

Maritime strategy for national development: Sri Lankan perspective

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Abstract—The maritime space around Sri Lanka changed to a greater extent with the end of LTTE terrorism in year 2009. Being located at the Indian Ocean (IO) in a strategically important location, Sri Lanka has a significant role to play in projecting maritime interests as well as protecting them. As a nation which thrives for achieving sustainable development goals in many spheres, Sri Lanka's future undoubtedly lies in the maritime environment around the island nation. It is quite evident that Sri Lanka over the years has not effectively utilized the maritime sphere to yield its full potential. A nation's wealth is a strategic asset; therefore we need a sound maritime strategy based on national interests to achieve development goals and other aspects such as maritime security and governance.

Keywords— Maritime strategy, maritime security and national development.

I. INTRODUCTION

There are quite a number of historic evidences to prove the ancient maritime strength of Sri Lanka. The connectivity to the ancient maritime silk route which linked the China and Europe opened in the middle of the Tang dynasty (618 CE-907 CE). The first ever recorded sea passage to Sri Lanka has been in the 5th century BCE is the arrival of Vijaya and his followers from Orissa in India. In another historic event the Mahavamsa mentions that the mast, rudder and helm of the ship which Sangamiththa brought the Sri Maha Bodhi sapling in the 3rd century BCE were placed in three museums in Anuradhapura.

Even though ancient Sri Lanka had a significant progress in the maritime culture which was rich with number of ports and shipbuilding industry, the downfall took place with the foreign invasions. Since then no major development or significance has been laid on the maritime factor of this island nation. The importance of paying close attention to the maritime space emerged early 80s with the inception of LTTE maritime activities mainly across the Palk Strait. The strategic failures that took place at the very early stages of the conflict in terms of developing a stronger Navy paid a heavy prize when confronted with the LTTE maritime capabilities at the crucial stages of the conflict.

Ladduwahetty (2014) highlights a significant fact pertaining to the early wakening of the highest political figures in the country of the requirement of strengthening the Navy in mid 80s. When this strategy of denying supplies to the LTTE was presented by signifying the importance of having a Navy with a stronger role, it has been positively considered by the late President J.R. Jayawardene. But when presented to the high command in the military (which was primarily consisted of personnel from the Army higher rank), the strategy of giving Navy a more important role in the operations, the strategy was treated with scepticism. Laduwahetty (2014) in the following statement points out the impact on the country which dragged the conflict for a near three decade period due to not implementing his strategy among many other facts.

'Had the proposal being considered with seriousness, developing naval capabilities at an early stage would have denied the LTTE ready access to vital support material...Had this strategy been implemented, thousands of lives would have been saved and the peace that Sri Lanka enjoys today would have been realized earlier with much less cost to blood and treasure...To meet such challenges, the capabilities of Sri Lanka's Navy should include not only operational capabilities but also the manufacture of infrastructure needs by the Navy so that Sri Lanka's Navy becomes a key arm of Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy'. p xiii-xiv

The above statement clearly highlights the importance of giving a high prominence to the maritime component of an island nation. As the attention towards affairs taking place in the seas around the country grew proportionately with the increase of LTTE Sea Tiger activities, many realized the importance of not only having a superior Navy but also the importance of having a broader idea of the maritime space around us.

II. NATURE OF MARITIME ENVIRONMENT POST 2009

Sri Lanka emerged victorious by defeating LTTE after a near three decade protracted war in 2009. The effective use of the maritime space by the LTTE was one of the main components which led to the rapid expansion of

their military capabilities. The Sri Lanka Navy played a decisive role in taking the control of the seas at the most critical juncture and crippled the LTTE by militarily starving them. Since winning the war in 2009, the seas around the country became free from a visible enemy. Not having a visible enemy in no way means that our seas are safe and secure. Obviously we have new challenges to face. We have to seriously look into drug trafficking, human smuggling, poaching/IUU fishing, marine pollution, responding to maritime disasters, search and rescue among many others.

Even though these challenges are largely limited to the Sri Lankan shores, the very nature of broadly knitted maritime network brings much more significant challenges. Located in one of the busiest shipping routes in the world; geographical location of Sri Lanka, vast area allocated as Sri Lanka's search and rescue region and the open ocean mass towards Antarctica place a significant importance of the role played by the island nation in the maritime domain. South of Sri Lanka runs some of the vital life lines which connect the East and West. Even a slight disruption on any of these lines will have significant impact on the region as well as international maritime trade. It is in this context that Sri Lanka being an island nation has been vested with a huge obligation towards the protection and safety of the maritime space around the country as well as in her Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

With the expected expansion of the already available EEZ in the near future, the Navy will have a broader role to play. Due to the sheer vastness of the ocean space, conducting 100% surveillance of the maritime domain will be a mammoth task for even the most advanced navies in the world. In essence, it is the task of any Navy to make sure the ocean space around a country is only used for legitimate purposes and its resources are used in a strategic manner. The importance of having a sound maritime strategy aligned with national policies and objectives remains as one of the most important pillars in the future of Sri Lanka. Even though we had few initiatives taking place in the maritime domain post-2009, lack of a grand maritime strategy based on national policies and objectives is likely to have impacts on the nation on short and long term basis. Sri Lanka's biggest strength and the future potential lies in the maritime space around the country. In order to yield the best out from a massive resources pool, a carefully laid down maritime strategy is not only a handy tool, but will be the

most decisive factor in determining the future of Sri Lanka.

III. MARITIME STRATEGY: MILITARY AND THE NATIONAL CONCEPT
It is important to understand the difference between the 'military concept' pertaining to maritime strategy and the 'national concept of maritime strategy'. It is quite common to refer to the military aspect of the maritime strategy when ever discussions pertaining to maritime strategy are surfaced.

In military planning, maritime strategies plays a significant role mainly due to the influence it can make on projecting power to areas of interest along the coastline as well as inland known as the 'littoral'. The littoral is defined 'as the areas to seaward of the coast which are susceptible to influence or support from the land and the areas inland from the coast which are susceptible to influence from the sea'. The Parliamentary Information Research Service (IRS) notes that at the turn of the 21st century, 'the littoral accommodates over three quarters of the world's population, hosts over 80% of the world's capital cities and nearly all of the marketplaces for international trade'.

A country may be landlocked or open ocean space, yet the importance and influence that the maritime strategy can make on the much broader military strategies are of high significance. As the military understanding of a maritime strategy is equally important in fully exploiting the potentials of the national concept of maritime strategy, it is essential to understand the key features of maritime strategy. The air, land and sea are essential elements of maritime strategies adopted by modern navies' world around. Key concepts such as sea denial, sea control and power projection plays a vital role in influencing events in the littorals and blue waters equally. Even though maritime strategy is not only limited to aspects of naval forces or naval strategy, many tends to view these two elements as the key factors of maritime strategy. Brief description of the above three key aspects are as follows:

- Sea denial is exercised when one party prevents an adversary from controlling a maritime area without being able to control that area oneself (JDP 0-01, 2006).
- Sea control is the condition that exists when there is freedom of action to use an area of the sea for one's own purpose for a period of time

and, if necessary, deny its use to an opponent (British Maritime Doctrine, 2011).

- Power projection in Western military writing traditionally denoted the use of naval firepower and tactical support for interventionary forces (Thompson, 1978).

As most of the literature cites the military aspect of maritime strategy, maritime strategies can always include broader aspects of national maritime objectives. When the national concept is embedded into the maritime strategy, it has the potential to expand this important concept to a much broader level. In fact the broader picture of the national maritime strategy includes the essentials in the military components of maritime strategy. Among the key constituents of national maritime strategy; economy, environment, social and political security aspects forms the key pillars while the military components of maritime strategy deals primarily with area such as war fighting, diplomacy and constabulary role.

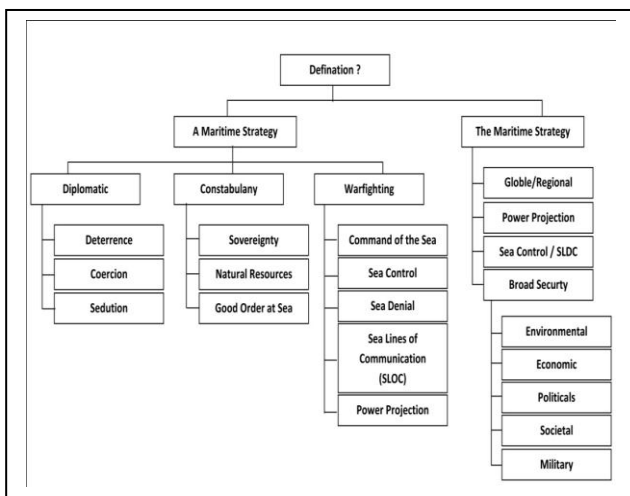


Figure 1. Key elements of national and military aspects of maritime strategy

Source: Information Research Service (2002).

As cited in the IRS (2002), in the case of a national maritime strategy ‘the term encompasses a national approach to its security that is either continentalist or maritime-focused and considers responsibilities, not only for military forces, across a wide spectrum of security sectors. As stated by Cooper (2001), National maritime strategy incorporates all arms of government and is usually focused on marine areas out to the edge of the exclusive economic zone or the seabed boundary while the military maritime strategy denotes the involvement

of all arms; sea, land and air which can influence operations or activities in the marine environment. That strategy is concerned more with the implementation of government policy.

Figure 1 provides a graphical account of the key elements which comprise national as well as military aspects of maritime strategy:

IV. WHY DO WE NEED A MARITIME STRATEGY?

Having had the idea of how the two aspects of maritime strategy works and the importance of both these elements, it is quite imperative that the Sri Lankan situation need to be viewed taking into consideration the past, present and the future. The lessons learned in the future are bitter in many ways. As cited in the introduction, the inability to understand the importance of developing the naval component of this country at a very early stage resulted in the formation of one of the most ruthless terrorist outfits in the world. The near three decade protracted conflict is the best example one could cite to prove this.

Having won the conflict militarily in year 2009, the maritime space was identified as one of the key strengths Sri Lanka has in planning the future. Threats and challenges in the maritime domain have taken different shapes and forms since then. Among the most discussed maritime security challenges, the following have been identified equally important to regional as well as the Sri Lankan context (National Maritime Security Strategy, 2013):

- Illicit trafficking
- Piracy
- Terrorism
- Proliferation
- Irregular immigration and smuggling of people
- Illegal exploitation of marine resources
- Acts against underwater cultural heritage
- Cyber threats
- Maritime accidents
- Natural disasters

Addressing above maritime security challenges will be much more demanding and strenuous than fighting a visible enemy in the form of LTTE. Most of the above illegal acts can be conducted with ease mainly due to the sheer vastness of the ocean space and lack of strong maritime strategy with a national perspective. Even though Sri Lanka does not foresee threats in the form of maritime terrorism and piracy in the near future, the

importance of laying down a solid maritime strategy in accordance with national imperatives are of significant importance. Failing to formulate a national maritime strategy at this very crucial juncture for sure will have irreversible impact on the broader national vision and for sure on the development goals.

Apart from the above maritime security challenges, the geographical location of Sri Lanka and its strategic importance have been well argued. As described by Kaplan (2011), the world maps that are been used in America, the Western Hemisphere is located in the center while the Indian Ocean (IO) is almost disappeared. This was very much relevant in the 20th century but not in the 21st century as the focus has been fundamentally changed. Kaplan has identified few countries as 'Monsoon Asia' which includes India, Pakistan, China, Indonesia, Burma, Oman, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Tanzania.

He explains how important these countries to American power and firmly believes that this area will be either the winning or losing grounds of democracy, energy independence and religious freedom will take place. If America is to remain relevant in the present context, this is the area that American foreign policy needs to be fully concentrated. The population growth, climate change, political and religion instability clearly explains why America cannot no longer ignore this area.

One would argue that we had a sound maritime strategy during the time of the LTTE conflict. The argument is partially true especially at the final stages of the conflict as the Navy was instrumental in mapping out some important maritime strategies mainly focusing the military aspect of it to neutralize LTTE maritime capabilities. That particular strategy was a short term one focused on mainly destroying LTTE Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs). As described above, the discussion in this paper focuses on developing a national maritime strategy in which the military component is embedded in it. Even though a discussion pertaining to the maritime vision of the country was introduced by way of planning to make the country a maritime hub, the efforts were not broadly focused on forming the much wanted national maritime strategy for the island nation.

Lack of other important doctrinal aspects such as the naval doctrine (presently being drafted) can also be seen as a drawback in forming the much needed national

strategic thinking pertaining to the maritime broader vision the country needs to face the future. In essence, the general notion has been that we lack a promising document stating clearly the maritime vision of the country. This is a major hindrance in reaping the benefits from our maritime space.

The geographic situation of the island nation Sri Lanka in the IO, which is known to be the third largest water body in the world, can be considered as one of the greatest strengths of Sri Lanka. Importantly, being an island nation the country lies in one of the best locations one could ever imagine in terms of international maritime trade. Sri Lanka lies in the middle of the East-West shipping route or the life lines that carry energy and manufactured goods to the two sides of the world. When we consider all of the above discussed areas, it is quite evident that Sri Lanka requires a well stipulated national maritime strategy that needs to be focused on the military as well as other aspects.

V. MARITIME STRATEGY: KEY TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The IO stands prominent along with many other ocean masses in the world as one of the leading ocean spheres that posses non-energy renewable and non-renewable resources. There are quite a number of factors that determine the sustainable harvesting of these resources such as technology, environmental aspects and political. These factors do equally apply for Sri Lanka too. The difference between most of the regional countries and Sri Lanka is that others have fully identified and are in the process of reaping the economic benefits from these arrays of resources for national development through a well stipulated national maritime strategy.

Among the many such available resources, fisheries and mineral industries have been identified as most commercially viable. Commercial and artisanal fisheries sustain the livelihoods of more than 38 million people worldwide (Young, 2006). In the Indian Ocean, fish production increased drastically from 861,000 tons in 1950 to 11.5 million tons in 2010 (Michel and Sticklor, 2012). But while other world oceans are nearing their fisheries limit, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) judges that, in certain areas, the Indian Ocean's resources have the potential to sustain increased production (Laipson and Pandya, 2009). **The coastal zone of Sri Lanka consists of around 25% of total land area, hosts around one third of the country's**

population, accommodates over two thirds of all industrial facilities, and over 80% of tourism infrastructure (UNEP, 2001). Marine fisheries play a pivotal role in Sri Lanka's fish supply. According to the National Aquaculture Development Authority (NARA), in 2011, around 86% of total fish supply has come from marine fisheries. The marine fish catch comprises of 58% from coastal areas and 42% from off-shore.

The recent discovery and exploration of oil and gas reserves could easily open a host of new economic opportunities. However, existing data shows that oil and/or gas potential exists in the Mannar Basin to the west, Cauvery Basin to the north, Bengal fan deposits to the east, and newly identified sedimentary basins to the south of the island and the potential gas hydrates zone offshore Sri Lanka could cover an area of approximately 50,000 km², the equivalent of 364 x 10¹⁴ Kwh of energy (SAARC Energy center, 2010). Sri Lanka ranked as one of the most visited destinations by tourists for obvious reasons. This industry is multipronged and has the ability to further expand into quite a number of areas in bringing a huge income. According to the statistics provided by the Sri Lanka Tourist Board, well over 830,000 tourists have arrived up to June this year which is 11.5% increase when compared with last year.

The importance of Sri Lanka being located at one of the most important international shipping route has been amply discussed at various forums. Apart from providing required infrastructure facilities and other services to ships that are calling on our ports, the influence these ships have on the Sri Lankan economy is quite significant. According to Central Bank report 2013, compared to the corresponding period of 2012, total cargo handling and container handling increased by 0.9 per cent to 44.1 million MTs and by 1.5 per cent to 2.9 million TEUs, respectively. Meanwhile, transshipment handling improved significantly by 3.8 per cent to 2.1 million TEUs reflecting Sri Lanka's attractiveness to large shipping lines that prefer to deliver cargo to a transshipment hub and subsequently deliver to smaller ports in the region. This is a major area of national development of Sri Lanka.

Ship repair and building is another area where Sri Lanka needs to explore and yield ultimate results. Sri Lankan professionals are capable of designing and building both aluminium and steel hull vessels and specialized in high speed patrol boats indigenously. The potential of this area is yet to be explore and there are many other areas

such as developing technology, facilities, logistic network with specialization in areas such as offshore energy sector support vessels earmarked for offshore oil and gas industry and offshore wind energy-related support vessels. A grand strategy is of utmost importance to fit these sectors to reap potential economic benefits closely integrated with other entities.

The project on the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf (DECOM) as provided in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was initiated as far back as 1999 by Sri Lanka and completed in 2009 (Dailymirror, 2015). The submission was made in respect to a part of the area of three million square Km of a submarine fan of sediments in the Bay of Bengal. This unique feature spans an area of 3000 Km in length and 830 to 1430 Km in width. Sri Lanka's claim of the extended continental shelf is about 20 times the land area (Dailymirror, 2015). This is indeed a huge area for a small country like Sri Lanka. Conducting surveillance, scientific research, infrastructure expansion etc. are among the many other important aspects that Sri Lanka will need to look through a broader maritime strategic plan that is essentially based on a Grand National maritime strategy.

A country could be vested with all the resources, expertise, infrastructure, political will and consensus to use the maritime domain for future development, yet a slightest failure in the maritime security aspect could very easily derail the broader expectations. Therefore it is imperative that Sri Lanka looks towards securing the maritime domain from traditional as well as non-traditional challenges. This is exactly where the military aspect of the maritime strategy needs to closely knit with the components of maritime strategy. If a country is incapable of securing the maritime domain from the threats discussed above, even though the most well articulated national maritime strategy will have a short life span when encountered with real challenges.

VI. NATIONAL MARITIME STRATEGY 2025

When looking at the wealth of resources available in the maritime space around the country and the strengths Sri Lanka has in possession, it easy to deduct that Sri Lanka's future development is primarily interconnected to the ocean around. One of the main challenges Sri Lanka is facing even at this moment is the careful formation of the much wanted national maritime strategy that is focused on achieving national development goals, both short and long term. Due to the very changing nature of the events

that are unfolding in the maritime domain along with regional and international affairs, a strategy has to have a time frame for effective implementation. Considering these facts, the national maritime strategy is formulated for year 2025. The proposed national maritime strategy is of two fold; one looking at the security challenges and the other focusing on the development aspect. In order to address the security issues that take place in the maritime space, attention should focus on following areas:

- **360 degree approach to maritime domain:** Broader access to all layers of the maritime domain as at present the focus is primarily on activities that take place on the sea surface. If a country is to ensure maritime security areas beneath the sea surface, above it (air element), immediate land areas and cyber activities that could impact all these three areas need to be secured, well monitored and be ready to respond during a time of crisis.
- **Sea control:** A very fundamental aspect of maritime security, yet an integral component of the broader strategy. History shows the prize Sri Lanka paid due to not having sea control over its maritime domain. The Navy has a significant role to play in addressing this area as establishing the local maritime superiority is crucial and essential. When sea control is established to the full, it will deny the use of Sri Lanka's maritime space by adversaries for military or any other illegal aspects (poaching, IUU fishing, smuggling etc.).
- **Maritime reach and depth:** When a sea area of twenty (20) times the land is going to be vested on Sri Lanka in the future, the presence of the Navy in this massive ocean space is important for number of facts. If the Navy is not capable of conducting maritime surveillance in this mammoth area of ocean, the chances of protecting the enormous wealth in the ocean will be minimized to a greater extent. When the vastness of the ocean space is a challenge to even the most advanced navies in the world in terms of conducting 100% surveillance, Sri Lanka Navy has to develop its fleet to address this very aspect.
- **Maritime security:** The Navy and the Coast Guard has a significant role to play in this regard. Traditional and non-traditional security threats have to be looked in with a broader view on regional as well as global trends. Even though maritime terrorism is unlikely to breathe life, the vastness of the ocean space around the country has allowed drug trafficking, human smuggling, IUU fishing,

poaching etc to emerge with ease. The Navy once again has to derive a strategic maritime security plan with short and long term threat assessment looking at the national objectives to keep illegal actors well away.

- **Maritime diplomacy:** Quite understandably the navies around the world especially in the 21st century have an important role to play in supporting the foreign policy of a nation. As national development of a country is tightly knitted with a sound foreign policy, the Navy has a role to play in the region for this purpose. With diplomacy comes cooperation. In the maritime affairs which is yet another area where cooperation could be among nations, navies or in terms of forming strategic alliances.

When the above aspects are incorporated to maritime security in the national strategy, the risks and threats to national maritime security depicted in figure 2 can be neutralized;



Figure 2. Risks and threats to maritime security
Source: National Maritime Security strategy 2013

In addition to the above aspects, it is necessary that the national maritime strategy focus on the national level challenges in order to better apprehend the much wider picture. The following national challenges stand prominent in this context:

- Sovereignty in the maritime domain and maritime security aspects.
- Security of maritime based energy sources.
- Security of maritime based food sources.
- Protection of marine ecosystem.
- Impact of climate changes.
- Sustainable use of marine resources.

- Marine science research and experimental capacity.
- Key stakeholder networking.
- Regional and international cooperation.
- Shipbuilding and repair.
- Tourism.
- Diplomacy for cooperation.

The Sri Lankan National Maritime Strategy (SLNMS) therefore need to look at a wide range of aspects mentioned above. The 2025 plan should incorporate all of the above aspects to four main pillars; maritime security, maritime governance, maritime research /scientific development and regional /international cooperation. The strategies that each of these pillars have to form and the composition that each of them should comprise is out of the purview of this limited paper. However, the individual strategies that are formulated for each of the above pillars need to abide by the broader national vision. Obviously that vision should be to ensure that *“Sri Lanka uses the full potential of the surrounding ocean mass to achieve broader national development objectives”*.

In order to best formulate a workable national maritime strategy to achieve the above stated vision, it is of greatest importance to establish a National Maritime Strategy Implementation Authority (NMSIA). This body will then work out strategies and policies to form the broader maritime strategy by combining key stakeholders such as the Navy, shipping industry and professionals in the field (scientists, researchers, maritime experts, analysts etc.).

VII. CONCLUSION

Sri Lanka had a rich maritime history and a maritime culture in the ancient times. Well over two millennia ago, Sri Lanka was thriving as one of the most important maritime hubs in the famous Silk Route. Foreign coins discovered from the ship wrecks in the southern coast of Sri Lanka are evidences to prove the intense international environment that prevailed at that time in networking the traders, scholars, artists, philosophers, explorers etc. by way of the well established maritime connections. Along the way, much of what was achieved lost its way in the deep oceans due to various internal and external factors.

The new era, especially after the end of the war has provided us with an opportunity to carefully analyse the existing maritime environment by taking into

consideration regional and international maritime affairs. As an island nation situated in one of the most important ocean masses in the world, time has now come to critically analyse the fact that whether we have done enough to reap the benefits of our ocean space. Lack of a national maritime strategy with a unique approach into looking at the ocean affairs is seen as the major lacuna we have faced over the years. The formulation of a sound national maritime strategy based on the above discussed areas and the effective implementation of same will be one of the major factors that will decide the future of Sri Lanka.

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