

The Galle Dialogue and Maritime Security Cooperation: Present Status and Future Possibilities

Sithara Fernando

*Department of Strategic Studies, Faculty of Defence and Strategic Studies,
General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka
sitharaf@gmail.com*

Abstract— *The Galle Dialogue maritime security forum was initiated by Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence and the Sri Lanka Navy in 2010. Since then the Galle Dialogue has become an annual event. This paper examines the contribution of the Galle Dialogue to maritime security cooperation. In particular it focuses on following four areas of maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR): geopolitical competition; Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing; sustainable harnessing of marine resources; and people smuggling. It's main finding is that at present the Galle functions as a forum for disseminating and exchanging ideas on maritime security cooperation. As such it has contributed to the production of knowledge and to generating suggestions for policymaking on this very important subject. The paper also makes some recommendations for enhancing the capacity of the Galle Dialogue to contribute to maritime security cooperation in the years ahead.*

Keywords— Galle Dialogue, Maritime Security Cooperation

I. INTRODUCTION

Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is faced with many problems and issues. These include geopolitical competition, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, sustainable harnessing of marine resources and people smuggling. Sri Lanka's geostrategic location in the IOR entails that it is both affected by these problems and that it is also in a position to contribute to the solution of these problems. Given the fact that the maritime domain is a space shared by many nations, cooperative approaches are essential for combating most threats to maritime security. The Galle Dialogue is well placed as a mechanism that can be utilized for enhancing maritime security cooperation in the IOR and perhaps even the broader Indo-Pacific region, in terms of both traditional security concerns and non-

traditional or emerging challenges in the maritime domain.

The Galle Dialogue was initiated in August 2010 by Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence and the Sri Lanka Navy as a forum for the discussion of maritime security issues. Eleven countries attended the first edition of this farsighted initiative held at the Lighthouse Hotel in Galle, Sri Lanka, which has been the venue of all subsequent editions as well. Nineteen countries attended the second edition in 2011, twenty eight countries attended the third edition in 2012, and thirty five countries attended the fourth edition in 2013. By the steady growth in the number of countries participating in the Galle Dialogue, which has become a regular annual feature by now, it is evident that this initiative is evolving into a premier regional forum on maritime security. This paper will consider the contribution that the Galle Dialogue has already made to address both traditional and non-traditional concerns in the Indian Ocean region before offering some concluding thoughts about how the Dialogue can position itself to expand and enhance its contribution to regional security in the years to come.

II. AMELIORATING GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION

Since antiquity the maritime space called the Indian Ocean today has been a corridor linking the East and the West. With the discovery of fossil fuels and their multifarious uses in the modern world the Indian Ocean began facilitating trade in the strategic resource of oil between the oil powerhouses in what is called the Middle East by some and West Asia by others and the rest of the world. While the Indian Ocean played only a marginal role in the First and Second World Wars and the 'Cold War', in the post-9/11 era with the United States (US) fighting two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq respectively the Indian Ocean resumed its importance in the global geopolitical discourse. This

resumption of importance occurred within the context of the resurgence of China and India as economic and military powers. Within the strategy of 'rebalancing towards Asia' articulated by the US since late-2011 the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) retains its importance within the broader contours of the geopolitical construct of an Indo-Pacific region. While the strategic dynamics in the IOR are complex and involve many powers there is little doubt that the 'strategic triangle' involving the US, China and India is one of the key traditional security issues facing the IOR.

In recent years a number of US and Indian scholars have begun to speak of an Indo-Pacific Region. Essentially this regional construct appears to be the maritime avatar of the Asia-Pacific construct which came into prominence in the 1990s. While the older regional configuration of the IOR will to some extent be overlaid by the broader Indo-Pacific construct, the former will also continue to coexist with the latter.

In recent years at least three academic authors have explicitly referred to triangular relations in the IOR involving the US, China and India. For Kaplan (2011), "the Indian Ocean is where the rivalry between the United States and China in the Pacific interlocks with regional rivalry between China and India...". He portrays a vision of Chinese expansion southward to the Indian Ocean and Indian expansion eastward and westward across the breadth of the Indian Ocean even as the US perseveres in maintaining its leadership position in guaranteeing freedom of navigation globally including in the IOR. He argues that while the superior capabilities of the US military will continue to be essential for security in the IOR the US will have to concede some space to the rising powers of China and India. Mohan (2011) identifies the US-China-India relationship as the most important strategic triangle in the Indian Ocean littoral. While he does recognize that there are other important players in the IOR, including major powers such as Russia, Japan, France and middle powers like South Korea, Indonesia, Australia and Iran, he emphasizes that the triangle involving the US, China and India will have the widest influence. Meanwhile Lou (2012) argues that given the fact most other states in the IOR are deeply influenced by the US, China and India it would be reasonable to expect triangular relations among these three powers to be the main determinant of regional security. The geopolitical

dynamics in the IOR involving the US, China and India will need to be carefully managed in order to safeguard regional stability.

An important factor inhibiting multilateral maritime security cooperation in the IOR is the periodic tension that tends to arise between China and the US as well as that between China and India. This factor has been alluded to by Sri Lanka's Secretary of Defence Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa in his Keynote Address at the 2012 Galle Dialogue. What he said was that, "unfortunately, it has to be admitted that there is a degree of mistrust between the major powers in the Indian Ocean region that presently limits the degree to which effective and long lasting multilateral cooperation can be achieved". Following this statement he made specific mention of India, the US and China in the IOR. Not only does this mistrust hamper the development of multilateral cooperation in the IOR, it also affects Sri Lanka's national interests as exemplified by the negative publicity given to the Hambantota project in the 'string of pearls' discourse. Therefore, in the words of Mr. Rajapaksa himself as expressed in his address referred to above, "Sri Lanka has a particular interest in promoting multilateral cooperation between the major powers present in this region", so as to reduce the mistrust among these three major powers, in particular that in the US-China and India-China bilateral relationships.

The annual Galle Dialogue has begun to contribute to a cooperative regional security discourse with the participation of the US, China and India. At the Galle Dialogue Mr. Robert Scher (2011), then US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia has stated that "it is clear that engagement with nations around the world on the basis of mutual interest and mutual respect is, and will continue to be an important part of US foreign policy, no matter the difficulty". During the Galle Dialogue Vice Adm. Su Zhiqian (2012), Commander of China's East Sea Fleet, has proposed "the perception of harmonious maritime security in a hope that we promote common development on the base of the respect of mutual benefit", and the development of "bilateral and multilateral dialogues on mutual strategic trust aimed at enhancing further friendly relations". Also at the Galle Dialogue Vice Adm. R.K. Dhowan (2012), then Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Indian Navy, stated that "maritime cooperation should be collective in character and there is a need to take shared

responsibility...sensitivities of one and all need to be respected and each nation's interests need to be carefully balanced". These statements made at the Galle Dialogue by officials and navy officers of the US, China and India make it clear that through the Galle Dialogue Sri Lanka is playing an important part in bringing these three major powers together to share their views on maritime security in the IOR, which can contribute to the reduction of the mistrust in the US-China and India-China relationships, and this is a very important contribution to regional maritime security.

II. CONFRONTING NON-TRADITIONAL CHALLENGES

In addition to geopolitical competition, maritime security in the IOR is faced with a number of other issues such as Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, harnessing of marine resources and people smuggling. The economic, food and environmental security of many developing states in the IOR are threatened by IUU fishing because they lack the resources to adequately monitor the waters under their jurisdiction. The ocean has the potential to provide resources such as minerals, oil, gas and renewable energy and there is a need for a sustainable approach to their extraction. In recent years the issue of people smuggling has emerged as a significant activity in the IOR which can at times have a tragic human cost in terms of endangering the lives of people. Thus it is clear that there are a number of what might be called non-traditional maritime security issues in the IOR which require our attention. Many of these non-traditional maritime security issues are transnational in nature which necessitates international cooperation to deal with them.

The three non-traditional issue areas mentioned above, IUU fishing, harnessing of marine resources and people smuggling, have a wide impact in the IOR. The consideration of them in papers delivered at the Galle Dialogue is of importance for the IOR as a whole.

A. Measures for Curtailing IUU Fishing

At the Galle Dialogue Rear Admiral Jayanath Colombage (2011), then Commander of the Eastern Naval Area of the Sri Lanka Navy and the current Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy, has made the following recommendations for dealing with IUU fishing:

1. Adoption and implementation of adequate legal and policy measures by states and regional organizations
2. Implementation of a fishing vessel registration and authorization to fish or licensing system
3. Proper flag state enforcement
4. Maintaining by flag states a proper record of fishing vessels including basic information and details of actual fishing operations
5. Implementation of effective Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures in the EEZ including licensing of foreign fishing vessels and establishing Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS)
6. Obtaining advance notice of port entry and implementation of fishing vessels inspections in port
7. Implementation of eco-labeling and catch certificate
8. Review and revision of national legislation and regional regulatory frameworks
9. Strengthening of regional institutions and bonds
10. Implementation of educational/awareness programs
11. Implementation of boarding in respective maritime areas and inspection through bilateral agreements
12. Promoting good ocean governance and regional cooperation
13. Formulating national plans to curb IUU fishing

It is noteworthy that recommendations 1, 8, 9 and 12 pertain to regional cooperation.

B. Sustainable Harnessing of Marine Resources

At the Galle Dialogue Commodore Syed Abedin (2012) of the Bangladesh Navy suggested the following principles for the management of ocean resources:

1. Sustainability, where the needs of the present generation is met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs;
2. Comprehensive Policy, which recognizes the interrelation between the ocean, land and atmosphere and provides for inter-governmental collaboration at the regional and bilateral levels for the management of

- geographic areas based on ecosystem rather than political boundaries;
3. Integrated Management, which attempts to give all users of ocean resources a stake in their management;
 4. Conservation, aimed at preserving coastal and marine ecosystems;
 5. Knowledge-based Decisions, which would ensure that policy is informed by scientific data on the oceanic and coastal environments;
 6. Adaptive Management, which would entail a process of continuous learning from experience and a dynamic approach to thinking about policy; and
 7. Creating Public Awareness, through informing and educating citizens about the importance of ocean resources.

It should be noted that the second principle calls for cooperation at both regional and bilateral levels. Some thought should be given to using these principles as the basis for a regional approach to the management of ocean resources.

C. Combating People Smuggling

At the 2013 Galle Dialogue Rear Admiral Timothy Barrett of the Australian Navy elaborated on cooperation to combat people smuggling in the IOR. His view was that in order to combat people smuggling there has to be coordination between the different agencies of government within countries as well as cooperation between countries. While efforts to combat people smuggling at sea are crucial and necessary the underlying causes of the phenomenon need to be tackled on land. He emphasized that the Australian government gives a lot of importance to cooperation with other countries in the region on this issue. Given the fact that a number of littoral and hinterland countries of the IOR have become the terrain of people smuggling activities this issue too merits sustained attention at the regional level.

Regional cooperation to deal with the three non-traditional issue areas discussed above would do much to enhance maritime security in the IOR.

III. ENHANCEMENT OF THE CAPACITY OF THE GALLE DIALOGUE TO CONTRIBUTE TO MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION

The issue areas discussed above, namely geopolitical competition, IUU fishing, harnessing marine resources and people smuggling, deserve sustained attention by both academics and policymakers in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific regions. In order to enhance the ability of the Galle Dialogue to contribute to this process this paper would like to make three suggestions.

First, under the aegis of the Galle Dialogue Study Groups on each of the above mentioned issue areas should be established. The purpose of this exercise would be to explore these issue areas in greater depth and detail, and to make informed policy recommendations to the governments of participating countries. The participants in these Study Groups should be experts in the relevant fields.

Second, it is important to secure the participation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA, formerly known as the Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation or IOR-ARC), in the Galle Dialogue process. While the IORA is not without its critics it is the apex regional institution in the IOR. Its participation will enable the Galle Dialogue to benefit from its regional perspective and to reach out to a regional audience. For the same purpose when the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Secretariat becomes fully functional representatives from that body could also be invited to participate. The setting-up of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Bangladesh was announced at the summit meeting held in March 2014. In addition the Galle Dialogue should also think about inviting participants from the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Unit at the ASEAN Secretariat and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Secretariat to widen its regional ambit from the IOR to the Indo-Pacific Region.

Third, at present the speeches made and the papers delivered at the Galle Dialogue are published after the annual event. While this is certainly useful to academics and policymakers an important improvement that can be made is to include in the publication a record of the discussions that take place during the question and answer sessions at the forum. This would make accessible to a broader

audience the rich and vibrant cross-flow of ideas that take place at the Galle Dialogue. In order to encourage a greater free flow of ideas while safeguarding the official identities of the participants the question and answer sessions can be conducted under Chatham House rules of non-attribution.

IV. CONCLUSION

At present the Galle Dialogue functions as a forum for disseminating and exchanging ideas on maritime security. As such it has contributed to moderating the geopolitical competition in the US-China-India strategic triangle by providing these three countries with a forum for listening to each other's ideas and understanding them better. Statements made at the Galle Dialogue by all three countries emphasize inclusive international cooperation. Paper's delivered at the Galle Dialogue have produced recommendations aimed at curtailing IUU fishing and a set of principles for the sustainable harnessing of marine resources, as well as emphasized the importance of both coordination between the different agencies of government within countries and cooperation between countries in combating people smuggling. These and other papers delivered at the four editions of the Galle Dialogue held so far constitute an important contribution to the pool of knowledge on maritime security cooperation. To enhance the ability of the Galle Dialogue to generate knowledge on this important subject this paper has proposed the setting-up of Study Groups on geopolitical competition, IUU fishing, sustainable harnessing of marine resources and people smuggling under its aegis. These Study Groups could also generate well informed policy recommendations for the governments of participating countries. In order to reach out to the Indian Ocean community at the regional level this paper has recommended the participation of IORA and BIMSTEC in the Galle Dialogue process. It could also secure the participation of representatives from the ARF Unit at the ASEAN Secretariat and the APEC Secretariat to reach out to the broader Indo-Pacific Region. Furthermore the well informed discussions that take place at the annual forum can be conducted under Chatham House rules of non-attribution and a record of them can be included in the published proceedings. This would make the highly interesting cross-flow of ideas that take place at this well represented forum accessible to a broader audience

of academics and policymakers. The Galle Dialogue is an initiative that is full of potential and it is up to Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence and Urban Development and the Sri Lanka Navy to realize it.

REFERENCES

- Abedin, Syed (2012), <http://galledialogue2012.navy.lk/assets/pdf/commodore_syed_abu_mansur_arshadul_abedin.pdf>, "Concerns and Challenges in Harnessing Ocean Resources: the Way Forward". Galle Dialogue 2012, Lighthouse Hotel, Galle, Sri Lanka, 13-14 December. Accessed 3 May 2014.
- Barrett, Timothy (2013), <http://www.galledialogue.com/assets/files/gd2013/papers_delivered_2013/how_cooperation_could_mitigate_people_smuggling_activities_in_the_indian_ocean.pdf>, "How Cooperation Could Mitigate People Smuggling Activities in the Indian Ocean", Galle Dialogue 2013, Lighthouse Hotel Galle, Sri Lanka, 25-26 November. Accessed 3 May 2014.
- Lou, Chunhao (2012), "US-India-China Relations in the Indian Ocean: A Chinese Perspective", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36 No. 4, July-August, pp. 624-639.
- Colombage, Jayanath (2011), <<http://galledialogue2011.navy.lk/index.php?id=24>>, "Cross Border Fishing: Impacts and Challenges", Galle Dialogue 2011, Lighthouse Hotel, Galle, Sri Lanka, 14-15 November. Accessed 3 May 2014.
- Dhowan, R.K. (2012), <http://galledialogue2012.navy.lk/assets/pdf/vice_admiral_rk_dhowan.pdf>, "Partnership Building to Shape Future Maritime Cooperation: India's Role", address by the Indian Navy's Vice Chief of Naval Staff at the 'Galle Dialogue- 2012', Lighthouse Hotel, Galle, 13 December 2012. Accessed 15 September 2013.
- Kaplan, Robert D. (2011), *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, New York: Random House.
- Mohan, C. Raja (2011), <http://www.india-seminar.com/2011/617/617_c_raja_mohan.htm>, "India's New Role in the Indian Ocean", *Seminar*, January. Accessed 27 December 2013.

Scher, Robert (2011), <<http://galledialogue2011.navy.lk/index.php?id=26>>, "Importance of Common Strategies for Global and Regional Maritime Security", address by the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia at the 'Galle Dialogue- 2011', Lighthouse Hotel, Galle, 14 November 2011. Accessed 15 September 2013.

the *Alumni Perspectives* publication stream on the APCSS website. This paper is an updated version of the same.

Sri Lanka Navy (2012), <<http://galledialogue2012.navy.lk/index.php?id=20>>, Full Text of the Secretary of Defence's Keynote Address at the 'Galle Dialogue 2012', Lighthouse Hotel, Galle, 13 December 2012. Accessed 15 September 2013.

Su, Zhiqian (2012), <http://galledialogue2012.navy.lk/assets/pdf/vice_admiral_su_zhiqian.pdf>, "Deepen Common Recognition, Strengthen Cooperation and Safeguard Maritime Security Together", address by the Commander of China's East Sea Fleet at the 'Galle Dialogue- 2012', Lighthouse Hotel, Galle, 13 December 2012. Accessed 15 September 2013.

Thar Nyunt Oo (2014), <<http://www.voanews.com/content/bimstec-establishes-permanent-secretariat/1864057.html>>, "BIMSTEC Establishes Permanent Secretariat", *Voice of America*, 4 March. Accessed 13 May 2014.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR



The author is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Strategic Studies, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU). He has been a recipient of the Kodikara Award for South Asian Strategic Studies and a visiting scholar at the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), Delhi. He has delivered conference papers and guest lectures at the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), Delhi; Delhi University; Manipur University, India; Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS) and the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies (LKIIRSS). He has published articles in the peer reviewed journals *China Report* and *Strategic Analysis*. Most recently he attended the Advanced Security Cooperation (ASC) course at the Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies (APCSS), Hawaii and his Fellows Project Research Paper was published in