

Nepal-India and Sri Lanka-India relations in the Regional Context since 1987

Wasana Nalawatta and Shalini Weeraratne[#]

Faculty of Law, Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka

shaliniweeraratne@ymail.com

Abstract: *Nepal is a landlocked country which is situated between the borders of two regional powers, India and China. Throughout history India has had concerns over the politics and security of Nepal. As a result of sharing borders with India, Nepal is facing political and security challenges such as cross border terrorism, crimes, smuggling of women, arms and illegal drugs. Located in the Indian Ocean close to South India, Sri Lanka faces the same issues via the sea. India exerts a considerable influence over Sri Lanka. Yet, unlike Nepal, Sri Lanka has accelerated its development in the recent past to a significant level. The prime factor of India's interest in Nepal and Sri Lanka is geopolitics. These two countries are important to India by virtue of Nepal's location between India and China in the Himalayan region and Sri Lanka's geopolitically significant location in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The objective of this paper is to comparatively analyze Nepal-India and Sri Lanka-India relations with regard to politics and security, and to highlight positive and negative impacts arising from the relations with India since 1987. The time frame was chosen in consideration with landmark moments that occurred during the Indo-Lanka accord (1987) and Nepal's economic blockade in 1989. The paper will also seek to identify ways and means through which Nepal and Sri Lanka can achieve sovereignty. Furthermore it will also seek to examine the role played by China's relations with Nepal and Sri Lanka and to compare India's responses to each of these bilateral relationships. Information in this regard will be derived from secondary sources like reference of text books, electronic data bases, journals, etc. The paper will propose that ongoing and future challenges could be overcome through lessons learned in the past and using the geographical location of both countries effectively and diplomatically.*

Keywords— Nepal, Sri Lanka, India

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Nepal

Nepal is a South Asian country located between two emerging Asian Giants and is a sovereign state. Himalayan range in North separate Nepal from China and the rest is surrounded by India.

Until Nepal becoming a Republic in May 2008, it had been ruled by monarchs for most of its modern history in relative isolation. The movement for the restoration of democracy 1990 paved the way for the first democratic election in 1991. Strikes were led by doctors, lawyers, pilots and students for this movement. King Birendra's government took a hard line at first but later decided to relinquish his power so that Nepal had its first democratic election after 32 years. As a result Nepal was able to establish a multiparty democratic system within the framework of monarchy. However later insurgency steered by Maoists broke out in 1996 ensuing 10 years civil war between Maoists and the government. In 2002 the cabinet was dissolved and King re-assumed the absolute power, resulting in several weeks of mass protest. In 2008 the democratic election held following the implementation of a nationwide Constituent Assembly declaring Nepal a Federal Democratic Republic and electing the country's first president. Between 2008 and 2011 there were four different coalition governments. Nepali Congress won the 2013 election and formed a coalition appointing President of the Nepali Congress Mr. Koirala as the Prime Minister.

Indo-Nepal friendship is formed and shaped by the geographical location and socio-cultural identities influenced by 1750km of open border (a unique feature of Indo-Nepal relations) which made communication easier and possible. Throughout Nepal's history, Indian influence could be seen very often. Therefore they have strong political and security relations.

Nepal's geostrategic location molded relations with China in a different manner. The high peaks and rough terrain towards China formed a natural barrier placing obstacles in maintaining links with China.

This is an agricultural country blessed with water resources and historical places like birth place of Lord Buddha. So far Nepal has not been able to provide a stable environment for the investments and according to UN estimates 40% of the citizens live in poverty. Nepal has a flourishing tourism industry, but she faces problems of deforestation and encroachment on animal habitat. Foreign aid is vital to the economy and heavily depends

on trade with India. As “SagarMatha” (Himalayan Mountain Range) is within the territory of Nepal, natural disasters are frequent.

B. Sri Lanka

Is one of the two countries that does not share borders in South Asia. Since the independence there were many changes in the government system. The 30 year war in Sri Lanka which ended in May 2009 and the subsequent peace resulted in the considerable progress in the economy.

Sri Lanka is one of the fast growing economies in South Asia with the budding tourism industry. As Sri Lanka is situated at an important geostrategic point she has many opportunities in developing maritime industry. In recent years Sri Lanka has taken many steps to reap benefits from its important position in the International sea route. All harbors owned by Sri Lanka are significant. Moreover utilizing natural resources like gems, fish and phosphate Sri Lanka earns foreign income. Besides these, among its main exports are tea, coconut and rubber.

C. India

India is the dominant political power in the region. In 1947 as a result of agitations by Swaraj movement led by Gandhi and Nehru, India gained independence. This federal country still has conflicts regarding border issues. It has a not so clean track record in influencing politics and security of neighboring states. The current Prime Minister Modi who opened new chapter in India's politics, stated that he is willing to continue friendly relations with other nations.

India being the largest military power in the region possesses nuclear power as well. With its fast growing economy it has become a member of BRICS too. Yet they face problems such as significant over population, environmental degradation, extensive poverty and wide spread corruption.

D. Nepali Security

Most of the Nepal security issues revolve around the open border system. One of the threats Nepal faces due to this system is that it provides a passage for the terrorists. Due to the fact that the majority of the populace in either side of the border has similar physiognomy, the porous borders between these two countries have created ample opportunities for terrorists in their countries or from a third country to cross the border unchallenged, and slip in to their territory. Therefore the peace & security were jeopardized and maintaining law & order have become formidable and expensive.

India which faces high threats from terrorism has been accusing Nepal that Pakistani ISI agents are entering in to India through Nepal. However it is impossible as Pakistanis must travel to India at first to come to Nepal, if they use the land route. Many other terrorists also escape to Nepal after attacking India. As an example, Abdul Karim Tunda, one of the India's 20 most wanted Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists, was arrested by a special cell of Delhi Police in Indo-Nepal border on August 16, 2013. Yasin Bhatkal, a co-founder of Indian Mujahideen (a militant group banned in India and listed as foreign terrorist organization by US) was also arrested near Indo-Nepal border on August 28, 2013.

Moreover Nepalese Maoist terrorists use these passages freely to enter into India and take in shelter as casualties in private hospitals in Lucknow. Recently a Lucknow Police Officer has arrested 8 Maoist terrorists with their leader Aakash Darlami and handed them over to Nepal Police.

Similarly cross border crimes such as murder, theft and rape are rampant in frontiers of both the countries.

Another major security issue is that smuggling of arms and drugs through the borders. Due to weaknesses of unrestricted border small arms manufactured in India are smuggled in. Likely various types of arms & ammunition, grenades and other war like materials are among these. These are unregistered and unlicensed weapons smuggled in mostly for the use of Maoist terrorists. In 2013 Police had arrested 7 people with dozens of small arms and stocks of ammunition from Sunsari, Jhapa and Siraha areas. Transporting and distributing of drugs is also one of the major money making sources of terrorist organizations. The open border has become a trail for transporting illegal drugs.

Further disputes like selling Nepalese girls in Indian brothels is more often done. According to UN estimates nearly 200,000 Nepalese girls are found in brothels of India. Smuggling of archeological artifacts, kidnapping and abduction of businessman & children of rich families, smuggling of goods, material & machinery, illegal migrations, smuggling of medicinal plants and herbs are other widely seen security issues. As a result of these illicit operations, the security of Nepal is at stake.

However, recently India's concern and influence on Nepal's military and security has increased. Nepal's large standing army of 96,000 with six divisions and police with 67,287 officers depend heavily on Indian aid and assistance. This tiny Himalayan region received five truck loads of bullets, bomb disposal equipment and explosive

devices in the second week of June 2014. Though India suspended her military aid in the year 2005 due to Royal takeover, in 2014 after a lapse of 9 years, India provided weapons with 70% of aid. (Rifles, helicopters, armored fighting vehicles etc.) According to Article 5 of Nepal-India peace treaty of 1950, "Nepal shall be free to import arms from a 3rd country but needs consultation with Indian government." This 65 year old treaty has compelled Nepal to completely depend on India's assistance. A clear example is where an armed personnel carrier and some 3000 American M16 A2 rifles ordered for Nepal army (during the 2002 insurgency period) was stopped by India.

In addition Gurkhas, one of the elite regiments in Indian army has Nepalese as members. Since the days of British Raj, the Nepalese have swelled the ranks of Indian military. Thus they hold joint military exercises also. Exercise "Surya Kiran" which focused on jungle warfare operations and counter insurgency tactics was the most recent conducted joint military exercise.

E. Sri Lanka Security

Indo-Lanka security ties constantly depended on the ground realities. In order to maintain their dominance throughout the region India is always concerned on the behavior of the security organizations of other surrounding states.

"A state's power can thus be understood as a combination of its capacity to influence others to behave as it wants them to and conversely, to resist the unwelcome influence of others." (Kenneth Waltz, THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS).

This can be used to reflect the Indo-Lanka relations, where India once sent Indian Peace Keeping Forces to Sri Lanka in 1987 in order to change the situation in Sri Lanka to her liking.

During the final stages of war Sri Lanka received Indian assistance and aid to combat terrorism. At the present scenario Sri Lanka took heed of Indian political and security interests during the development process and when pursuing International Relations. As India's little brother, Sri Lanka has to be careful when letting other relative countries in to Sri Lankan waters. In the year 2014 by allowing a Chinese war submarine to dock at Colombo harbor, Sri Lanka aggrieved India. So when taking the support of a third country in the developing process it is important to consider the Indian concern. As the "Hindu" has reported in the beginning of 2015, Indian government was unhappy with Chinese constructing Nelum Kuluna. According to Indian sources there is a

possibility of spying on India, if high technological equipment are installed in it.

Handling the diamond pendant of the String of Pearls: With Hambantota, Trincomalee, Colombo and Kankasanthurai ports, India always harbored a great anxiety. According to a previous Galle Dialogue, Sri Lanka has paid attention on giving India more opportunities to handle Kankasanthurai harbor.

Sri Lanka, situated in a geopolitically sensitive position very close to its powerful neighbor thus has to face with many difficult situations similarly faced by Nepal due to open border system with India. Those issues are discussed below.

Indian Ocean region is a place where there are lots of terrorism activities. During 30 years of war the narrow sea between Sri Lanka and India was a safe location for terrorist groups to get war like material. Whenever it became unsafe for a terrorist or a criminal in Sri Lanka they escaped to Indian Territory from South India after sailing the narrow straits. During the war LTTE members at times mingled with Indian fishermen and sometimes posed like South Indian fishermen came to Sri Lanka's waters for fishing. Therefore Sri Lankan Navy and Coast Guard were helpless to check or to attack them.

Moreover, most of the weapons found in LTTE bunkers were not weapons that were made in Sri Lanka but were high technological weapons used by terrorist organizations like Thaleiban and Mujahideen. The most popular way LTTE used to bring those weapons was by using narrow sea between Sri Lanka and India. A large amount of weapons was brought through Indian fishermen who entered Sri Lanka waters. Even after the war in areas like Kanthakkudi there is a large amount of illegal weapons. And criminals in South still acquire weapons made in foreign countries. This is not because of a weakness of the Sri Lankan Navy.

The illegal drug industry- which is one of the most popular ways of earning money of many an illegal organization and underworld- affects Sri Lankan security. During the war LTTE used to earn money by drug trafficking to acquire weapons. Not only LTTE the money generated from illegal drug trade is linked to international terrorism.

Some of the South Indian fishermen breach fisheries laws and trespass to Sri Lankan waters and sometimes Sri Lanka fishermen also so the same. This is a very sensitive security fact in Indo-Lanka relations. Sometimes when Indian fishermen are punished by Sri Lankan courts South

Indian politicians raise their hue & cry. Because of the political pressure apprehending those fishermen and punishing them has become highly complicated affair which may set off a powder keg. The methods they use to fish destroy maritime resources and adversely affect livelihood of Northern fisherman. The losses caused by this poaching amounts to millions of dollars and the irreparable destruction caused by this affects fishing and tourism in the north coastal areas of Sri Lanka. The worst effect is on fishermen of the North who are rebuilding their lives after the war, because for them it is impossible to compete with the Indian fishermen.

F. Nepal Politics

When discussing about Nepal's politics we can never do it without mentioning India. The 1989 economic blockade was an embarrassing and painful experience to Nepal. The reason behind it was Nepal importing weapons from China. But Indian excuse was the Nepal's refusal to renew the treaty as per the conditions laid down by India. The victory of democracy in 1991 was also supported by India. The Prime Minister Koirala's maiden foreign visit was to India. During the 10 years of Maoist insurgency India was a major party to aid and assist Nepal. During the 2008 election which was the first proper election in a decade, India's covert manipulative apparatus and the mailed fist was evident all over Nepal. The magnitude of the involvement was such that party of Maoist guerrillas was bribed by Indian agents. The Prime Minister Modi also promotes these covert operations and is an ally to in it. According to Prime Minister Bhattarai Nepal- India relations can be developed as a cooperation between neighbors. Nepal political system highly depends on India.

G. Sri Lanka Politics

In 1987, the "Operation Liberation" was launched in Jaffna peninsula involving nearly 1000 troops supported by helicopter gunships and ground attack air craft. They were just about to defeat LTTE. As civilian casualties mounted, Indian media started capitalizing on it as a developing humanitarian crisis. Relenting under the clout of a massive population in South India, Indian government called the Sri Lankan government requesting them to hold the offensive till the political negotiations began. Failing to negotiate with Sri Lanka government, India announced on 2nd June 1987 that they would send unarmed ships to Sri Lanka to provide humanitarian assistance but they were turned back by Sri Lankan Navy. With that failure, Indian Air Force turned to launch the infamous "Operation Poomalai". Five Indian Air Craft under cover of heavily armed Indian fighter jets, air dropped 25 tons of supplies in Jaffna within Sri Lankan radar coverage. At the same time Sri Lankan high

commissioner of New Delhi was informed that any attempt to stop that operation would make India launch a full scale military retaliation against Sri Lanka. With the imminent possibility of an Indian intervention President Jayewardene lifted siege of Jaffna. This led to signing of Indo-Lanka accord on July 29, 1987 (Sri Lanka under curfew) under which Sri Lankan troops withdrew from North and the IPKF followed in their wake. That was the heaviest blow from India to Sri Lankan security and politics. In the evening of that day Rajiv Gandhi was assaulted by a sailor at the guard of honor. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 reduced the Indian support to LTTE within India. Then for a considerable period Sri Lanka-India relations were fine. Even in the final war Sri Lanka got Indian assistance. After the post war period till 2015 Sri Lanka- India relations were not so cordial, Sri Lanka allying with China aggrieved India. By 2015 the two new elected leaders of both countries are looking forward to normalize relations.

H. Location and importance to India.

Nepal- According to India Himalayas has provided a magnificent frontier to them to a considerable level. In order to achieve the objective of becoming the principal power of Asia, ability to manage her immediate neighborhood is important. Nepal has a massive amount of resources which India likes to share with.

Sri Lanka- Sri Lanka is the neighbor India from south. It is located at the most specific position in the Indian Ocean. India wants its backyard neighbor to act according to her edict. When it comes to security India cannot afford an enemy to dominate Sri Lankan territory because its location is extremely important and sensitive to India's wellbeing.

I. Development

Nepal- After becoming a republic in 2008, the government has paid more attention on transforming Nepal into a higher level of development. India which surrounds landlocked Nepal from three sides with open border is crucial to this process. As Nepal lies in between two fast growing economies, they cannot afford to remain backward or under developed. They seek cooperation of both neighbors. One of their main concerns is using their water resources for the maximum benefit. But Indian influence over that has made it difficult. The threat from border issues also has hampered their development speed. Still they are incapable of providing a stable setting to draw investors.

Sri Lanka- In recent years Sri Lanka has achieved a rapid development through cooperation. Though they did not hold hands with India, they have found ways and means

to develop. As they lie on one of the most vital economic sea routes, they have expanded and developed their harbors to cater the growing maritime traffic. The tourism industry is growing day by day and the facilities provided to them encourage visitors to come over and over again. Sri Lanka has one of the best public health services in the region and they are cherishing a goal to improve their education system as the best in Asia. They struggle to get a better market for fish and other exports and combating illegal drugs has showed a fine improvement.

J.China Factor

China-Lanka. The recent cancellation of some Chinese projects by Sri Lankan government has annoyed China. The fact Sri Lankan government is trying to build close ties with India during the recent past also has drawn the Chinese attention. They are closely monitoring developments in Sri Lanka at present. Previous government has done a huge development with the help of China. Most of them were through loans with strict conditions. India which is very close to Sri Lanka, separating them from us by 100km. Unlike China India has very deep political and security relations with Sri Lanka.

“Friends may change but not neighbors who will have to live together”- Atul Bihari Vajpayee

Sri Lanka cannot afford to ally with one country because both of them are developing very fast and bears the ability to assist Sri Lanka to accelerate the growing process. Throughout the history Nepal was closer to India than with China due to geographical barriers. But after the independence they got closer regarding transportation development, secret Military Cooperation, promoting peace and purchasing arms. After the cold war China tried to make its own socialist economy. At the same time Nepal was undergoing rapid political changes. China started strengthening bonds with India too. This situation led all three countries to make closer ties but Nepal importing arms from China changed the situation and led to the economic blockade in 1989. Present pro Indian Nepalese government is forging closer ties with India. According to the government they are seeking a strong development with peace and prosperity. They want to maintain cordial relations with both countries. They want to become a development partner of India. According to them Nepal will not allow its soil to be used against the security interests of any of her neighbors.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

With the huge influence of India it is questionable whether there is genuine sovereignty in Nepal. A majority

of her imports and exports go through India. Under treaties signed in the 20th century Nepal has to await India's opinion before their military activities. In order to gain true sovereignty, maximum benefit of their resources and to stand up as a strong nation they need a policy change.

Treaties signed in 20th century no longer fulfill requirements of 21st century. Regarding their peace and security they should focus to enter into agreements and negotiations that are more favorable to them. As both goods and ideas have to be channeled through India, their possibility of going against the wishes of India is very low. The economic blockade of 1989 was the moment of that bitter truth. Though Himalayan Peaks have made communications with China very difficult, with high technology and resources of China will not be an impossible task in the future.

Just as Sri Lanka got China's support to build a harbor in one of the world's busiest sea routes, Nepal can focus to obtain China's support to build an effective transportation channel with them through Himalayan Peaks. As Nepal is a democratic country it can focus more attention on the development of their economy as Sri Lanka did after war situation in 2009. Since Nepal has been unable to provide a secure and stable environment to draw investors they should pay more attention to combat Maoists with the help of neighboring countries. To get the maximum benefit of their water resources they can seek the help of Chinese technology. The open border system is alarmingly insecure therefore they have device a procedure to keep records of people who crossed the borders and to check the goods they carry. If they have a road link with another country India would not pressure them much. That will lead them to a better future.

Sri Lanka is one of the finest examples for the development after a brutal war. But allying with one party would not help Sri Lanka in the future. Like Sri Lanka led relations with non-aligned policy in the past, Sri Lanka has to ensure friendly relations with every state if she wants to continue with improvement. Under any circumstance, becoming an enemy of India will be a grave threat to Sri Lanka as it happened in 1987. Using their strategic location in Indian Ocean effectively will benefit Sri Lanka from both economic and military aspects. As an example, joint operations to combat piracy in Indian Ocean, fuelling ships passing the Hambantota harbor etc.

Therefore both Nepal and Sri Lanka have to take meaningful steps for the expansion of their economies with getting along smoothly with neighboring states and

other players so as to secure the stability of their nations from foreign interferences to security and politics of the country which comprehensively affect their sovereignty.

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