

MARITIME SECURITY DILEMMA IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR SRI LANKA

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This study is an attempt to investigate the existing maritime security trends and dilemmas in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The key notable trend is the strategic significance of this ocean for modern merchant maritime civilization in the global commons. The littoral states (South Asian, East African and South East Asian coastal states) and user states (China, Japan, USA, Russia. etc.) in this region have a keen interest over the maritime domain activities, where the Indian Ocean has given them an opportunity to project power over their locale to gain maritime economic advantages. The non-traditional security issues such as drug smuggling, gun running, illegal migration, maritime pollution, human smuggling and illegal unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) activities have caused maritime security implications for regional as well as extra-regional countries. There are no conventional wars in these waters at the moment. However, it is essential to understand the possibility power rivalries among key players in the IOR escalating a war in the future. This traditional and non-traditional spectrum of challenges has had a negative impact on the Sri Lankan maritime security environment. To exploit the opportunities, it is essential to understand the significance of maritime resources, maritime economy, maritime people and sea power with a focus on the strategic location of Sri Lanka in the IOR. This study attempts to examine the vulnerability of the Sri Lankan maritime security environment in the face of traditional and non-traditional security issues. The location of Sri Lanka in the IOR entails an excellent maritime geographic opportunity in terms of the availability of coasts and harbors, the proximity to important sea lines of communication and the ease of access to the open ocean. Therefore, the research problem signifies the importance of understanding the nature of maritime security issues that require Sri Lanka to collaborate with user states and littoral states in the region. The study collected data from secondary sources, such as articles, books, case studies, journals, employing a qualitative approach. This paper discusses the idea of power rivalry with a focus on the triangular balance of power in the IOR. Further, the analysis highlights the importance of developing the maritime strategies of conference diplomacy, co-operative security and interoperability to overcome existing traditional and non-traditional security issues while Sri Lanka plays a key role as a smart state in the region.

Keywords: Conference Diplomacy, Maritime Economy, Power Rivalry

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