

Theoretical Analysis on Trends and Developments of Indo-Lanka Relations

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Background

Literature survey on Indo-Lanka relations depicts certain fluctuations in the bi-lateral relations due to political tensions between the two countries. Despite certain efforts for cooperation, since 1983 communal clashes between Sinhala majority and Tamil minority extremist groups in Sri Lanka until mid-1990s the deterioration in Indo-Lanka relations was evident as the two countries failed to attain reconciliation and compromise through a lasting solution for ethnic crisis which is acceptable for all parties in the country. 2009 military victory by Sri Lankan government over the Liberation Tigers Tamil Elam (LTTE) generated hostilities between two countries reminding 1980s to mid-1990s hostilities of similar kind. Since the 1980 to mid-1990 and 2009 resemble certain similarity in Indo-Lanka relations under hostile circumstances, it triggered the interest to analyse both past and the present situations under comparative study. Since independence it was during 1980s to mid-1990s and 2009 period that marked apparent hostilities in the bi-lateral relations of India and Sri Lanka which is subjected for the present study. Comparative study will identify causes and effects of any transformation in the bi-lateral relations and it will be useful to understand foreign policy of both countries. It is required to identify what policies should be adopted or prevented to develop more healthy Indo-Lanka relations.

Research problem

Indian voluntary role of guarantor and advocator of establishing peace in Sri Lanka was not acceptable for both majority Sinhalese and Tamil extremists. This was manipulated by the Sri Lanka political leaders to abandon Indian proposals that came in the form of Indo-Lanka Peace Accord in 1987 and after 2009 military victory by the Sri Lankan government India re-emphasized on the same proposals and more devolution of power. Indian involvement of Sri Lankan Tamil problem continues to trigger tensions between the two nations. The identification of the causes and effects of such deterioration in bilateral relations in comparative terms during the given two periods exploring any transformation in the conduct of bilateral relations by the two nations and possibilities of repairing strained relations to develop healthy relations is the main research problem. It is expected to analyse them through theories to provide a scientific explanation which had been lacking in the existing literature.

Objectives

To identify causes and effects of deterioration in Indo-Lanka relations during the given two periods

To identify trends and developments of Indo-Lanka relations in the recent past

To determine the possibilities of renewing bi-lateral relations between India and Sri Lanka

Research Methodology

Qualitative approach and deductive content analysis were used to analyse the data. The deductive content analysis is useful to retest the existing data with theory. Secondary data was gathered through data triangulation method by obtaining data from multiple secondary sources such as historical records, government publications, books, biographies, the view points of the chief policy makers that are recorded in press or other means of interviews, speeches, web information, and previous research, official letters exchanged between leaders available in both printed and electronic form.

Key Findings

India adopted the role of self-mediation to fight Sri Lanka's war to secure its regional hegemony using both offensive and defensive measures. Under neorealism Waltz (1997, p.915) argues states "are free to do any fool thing they care to, but they are likely to be rewarded for behavior that is responsive structural pressures and punished for behavior that is not". Accordingly Sri Lanka not only accepted Indian hegemony but paid heavy price for not accepting India's hegemony before. Lack of central authority in international system defending states from external threats makes them feel suspicious about one another and under anarchism states suffer from "Security Dilemma" (Waltz 1988, p.619). Both India and Sri Lanka were victims of security dilemma and India as the strongest controlled Sri Lanka in favour attaining India's expectations by using both coercive diplomacy and military interventions constraining Sri Lanka's independent decision making.

On the contrary to structural pressures, domestic politics of India and Sri Lanka revealed that both states had bargaining power under domestic conditions. They expanded and limited their win-sets to influence the other negotiator. Putnam (1988, p.434) describes international negotiations are a result of "two level games". Political survival of the Sri Lankan leadership and the cost of no agreement worked as push factors in signing Indo-Lanka Peace Accord (1987) while they use the same reason for both voluntary and involuntary defection to withdraw from the Accord later.

Above domestic and systemic level factors behaved in a similar fashion after 2009 also. India diplomatically helped Sri Lanka to resist international pressure to suppress LTTE with the promise of implementing Thirteenth Amendment of Sri Lankan constitution. When domestic pressures denied Thirteenth Amendment Sri Lankan leaders refused such implementation causing damages for the integrity kept on Sri Lanka by India. Indian support for the U.S led resolutions against Sri Lanka at the United Nations Human Rights Council further caused more damages. The U.S and Indian pressure pushed Sri Lanka towards China whose material and moral support carried no political strings. Domestically Chinese presence was hailed by Sinhalese since these mega projects were concentrated on majority Sinhalese areas. Political survival of Rajapaksa regime was fully supported by the Chinese economic assistance causing security dilemma for India.

Conclusion

During the given periods both domestic and systemic factors behaved in somewhat similar fashion. Sri Lankan leaders' political survival damaged Indian hegemonic aspirations proving the two level game was not a success during both periods. Indian domestic survival also badly affects its negotiations with Sri Lanka but India's hegemonic aspirations were more influential than domestic pressures. Present government's efforts on good governance help to promote positive Sri Lankan image internationally which could reward Sri Lanka in forthcoming United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution in September 2015.

References

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