

China-Sri Lanka Economic and Strategic Relations and India's Response: Testing Theory of Realism

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In the new world order, China has become the second most influential nation in the world after the USA. In this context, China always tries to sustain its peaceful rise, and increase its influence around the world and South Asia is no different. As such, Sri Lanka too becomes a main economic and strategic interest country for China. Accordingly, China tries to develop the closer economic and strategic relations with Sri Lanka. India evaluated this situation has a huge challenge and threat for her to remaining as regional power in South Asia. Therefore, India tries to minimize the China-Sri Lanka economic and strategic relations, while influencing Sri Lanka as the big brother. On this basis, this study focuses to evaluate the growing China-Sri Lanka economic and strategic relations and India's response in general and particularly during the period from 2005 to 2020, while testing the theory of realism. With this broad objective, the following specific objectives have been pursued: to analysis why do China and Sri Lanka want to conduct economic and strategic relations with each other despite India's big role, to explore what foreign policy challenges does Sri Lanka face in conducting her economic and strategic relations with China in the context of growing Sino-India strategic rivalry in the Indian Ocean and to examine what are the policy options for India to avoid China's presence in Sri Lanka and protect her hegemony aspiration in south Asian region. The study was largely descriptive, and researcher used qualitative research methods for the subsequent analysis. Qualitative data were gathered by using primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, case studies, official documents, reports and GIS Mapping. The sample size was consisted of 100 respondents. The secondary data were gathered through published books, research papers, working papers, newspaper articles and internet. The study found that China has increased the economic and strategic relations with Sri Lanka over the years, providing a model of close relations between large and small countries. The following factors have been impacted to China's interest to build close economic and strategic relations with Sri Lanka; the importance of the Indian Ocean to China's rapid growth, strategic importance of Sri Lanka, balance India, survive as a hegemonic power in Asian region, and use Sri Lanka as an economic and trade hub. The study also found that Sri Lanka too has an interest to build closer economic and strategic relations with China with following reasons; survive through balance, economic benefits, no condition for borrowings and aids, and China non- interference in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka. The study further found that India's dominate behaviour towards Sri Lanka has become a realistic dynamic of closer economic and strategic relations between two countries. The study finally found that the China-Sri Lanka economic and strategic relations create a huge challenge to Indian hegemony aspiration in south Asian region, which India has dominated for many years.

Keywords: *China-Sri Lanka, Economic , Strategic Relations, Hegemony*