intentionally invited China into economic and defense spheres to check and balance India. As a result, there has been a regional power transition in South Asia. The power transition was partly facilitated by Sri Lanka's foreign policy choices and the unintended effects of its domestic politics, all of which have shaped the triangular nature of the emerging relationship.

**Methods**

The conducted empirical analysis combines an assessment of Sri Lanka's Ministry of External Affairs annual reports and a newspaper analysis. The Sunday Times archives were analyzed for any mention of India from 2013 onwards. The events were coded as positive or negative "security," "trade," or "tourism." For example, if a defense contract reneged or if there was a failed summit, that event would be coded as "negative security." An event like an increase in foreign exchange students or tourists would be coded as "positive tourism." Each type of event held a different weight. A security event was weighted as a 3, a trade event was a 2, and a tourism event was a 1. Weights were assigned in this manner because security cooperation is more substantive and impactful regarding foreign policymaking and implementation than people-to-people relations. As shown in the empirical section, the graphs show the frequency and levels of cooperation, in the form of built or upheld agreements, and competition, in the form of broken agreements, between India and Sri Lanka.

**Bilateral History**

After British colonialism, Sri Lanka was wary of Indian regional dominance. British dominion, from 1948 to 1972, was Sri Lanka’s response to its fear of Indian hegemony (Manoharan 2011). Sri Lanka essentially gave the British sustained control over some military and naval bases to ensure that the island was safe, security-wise, from
the potential of Indian imperialism (Bullion 1996). Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru took a “cautious optimism” approach with Sri Lanka, according to Manoharan (2011). The upper echelons of Sri Lankan leadership were often unfriendly to India. The government suspended Indian laborers in Colombo and initiated the political persecution of Sri Lankan Tamils (Bullion 1990). Nehru, optimistically, attributed initial Sri Lankan foreign policy failures to the island’s “limited world and experience with foreign relations” (Manoharan 2011)

Nehru's caution resulted from Sri Lankan foreign policy actions against Indian interests. However, his optimism was rooted in a personal relationship with Sri Lanka's Prime Minister (Krishna 1990). Personal diplomacy defined the first phase of India-Sri Lanka relations. For example, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Nehru, and later between Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Indira Gandhi, were close friends (Krishna 1990). The Bandaranaike's, Nehru, and Gandhi all valued international cooperation and disarmament (Krishna 1990). Personal diplomacy, however, could not maintain long-term relations for both countries (Krishna 1990). Two issues were static: concerns over maritime boundaries in the Indian Ocean and the treatment of Indian Tamils (Krishna 1990).

As mentioned in the historical chapter, Sri Lankan domestic political institutions isolated Indian Tamils. Indian Tamils were "brought as indentured laborers by the British at the beginning of the nineteenth century, mainly from southern India, to work in coffee, rubber, coconut and tea plantations" (Manoharan 2011). Indian Tamils were excluded from political discourse through legislation like the Sinhala Only Act and had little political legitimacy (Wickremesinghe 2014). The frustrations of the Indian Tamils culminated in the decades-long civil war.
Ethnic Conflict-Hands On

The secessionist movement launched by the LTTE in the late 1970s resulted from mismanaged autonomy demands on the part of the Sri Lankan government. India was the most involved external actor during the ethnic conflict for several reasons. First, it was in the geostrategic interest of India to promote stability in the region (Manoharan 2011). Second, as a regional power, it was in India's interest to strike a balanced negotiation with the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil rebels (Manoharan 2011). If India had been successful in this pursuit, it would have reinforced its reliability as a regional power and its role as an ally to Sri Lanka and other small South Asian states.

However, caught between the interests of its domestic Tamil community and the territorial integrity of its neighbor Sri Lanka, the Indian national government was domestically constrained. New Delhi attempted to mediate a conversation with the Sri Lankan government and the rebels (Manoharan 2011). In August 1985, India, Sri Lanka, and the rebels met to resolve the conflict (Bullion 1996). The talks were inconclusive (Bullion 1996). In 1987, once the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was signed, the Indian national government involved Indian Peacekeeping Forces in Sri Lanka's domestic conflict (Bullion 1996).

Indian Peacekeeping Forces (IPKF) were deployed in Sri Lanka to promote democratic practices and protect the integrity of elections (Bullion 1996). The IPKF had some successes. The forces succeeded in "conducting violence-free and high-turnout elections in the North East" (Mehta 2008). While the IPKF succeeded in encouraging the highest voter turnout in the North East for elections, the forces also inspired increasing anti-Indian sentiment amongst the Sri Lankan population (Manoharan 2011). Citizens
perceived the forces as India's means to get involved in Sri Lanka's domestic conflict (Manoharan 2011). There was increasing resistance from factions in the Sri Lankan government and most of the LTTE (Mehta 2008). The LTTE would launch strategic assaults against the forces. By the end of the IPKF's tenure in the 1990s, the LTTE murdered over 1,200 IPKF troops (Mehta 2008). The forces, essentially, were a manifestation of the Sri Lankan people's fear that India had imperialist intentions in the region. The main concern regarding the forces was that the Sri Lankan people did not want "outsiders" involved in the war (Mehta 2008). While the force did bring some stability to Sri Lanka, they increased anti-Indian sentiment at the cost of India's reputation on the island.

**Ethnic Conflict-Hands Off**

S.D. Muni (1993) argues that in the early 1990s that India's informal "hands-off policy" towards Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict was a consequence of two major events. First, the Sri Lankan government asked the IPKF to withdraw from the island (Muni 1993). The forces left the island, having lost a little over one thousand troops (Muni 1993). Second, the LTTE assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (Muni 1993). The latter increased anti-LTTE sentiment in India and inspired the national government to keep a distance from the ethnic issue in Sri Lanka.

Much to the displeasure of Tamil Nadu, India banned the LTTE in 1992 (Muni 1993). The LTTE, which the Indian government once supported because of Tamil Nadu's insistence, was now the common enemy of the Indian and Sri Lankan governments. Although India was more hands-off after 1991, India still played a significant role in mediating conversations between the Sri Lankan government and the rebels (Muni 1993).
Norway took the lead on mediation efforts, but India was brought in confidence on most issues (Manoharan 2011).

When Mahinda Rajapaksa rose to power in 2005, the peace process broke down (Pant 2017). Rajapaksa was adamant about conducting a strong and decisive military attack on the rebels (Wickremesinghe 2014). According to Manoharan (2011), Rajapaksa effectively used the "China card" against New Delhi. India wanted to maintain good relations with Sri Lanka but had to consider Tamil Nadu's sentiments (Pant 2017). The Tamil Nadu factor was the domestic constraint on India's relations with Sri Lanka during the war. Referring to Putnam's (1988) two-level game theory, India's domestic win-set limited the opportunities that "chief negotiators" like the national government had to build strong relations with Sri Lanka. India had limited options to assure the Sri Lankan government of its allyship without upsetting Tamil Nadu. Despite domestic constraints, India banned the Tigers and cracked down on the LTTE's supply lines that ran through Southern India (Muni 1993).

While India was more hands-off in terms of conflict intervention after the 90s, economic and cultural bilateral relations prospered. The Indo-Lanka Free Trade Agreement, which liberalized trade between the two nations by reducing tariffs and duties, was signed by both governments in 2000 (Kelegama and Mukherji 2007). India was also Sri Lanka’s largest trading partner well into the 21st century. In 2010, biannual trade between both countries was around USD 2 billion (India MEA 2010). India had also increased its foreign direct investment in Sri Lanka, with estimates ranging upwards of USD 500 million in the early 2000s (Pant 2017). In terms of people-to-people
relations, Indian tourists accounted for 21.4 percent of all Sri Lankan tourists during the course of the war (Manoharan 2011).

**Post-conflict**

After the conflict came to an end, India sent millions of dollars’ worth of humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka for two reasons (Pant 2017). First, India sought to ensure that Sri Lanka does not seek assistance from other countries, like China. Second, the aid signaled to the world that Indo-Lanka relations are still headed in a positive direction. New Delhi sent USD 100 million for relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction purposes immediately after the war (Business Standard 2009). Tamil Nadu sent a separate aid package worth USD 5 million (Business Standard 2009). India also sent 10,400 tons of steel and 400,000 bags of cement for the reconstruction of homes for internally displaced people (The Hindu 2009). The national government initiated an agricultural renewal program valued upwards of USD 6 million, including a large supply of seeds and farming supplies and 500 tractors (Business Standard 2009). The humanitarian assistance targeted at the Sri Lankan Tamil community was strategically intended to assure Tamil Nadu that "the interests of their brethren" were not ignored in favor of strong neighborly relations (Manoharan 2011).

Aside from grants, India has set up a strong line of credit for Sri Lanka. India established a credit line to Sri Lanka valued at USD 167.4 million to repair the Colombo-Matara railway (High Commission of India in Sri Lanka 2011). India also sent a USD 800 million credit line to reconstruct other railway lines in northern Sri Lanka to boost infrastructural connectivity (High Commission of India in Sri Lanka 2011). India has also invested in several Sri Lankan infrastructural projects, including a critical 500 MW coal-
based power plant in Trincomalee, inter-connectivity electricity grids, and numerous development projects in education and health (High Commission of India in Sri Lanka 2011). India's investments have come with governance conditionality founded on one main issue: the political resettlement of Sri Lankan Tamils through the proper implementation of the 13th Amendment (Pant 2017).

The 13th Amendment, as mentioned in the historical chapter, was a product of the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord, which promoted the devolution of federal power to local provinces (Mehta 2008). The measure failed and was reversed after the northern provincial council threatened to secede during the third phase of the civil war (Mehta 2008). India has been pushing for the revival and implementation of the 13th Amendment as an interim measure (Pant 2017). India will continue to incentivize the implementation of the 13th Amendment until a final solution is reached through the All-Party Representative Committee (ARPC) (Pant 2017).

In the next section, an annual empirical analysis of Sri Lanka-India relations looks particularly at the ways in which both countries have handled the challenges that have faced them since the end of the war. As aforementioned, the issue of the 13th Amendment remains at the core of India-Sri Lanka relations in the past decade. India has been pushing for its implementation for over 12 years (Manoharan 2011). Additionally, there are concerns over the safety of Indian fishermen and disputed maritime boundaries. Lastly, there is the concern of trade and extra-regional players, primarily China, influencing Sri Lankan foreign policy and attitudes towards India.
2013

There were a couple of large issues looming over Indo-Lanka relations in 2013. First, there were tensions over the 2013 UNHRC resolution, explained in the previous chapter. The resolution was perceived as "anti-Sri Lanka" by the Sri Lankan government. The resolution called for Sri Lanka to investigate its war crimes (UNHRC 2013). India tried to balance the domestic constraint placed by Tamil Nadu and the neighborly demands of Sri Lanka to the best of its abilities. India told the Sri Lankan government that it was responsible for "watering down contents of the resolution" (The Sunday Times 2013). This statement implied that India assisted Sri Lanka in ensuring that Sri Lanka's punishment was not as severe as it could have been. India also conveyed to Tamil Nadu that the Indian national government suggested consequential amendments to the resolution. However, the United States, who was the resolution's sponsor, would not allow them (The Economic Times 2013). Unfortunately, the domestic narrative to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) did not sell. The DMK formally pulled out of Manmohan Singh's United Progressive Alliance government in March of 2013 due to its soft approach against the Sri Lankan government (The Economic Times 2013). India was trying, but seemingly failing, to navigate two competing entities, narrating different stories to both.

After tensions rose between Sri Lanka and India after the 2013 UNHRC vote, Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon visited Colombo to hold talks on a trilateral maritime security treaty amongst India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives (India MEA 2013). Following the meeting, the three countries agreed on a roadmap for future cooperation in maritime security (India MEA 2013). They signed an Outcome Document
outlining further collaborative measures in several areas. First, they signed the Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) (India MEA 2013). Second, they agreed to strengthen the coordination of maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) (India MEA 2013). Third, they agreed to cooperate on issues of marine oil pollution (India MEA 2013). Fourth, the nations agreed to share information on illegal maritime activities and piracy (India MEA 2013). Fifth, and most importantly, the three agreed to expand 'DOSTI' (friendship) exercises, a cooperation exercise aimed to project a common goal of maintaining safer seas (India MEA 2013).

Additionally, Menon discussed implementing the 13th Amendment, a provision at the top of Indian priorities in Sri Lanka (India MEA 2013). On the topic of the 13th Amendment, Rajapaksa noted that the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) was the best forum to reach a consensus on implementing the 13th Amendment (Sri Lanka MEA 2013). Rajapaksa also told Menon to encourage the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) to participate in the PSC since the TNA have boycotted the PSC (Srinivasan 2013). Opposition parties, all led by Ranil Wickremesinghe, doubt the PSC's ability to arrive at a fair decision on the 13th Amendment (Srinivasan 2013). The implementation has been particularly challenging without the full involvement of all minority parties, some of whom want the 13th Amendment implemented in its original form and others who would like it changed (Srinivasan 2013). While economic and trade partnerships between the two countries were growing, the bilateral relationship would be stalled until the Sri Lankan national government granted the proper devolution of power.

Many Sri Lankan politicians and citizens have seen the 13th Amendment as a means for India to gain control over Northern Sri Lanka (Pant 2017). Several analysts
suggest that the devolution of power to provincial councils, an administrative failure of the past, is a "Made in India" model forced upon Sri Lanka (Pant 2017). India has put continued pressure on the 13th Amendment to increase Tamil representation in politics (Manoharan 2011). However, Rajapaksa held in 2013 that the devolution of power in the North could be a threat to Sri Lanka's national security if a pro-India party comes to power at the regional level (Srinivasan 2013). India has a clear interest in implementing the Amendment for geopolitical and domestic incentives, given that northern Sri Lanka is the closest landmass to Tamil Nadu. However, the Rajapaksa government consistently delayed implementing the 13th Amendment, neither providing a public reason for its delay nor an alternative to the Amendment.

NSA Menon was not the only upper-level official to visit Sri Lanka in 2013; Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid also a paid formal visit. On a two-day trip, Khurshid addressed bilateral trade issues, development cooperation, and, primarily, the detention of Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan authorities (India MEA 2013). The Tamil Nadu state government was putting pressure on the national government to release Tamil fishermen apprehended by Sri Lanka (Srinivasan 2013). On the Sri Lankan side, Sri Lanka confirmed with Khurshid that PM Manmohan Singh would attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Colombo in the following month (Sri Lanka MEA 2013).

Khurshid’s visit highlights the importance of the poaching issue across maritime boundaries that haunts the Indo-Lanka relationship (Sri Lanka MEA 2013). Sri Lankan Foreign Minister G.L. Peiris noted that the issue of illegal poaching by Indian fishermen in SL waters is a cause for great concern for Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka MEA 2013). Given the
high incidence of poaching in Sri Lankan waters by Indian fishermen, Minister Peiris emphasized the need for a deterrent. He stated that Indian poaching directly affects the lives of Sri Lankan fisher communities who, after years of deprivation due to the conflict, were now beginning to rebuild their lives by engaging in their traditional livelihoods (Sri Lanka MEA 2013). Although discussed at numerous meetings and summits, the poaching issue will be an unresolved issue for years to come. While complications and competition surrounding issues of human rights and poaching defined 2013, 2014 brought upon a new era of cooperation centered on the election of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

**Figure 17: Cooperation, 2013**

2014 ushered in a new era of cooperation in Indo-Lanka relations. From 2013 to 2014, India has high peaks of cooperation but also lower troughs in terms of broken security or economic agreements. 2014 began with India abstaining on a UNHRC resolution against Sri Lanka's human rights record during the war (Kurukulasuriya 2014). India opposed the inclusion of the operative paragraph 10(b), which calls on the Office of the High Commissioner of Human rights to "undertake a comprehensive investigation into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights" (UNHRC 2014). The Indian
statement suggested the investigation would be highly intrusive and undermine Sri Lanka's sovereignty (Kurukulasuriya 2014). The abstention was a mark of progress in Indo-Lanka relations, as the public and the government saw India's vote as a sign of a shared commitment towards moving on from the civil war.

Sri Lanka's invitation to Modi's inauguration made the country hopeful about the future of Indo-Lanka relations. Sri Lankan newspapers labeled the event as a "mini-SAARC summit" (The Sunday Times 2014). Modi, however, did not waste time in bringing up his concern about the implementation of the 13th Amendment. In a private meeting between Rajapaksa and himself, he urged for the "early and full implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution" (The Sunday Times 2014). Modi said the Sri Lankan Government "should expedite the process of national reconciliation in a manner that meets the aspirations of the Tamil community for a life of equality, justice, peace, and dignity in a united Sri Lanka" (The Sunday Times 2014). However, Rajapaksa publicly stated that he made no such assurance to Modi during his visit to India (The Sunday Times 2014).

From an economic perspective, Modi also encouraged the expedition of several agreements signed between Sri Lanka EAM Peiris and then-Indian EAM Salman Khurshid (Manu 2014). Modi was referring to eight different agreements for the establishment of a comprehensive power project. The Trincomalee Power Company Limited (TPCL) and the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) intended to run the project, with both holding equal shares (Manu 2014). Among the agreements were a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), a Land Lease Agreement (LLA), and a Coal Supply Agreement (CSA), among other plans (Manu 2014). The cost of construction was estimated to be
around USD 512 million (Manu 2014). Upon his 2014 return from New Delhi, Rajapaksa tweeted that he had directed the work on the project to be expedited (Manu 2014). While the Tweet suggested that plans for the power project were stalled for some time, New Delhi received assurance that Rajapaksa was listening and acting upon Modi’s concerns (Manu 2014).

While economic and security cooperation enhanced significantly from the previous year, the major unresolved issue was the poaching concern. There was series of back and forth on the poaching issue (Rubatheesan 2014). Sri Lanka had arrested more Indian fishermen and refused to release them without upper-level talks with Indian officials (Rubatheesan 2014). Sri Lanka then rejected an Indian proposal on the poaching issue that would allow Indian fishermen to enter Sri Lankan water three days a week through an MoU with the Indian government (Rubatheesan 2014). Indian officials also requested establishing a legal mechanism for the release of Indian fishermen and their boats (Rubatheesan 2014). This suggestion was also rejected by Sri Lanka, with 2014 ending with no change in the Sri Lankan policy towards poaching (Rubatheesan 2014). While poaching was unresolved, Indo-Lanka relations were in a prime position to continue developing with the onset of 2015.
2015

2015 marked an unexpected yet positive turn in Indo-Lanka relations with the election of Maithripala Sirisena to the office of Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. An empirical comparison of both Chinese and Indian cooperation with Sri Lanka suggests that this year was much better for Indo-Lanka relations than Sino-Lanka relations. This year was significant for strengthened economic relations between the two countries. The countries initiated several projects in areas of business and trade. Most importantly, India and Sri Lanka signed Rs. 2.5 billion train deal (Manu 2015). An Indian investor, Shreepati Edifice, also planned to construct Sri Lanka's tallest building in a tube-shaped structure to honor Arjuna Ranatunga's World Cup-winning 1996 cricket team (Manu 2015). The structure was valued at USD 330 million (Manu 2015). Additionally, an India-based green energy firm, Sustainable Green Energy, was given government permission to conduct an industrial venture on sustainable bamboo cultivation in Northern Sri Lanka (Manu 2015). The project had an investment value of USD 20 million (Manu 2015).
Sirisena visited Delhi in 2015 (Sri Lanka MEA 2015). The high-profile visit resulted in several signed agreements for cooperation. One of the most critical agreements resulted in a civil nuclear energy cooperation pact between Colombo and New Delhi (Sri Lanka MEA 2015). Sirisena also demonstrated his willingness to restore strong relations with India at the cost of cooperation with the Chinese. Sri Lanka suspended USD 1.5 billion worth of contracts with Chinese investment companies that included luxury real estate projects, the largest of several Chinese investments in Sri Lankan ports and infrastructure, on the insistence of New Delhi (Peri 2015). Sri Lanka's suspension of Chinese projects showed that it highly regarded Indian interests and wanted India. Further, it demonstrated that Sri Lanka wanted India to feel secure in the Indo-Lanka relationship, given Sri Lanka's growing allegiance to China. After Sirisena's successful visit to New Delhi, Modi visited Sri Lanka.

Modi visited Sri Lanka in 2015, the first visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Sri Lanka in 28 years (Pant 2017). Modi’s visit seemed to be critical to the implementation of his “Neighborhood First” policy. The policy sought to improve India’s ties with the South Asian neighborhood and reassure South Asian small states, like Sri Lanka, that India was an all-weather ally (Harris 2015). Modi was the first Indian Prime Minister and second foreign leader after British Prime Minister David Cameron to visit war-ravaged Jaffna (Harris 2015). Modi gifted homes to the Tamil population built with Indian assistance (Harris 2015). Modi was quoted saying that India stands with Sri Lanka "to build a future that accommodates all sections of society, including Tamils, for peace, justice, and equality in Sri Lanka" (Harris 2015). This statement falls in line with Modi and the Indian government’s insistence on the proper implementation of the 13th
Amendment to restore political rights and representation to Sri Lankan Tamils. Modi’s visit was also monumental for Indo-Lanka economic and people-to-people relations.

Modi's visit to Sri Lanka in 2015 also resulted in four major agreements. First, India granted visa exemptions for holders of diplomatic passports (Sri Lanka MEA 2015). Second, both countries granted mutual assistance in customs (Sri Lanka MEA 2015). Third, the countries signed a memorandum of understanding for youth development (Sri Lanka MEA 2015). Fourth, Indian established a museum in Sri Lanka dedicated to Rabindranath Tagore (Sri Lanka MEA 2015). India also offered a new line of credit of USD 380 million for Sri Lanka's railway sector (India MEA 2015). Additionally, India committed to establishing Trincomalee, in southern India, as a petroleum hub for Sri Lanka's state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (Sri Lanka MEA 2015). During Modi's first full year in office and Sirisena's first couple of months in office, Indo-Lanka relations prospered.

2016 witnessed the 9th session of the Sri Lanka-India Joint Commission led by Indian EAM Sushma Swaraj, Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena, Sri Lankan PM
Ranil Wickremesinghe (Sri Lanka MEA 2016). The Joint Commission covered a range of issues, including the progress of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), a consideration of new Small Development Project models, and the resumption of a ferry service connecting Colombo-Cochin-Male (Sri Lanka MEA 2016). The commission also considered the poaching issue, a concern at the center of much tension in the bilateral Indo-Lanka relationship (Sri Lanka MEA 2016).

The commission agreed to initiate the voluntary return and repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from India (Sri Lanka MEA 2016). On poaching, Sri Lanka expressed strong concern over Indian fishermen's abuse of the environment and the threat of trespassing to Sri Lankan fishers (Sri Lanka MEA 2016). The commission highlighted the need to identify innovative solutions but seems not to have identified any solutions themselves (Sri Lanka MEA 2016). While the poaching issue remained unresolved, the commission deliberated on the Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ECTA) (Sri Lanka MEA 2016).

The ECTA is a diplomatic arrangement that emulates a proto freedom-of-movement system concerning trade-in services (Ramakrishnan 2016). The proposal aims to introduce low-cost goods for low-income people in Sri Lanka (Ramakrishnan 2016). For India, the agreement looks to increase the sale of high-end goods in India and make Sri Lanka attractive for increase foreign direct investment (FDI) (Ramakrishnan 2016). The impact of the agreement, according to experts, is estimated to add USD 500 billion to the shared economy (Ramakrishnan 2016). The ETCA faced challenges on the part of the Sri Lankan people. Several Sri Lankan trade unions opposed the Act because they worried that it would exploit cheaper laborers in Sri Lanka (Ramakrishnan 2016). Despite
local opposition, the Act's details were finalized and signed by the two-state leaders by the end of the year (Ramakrishnan 2016). While India had a successful year with regards to strengthening economic ties, China had a better year with Sri Lanka in terms of security. China was sending more military equipment, personnel and was in the works of gaining primary control over the Hambantota Port in southern Sri Lanka. However, 2017, like 2016, saw an immense development of Indo-Lanka economic relations.

![Cooperation, 2016](image)

**Figure 20: Cooperation, 2016**

**2017**

Although 2017 saw an escalation of the poaching issue and China's rising influence in Sri Lanka due to its new control over operations in the Hambantota Port, Indo-Lanka economic relations prospered. The two countries signed many new agreements, including the Trincomalee oil farm deal, a new MoU for development, and the entry of Indian corporations into Sri Lankan markets (Sri Lanka MEA 2017). Trincomalee is in northern Sri Lanka and close to southern India. Its oil farm deal was a joint venture between the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) (Shepard 2017). India has been pushing for the Trincomalee deal to offset China's growing influence in southern parts of the island, including Hambantota.
(Shepard 2017). In 2012, the Rajapaksa administration rejected India's request to invest upwards of USD 5.2 million to renovate and develop the upper tank farm (Shepard 2017). India wanted first to renovate ten tanks and turn the project into an international oil storage facility that would "provide an alternative to Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)" (Shepard 2017). When Sirisena came into office alongside PM Wickremesinghe, India reinvigorated its push for the Trincomalee oil farms (Shepard 2017). In 2017, PM Wickremesinghe mandated the establishment of a committee to negotiate the development of the Trincomalee upper oil tank farm with India (Shepard 2017).

The development of the Trincomalee oil farm was part of a larger Memorandum of Understanding for "cooperation in economic projects" signed by the two countries in 2017 (Sri Lanka MEA 2017). The MoU's objective was "to achieve greater economic, investment and development cooperation in a progressive manner, through joint ventures and other cooperative activities that ensure the wellbeing of the people of the two countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit" (Sri Lanka MEA 2017). Not only was there an agreement to establish and expand petroleum refineries in Sri Lanka, but Sri Lanka also encouraged Indian companies to invest in a Container Terminal in the Port of Colombo (Sri Lanka MEA 2017). The MoU also affirmed the establishment of special economic zones, the development of the Dambulla-Trincomalee road, and the development of the railway sector (Sri Lanka MEA 2017).

In terms of security, there was some progress concerning the poaching issue. While Sri Lanka arrested hundreds of Indian fishermen and held captive hundreds of vessels, there was an exchange of fishermen prisoners (Kamalendran 2017). The Indian
government also gifted a ship to the Sri Lankan Navy (Kamalendran 2017). India sent the Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) to Sri Lanka to expand its navy's operational capabilities (Kamalendran 2017). In 2017, both China and India had similar levels of security and trade progress with Sri Lanka. 2018 progressed cooperative ties, with more evidence of India making strategic geopolitical moves to balance China's growing economic and security influence in Sri Lanka.

![Cooperation, 2017](image)

**Figure 21: Cooperation, 2017**

**2018**

2018 saw growing cooperation between the two countries. First, the Indian Airports Authorities gained newfound control over the Mattala Airport (Sri Lanka MEA 2018). Second, the Indian government provided living assistance to Hambantota residents (Sri Lanka MEA 2018). Third, Sri Lanka considered numerous Indian companies for new infrastructural projects (Sri Lanka MEA 2018). The Airports Authority of India (AAI) purchased a controlling stake of 70 percent, for USD 325 million, of Mattala International Airport in a joint venture partnership with the Sri Lankan government (Srinivasan 2018). Political analysts saw the move as an effort to offset China's presence in Sri Lanka (Srinivasan 2018). The Mattala International Airport would have been the
first time AAI would manage an airport outside India (Srinivasan 2018). The Sri Lankan Civil Aviation Authority will continue to preside over aircraft movement and the use of air space (Srinivasan 2018). The agreement also explicitly noted that the Indian government, like the Chinese government in Hambantota, would not be allowed to use the airport for any military purposes (Srinivasan 2018).

In another foreign policy decision that seemed to directly respond to China's new control of the Hambantota Port, India signed two MoU's with the Sri Lankan government to provide living assistance to Hambantota residents (Sri Lanka MEA 2018). Collectively, the MoU's would provide 1,200 houses across 50 villages to a total amount of Sri Lankan rupees 600 million (India MEA 2018). Additionally, India provided grant assistance of Rs. 300 million for constructing the Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Auditorium at the University of Ruhuna, Matara (Sri Lanka MEA 2018). The new India-sponsored auditorium would be the largest auditorium at any university (India MEA 2018). India's efforts to give Sri Lanka grants, instead of loans, seemed to give India a minor edge in its bids for other economic prospects (Sri Lanka MEA 2018).

Sinohydro, a Chinese bidder selected to renovate northern roads, was dropped by the Sri Lankan government for Indian construction companies (Ramachandran 2018). The government then obtained two new Indian proposals from Indian companies for the same project (Ramachandran 2018). "The High Commission of India in Colombo has facilitated two contractors of which one is a Government of India owned company IRCON and a partially Government of India owned company IL&FS Transportation Networks Ltd (Public-Private Partnership company)," the memorandum reported (Ramachandran 2018). The memorandum on behalf of the Sri Lankan government also
noted that the Sri Lankan government was likely to give the contract to the Indian companies because of the "past support and cooperation extended by the Government of India on socio-economic development of Sri Lanka" (Ramachandran 2018). In 2018, India had slightly better security and trade relations with China due to the Sirisena government's intentional focus on geopolitics and India's importance as Sri Lanka's neighbor.

Sri Lanka also espoused a tone of cooperation with India for the security of the Indian Ocean Region. Defense Minister Kapil Waidyarathne also delivered a keynote at the 17th Shangri-La dialogue (Sri Lanka MEA 2018). The International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) is an independent think tank that hosts the IISS Asia Security Summit: The Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) to cultivate a sense of community among important defense and security policymakers (Sri Lanka MEA 2018). During Waidyarathna's speech, he fostered a tone for cooperation, reminding the members of the SLD that it is essential to find solutions for global issues, like human trafficking and terrorism, "not in isolation but in cooperation with all of our partners and stakeholders" (IISS 2018). The minister also noted, "Indian Ocean nations should play an active role as a contributor to maritime security in the IOR, especially given the risk of emerging-power tension in the IOR" (IISS 2018). Waidyarathne concluded his speech with a call-to-action. The minister stated that a governance mechanism was essential to ensure that regional maritime affairs were governed according to established rules and regulations (IISS 2018). The following year, 2019, marked the re-election of Indian PM Modi and a moderate progression of Indo-Lanka relations.
In 2019, there was a significant focus on furthering cultural relations between India and Sri Lanka. Indian students visited Sri Lanka on an exchange program, Sri Lanka celebrated India's 70th Republic Day, and Indian Bharatanatyam dancers performed in Colombo (Mahadura 2019). There was also the establishment of a scholarship, funded by the Indian government, to help Sri Lankan students in courses in the performing and fine arts (Mahadura 2019). While there were not many security and economic agreements signed in 2019, the re-elected Modi government made sure to let the Sri Lankan government know that it was fulfilling its role as the regional “big brother.”

When Gotabaya Rajapaksa visited Modi in New Delhi, Modi announced a USD 450 million line of credit for the island nation (Bhattacharjee 2019). Of the total amount, USD 400 million was extended to Sri Lanka to strengthen its economy, including the initiation of new solar projects (Bhattacharjee 2019). The other USD 50 million line of credit was given to the government for counterterrorism efforts (Bhattacharjee 2019). In the wake of the April 2019 Easter Sunday attack, the Indian government felt the need to
help the Sri Lankan government enhance its intelligence capabilities (Bhattacharjee 2019). The funding comes alongside Modi's claim that all Sri Lankan officers in major Indian institutions will receive counterterrorism training (Bhattacharjee 2019). 2019 marked the leveling of China and India's influence in Sri Lanka, with both countries having similar levels of security, trade, and cultural engagement with Sri Lanka.

![Cooperation, 2019](image)

**Figure 23: Cooperation, 2019**

**2020**

2020, a year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, saw minimal progress in bilateral relations. Most significantly, Sri Lanka decided that India's Adani Group would handle the East Container Terminal (ECT) operation (Dias 2020). The Adani Group would have a 49 percent stake, while the Sri Lanka Port Authority (SLPA) would maintain 51 percent (Dias 2020). While this strategic port is vital for India to compete with the Chinese-run Colombo International Container Terminal at the Colombo, the ECT is structurally inferior to the CICT. The CICT is a deep draft terminal that can handle larger, contemporary vessels (Dias 2020). The ECT, on the other hand, cannot handle such vessels (Dias 2020). Unfortunately, in March 2021, the deal between the Adani Group and Sri Lanka fell through, with the Sri Lankan government citing "a lack
of flexibility" on behalf of the Adani Group (Manoj 2021). The Adani Group insisted on the same terms and conditions set for the Chinese when they took control of the CICT (Manoj 2021). The Sri Lankan government refused, citing the 2009 recession as a reason for differences in terms and conditions (Manoj 2021). This failed deal followed India and Sri Lanka's failure to reach an agreement on the Mattala Airport in 2020.

In 2020, the Sri Lankan government halted plans to sign a management deal with India for the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (Wijedasa 2020). Aviation Minister Prasanna Ranatunga released a statement suggesting that his government was no longer interested in pursuing the deal with the Airports Authority of India after AAI failed to respond to a draft agreement (Wijedasa 2020). The stalling of the negotiations process, which began in 2017, suggests that India will neither control the Mattala Airport to balance China in Hambantota nor control the ECT to balance the Chinese-run CICT.

From 2019 to 2020, we see an equalizing of relations between India and China. Both countries have relatively the same level of involvement in the island nation, with Indian foreign policy goals compensating for Chinese initiatives. However, India has been more disadvantaged than China, given that more significant trade and security deals have fallen through for the Indian government than the Chinese government.
Conclusion

The empirical analysis of cooperation in collaboration with an assessment of significant events from Sri Lanka MEA's annual reports shows that as China has gotten more involved with Sri Lanka, India has attempted to balance China's influence by adapting its foreign policy goals. The Indian government has increased pressure on the Sri Lankan government to sign more infrastructural contracts, like those for the ECT and Mattala Airport. However, due to the Indian government's mismanagement of such contracts, both projects have failed to materialize. In theory, India should have an advantage over China due to its geographical proximity and cultural ties. However, due to domestic constraints and unresolved security issues, like poaching in the Indian Ocean, India has not been able to provide the necessary resources to the Sri Lankan government to limit the island's dependence on Chinese military aid and financial loans. Now, India and China are relatively equal-parts players in Sri Lanka. India has strong cultural, people-to-people relations, and economic ties through grants and credit with Sri Lanka. China has robust security and infrastructural ties with Sri Lanka. While Indo-Lanka relations have gotten much better under Modi's government, with India giving Sri Lanka...
COVID-19 vaccines, India faces significant challenges with balancing China in the long run (The Hindu 2021).
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In sum, Sri Lanka's domestic concern surrounding human rights violations during its civil war has served as the crux of its relations with India and China. In terms of China-Sri Lanka relations, the human rights issue brought the two countries closer. China would protect the Sri Lankan government, specifically the Rajapaksa family, in international tribunes like the United Nations. In return, Sri Lanka would provide China with critical geo-economic security and infrastructural deals. It is still unclear whether China has engaged in deliberate debt-trap diplomacy. The current media-led narrative surrounding Chinese debt-trap diplomacy makes China seem malicious while also taking away Sri Lanka's agency as a small state. Sri Lanka has willingly and actively invited the cost of Chinese debt because of the great benefit of international protection from war crimes prosecution and post-conflict development. The human rights issue has cumulated to strong security and trade ties. China-Sri Lanka relations are incredibly intertwined now, with China serving as Sri Lanka's biggest trade partner.

Meanwhile, the human rights issue has been a drag on India-Sri Lanka relations. Sri Lanka's human rights issue domestically constrains its foreign policy. The human rights issue has complicated India-Sri Lanka relations as India was consequently domestically constrained by the interests of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has withdrawn from majority coalitions in the Indian national government due to dissatisfaction with the Indian national governments handling of Sri Lanka's Tamil question. The southern state encouraged the national government to vote against the Sri Lankan government in international tribunes like the UNHRC. Moreover, the implementation of Sri Lanka's 13th Amendment continues to strain India-Lanka relations.
as India continues to push for its proper implementation and Sri Lanka avoids giving a proper answer. India has failed to take advantage of its long historical ties with the island, close geographical proximity, and "big brother"-like presence to maintain strong relations with Sri Lanka.

The triangular relationship has regional consequences. Growing Sino-Lanka ties are causing a South Asian power transition. China is balancing against India's regional hegemony by increasing its influence through small states. Small states, like Sri Lanka, are dependent on Chinese geopolitical and financial support, while India remains largely constrained by its domestic win-set. Thus, there are three areas of further research. First, the implications of the power transition on South Asian power dynamics and India's role in South Asia demand further exploration. Second, the consequences of Sri Lanka's role in India and China's geo-economic competition require more analysis beyond this thesis' scope.

Third, Sri Lanka's means of foreign policy formulation requires further research. Foreign policy formulation is complex. In Sri Lanka, the increasing Chinese footprint in local industries and fears of Indian imperialism persists. Questions remain about citizen perceptions towards both powers and the implications of their development projects on Sri Lankan livelihoods. Foreign policy is not simply about large countries but presents important consequences for individuals. Large power politics may often overlook the individuals of small states, but their stories and perceptions matter just as much.

Looking ahead, Sri Lanka has much influence in determining the nature of the triangular relationship for years to come. While Paul suggested China holds the most influence in terms of India-China competition and South Asian power dynamics, this
thesis demonstrates that Sri Lanka has the most influence in the triangular relationship. Using Paul's (2019) framework, Sri Lanka's unique agency as a South Asian small state has given Sri Lanka the ability to decide which concessions it will accept from China and India. This unique power gives Sri Lanka, as a small state, an important say in how much influence each power has in its borders. Moving forward, the Sri Lankan government must take responsibility for its human rights abuse and respect an international probe into the government and the LTTE's war crimes. The government cannot label itself as a democracy if it fails to respect substantive political and human rights. Additionally, the government cannot act against its citizen's interests by accruing further debt with China to avoid international persecution. Sri Lanka must face the consequences of its mistakes to pursue bilateral relations with India and China without the taint of its past.

It is in Sri Lanka's best interest to take responsibility for its human rights abuses. The Sri Lankan government does not have to be constrained by its domestic win-set centered on its war crimes. Further, Sri Lanka can avoid excessive dependence on the Chinese government and play a more significant role in balancing against both India and China. In terms of long-term economic growth, the Sri Lankan government's mismanagement of finances and increasing debt is unsustainable. The government's acceptance of responsibility and openness to international probes can eliminate the island nation's increasing dependence on foreign aid. The Sri Lankan government can open the country to more trade, increase domestic political stability and give officials more time to focus on issues that matter to the Sri Lankan public.
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