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**A Diamond in the String of Pearls:
The Strategic Importance of Sri Lanka for Indian Ocean Regional Stability**

by

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the
requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed
by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

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04 May 2011

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Abstract

In the past decade, China has rapidly expanded into the Indian Ocean region following an integrated strategy of economic development and military expansion. China has financed and built a series of commercial ports in the Indian Ocean in what has been dubbed a “String of Pearls” that extends from China through Burma, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and Pakistan. While China maintains that the ports are strictly commercial developments, India fears that the ports have potential military application, thus sparking concern that China is slowly attempting to encircle them. As China continues to expand and Indian fears continue to grow, the region is trending towards instability. As globalization increases, the United States is in the position to act as an intermediary between India and China. Therefore, the United States must decipher whether China is expanding peacefully or if they have hegemonic intentions. America can use Sri Lanka as a litmus test for Chinese intentions, and by increasing engagement with Sri Lanka during this transitional period in Sri Lankan history the United States can maintain influence in the Indian Ocean region. This paper examines commentary and historic studies from the United States, Sri Lanka, India, China, and the world community in order to analyze differing perspectives, and offers potential actions for PACOM and PACFLT to take to increase engagement with Sri Lanka and affect a long term strategic partnership in order to maintain Indian Ocean regional stability.

If the “String of Pearls” is a disguise for hegemony, then China will likely pursue a patient, deft, and subtle approach. The United States must remain vigilant for indicators and warnings of such intent... China’s behavior should alarm Washington if the “String of Pearls” results in states being forced to distance themselves from the United States and gravitate towards China. Militarily, continued lack of transparency, pursuit of a “blue water” navy, procurement of weapon systems specifically designed to counter U.S. forces, or deployments of a forward military presence aimed at excluding the U.S. access are some of the indicators and warnings that should alert Washington to nefarious intent.

- Christopher J. Pehrson
Carlisle Papers in Security Strategy, 2006

In the past decade China has embarked on several projects that have puzzled and alarmed many governments around the world, including the United States. The Chinese have made huge advances in weapons systems development as evidenced by the introduction of the DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile and J-20 prototype stealth fighter aircraft in late 2010.¹ Both of these weapons systems were specifically designed to counter existing U.S. aircraft and aircraft carriers.² Additionally, the Chinese displayed their burgeoning blue water capability by completing six rotational deployments to the Indian Ocean in support of counter-piracy missions from 2009-2011.³ Furthermore, the Chinese are building infrastructural developments around the Indian Ocean in what has been called a “String of Pearls” strategy.⁴ Beijing has stated that these projects are in line with their goal of peaceful development, and has reiterated their policy of nonalignment and noninterference.⁵ The troubling aspect of these developments is their lack of transparency. In April 2011, Dr. Milan Vego stated, “We should take note of the PRC’s supposed peaceful rise, and far more prudently its military capabilities. The perennial lack of transparency of the PLA’s modernization further compounds the problem of deducing the PRC’s real intentions.”⁶ U.S.

policy makers must decipher whether these developments are part of a “peaceful rise” or if they are “a disguise for hegemony with nefarious intent.”⁷

While the United States remains focused on Overseas Contingency Operations, the ability of U.S. forces to effectively counterbalance China as it increases its capabilities is steadily waning. In this period of “elegant decline” the United States must look to sea power allies like Japan and India to offset the Chinese rise.⁸ The United States should foster relationships with smaller strategically important countries as well. Sri Lanka is among the most important countries for the United States to partner with due to its location and strategic importance to both India and China. Additionally, Sri Lanka’s recent victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the increased commercial and economic capacity resulting from numerous infrastructural projects make Sri Lanka an excellent target for increased U.S. commitment. Finally, growing tension between China and India over Chinese intentions within the Indian Ocean could lead to instability in the region. Therefore, the United States should increase engagement with Sri Lanka in order to balance Chinese expansion, maintain U.S. influence, and ensure stability in the Indian Ocean region.

This examination of Sri Lanka analyzes commentary and historic studies from the United States, China, India, Sri Lanka, and the international community in order to examine all perspectives. It addresses Chinese intentions in the Indian Ocean, and particularly in Sri Lanka. Additionally, this study considers regional implications resulting from Chinese expansion. Finally, it considers why the United States should increase engagement with Sri Lanka and addresses actions United States Pacific Command (PACOM) and United States Pacific Fleet Command (PACFLT) should take to affect an increased strategic partnership.

The changing situation in the Indian Ocean is a snapshot of globalization in general. Robert Kaplan stated, “Like a microcosm of the world at large, the greater Indian Ocean region is developing into an area of both ferociously guarded sovereignty and astonishing interdependence.”⁹ Countries must guard their national character while simultaneously seeking to form new bonds in order to increase prosperity. Additionally, global conglomerate companies and multinational businesses are filling roles traditionally filled by sovereign countries. As national interests interconnect and the lines of traditional partnership blur, temporary partnerships are forming based on economic advantage and political expediency.

As globalization increases, India will retain a position of influence in the Indian Ocean region. However, India’s dominance in the Indian Ocean region is declining as China expands and seeks increased influence.¹⁰ India asserts that “Whoever controls the Indian Ocean controls Asia.”¹¹ Consequently, the goal should be to keep any one power from controlling the entire Indian Ocean and therefore dominating the continent. The United States must remain postured to assure access and freedom of navigation to all parties in the global commons of the Indian Ocean.¹² Furthermore, it is essential that India and China mutually accept each other’s influence in the region in order to avoid a potential struggle for dominance that could ultimately lead to conflict. The role of the United States is pivotal, and American influence is integral in maintaining regional stability.

Historically China has maintained a policy of nonalignment within the international community; seeking to cultivate economic opportunities throughout the world without the ties associated with alliance or military coalitions.¹³ The strategy of “mutually beneficial cooperation and common prosperity” is a centerpiece of Chinese strategy, as stated in numerous PRC White Papers on National Defense.¹⁴ This “Charm Offensive” of wielding

soft power for mutual benefit has significantly increased Chinese stature globally, especially with developing nations who seek assistance without moral or political strings attached.¹⁵

China has made great advances in military modernization in the last ten years. The advent of new high-technology weapons such as the DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile and the J-20 stealth fighter are indicative of the rapid progress the Chinese have made in technology advancement. They are steadily increasing their ability to operate as a blue-water navy, and recent counter piracy operations in the Indian Ocean provided an international stage to showcase their abilities.¹⁶ Chinese defense expenditures have steadily increased as well; in 2008, China increased its annual defense spending by nearly 20 percent, and their military could be one-quarter the size of the U.S. military by 2030.¹⁷ China asserts that the military buildup is a natural extension of the two strategic tasks associated with modernization efforts: developing the economy and strengthening national defense.

However, the Chinese military cannot be viewed in a vacuum. It is inextricably linked to the primary national objective of economic expansion, and therefore it is difficult to differentiate where economic policy ends and military policy begins. As stated in the Chinese National Defense Policy, “national defense is subordinate to, and in the service of, the nation’s overall economic construction.”¹⁸ Economically, China has substantially outpaced Indian investment in the Indian Ocean region in the last decade. As countries in the region look for investors in India, America, and within the global community, China usually offers the best terms. Additionally, the governments within the Indian Ocean region seem to prefer Chinese assistance because it does not stipulate prerequisites for reform, transparency, and competitive bidding.¹⁹ Recently China has begun development on numerous deepwater ports and infrastructural developments around the Indian Ocean. These port projects have been

dubbed the “String of Pearls” in Western literature after the term was first coined in a classified Booze Allen Report in 2004 entitled “Energy Futures in Asia.” China has invested \$1.2 billion in Gwadar, Pakistan,²⁰ over \$6 billion in Hambantota, Sri Lanka,²¹ over \$1 billion in Mauritius,²² and has agreed to finance the \$8.7 billion port development in Chittagong, Bangladesh.²³ Additionally, China is funding port projects in Burma and has proposed a \$20 billion canal across Thailand in order to bypass the Straits of Malacca.²⁴



Figure 1: The Chinese “String of Pearls”

Despite rampant speculation surrounding the port developments, China insists they are strictly commercial projects with no military application. Beijing cites the 2000 White Paper on National Defense as evidence, which states Chinese developments “will constitute no threat to anyone, but will rather promote world peace, stability, and development. China does not seek military expansion, nor does it station troops or set up military bases in any

foreign country.”²⁵ China imports over 200 million tons of oil every year, and over 80 percent of that oil transits the Indian Ocean.²⁶ China’s position is that these ports are vital to maintain the flow of oil in order to further fuel economic and domestic development.

These advancements have caused many in the international community to question the rationale behind the commercial and military buildup, and comments from high ranking members of the Chinese military have caused concern that China may be moving away from its historical position of non-alignment. In 2008, MGEN Jin Yanan admitted that the lack of bases in the Indian Ocean posed a problem. In 2009, ADM Yin Zhou stated “China requires a stable and permanent supply and repair base,”²⁷ and COL Dai Xu stated that, “establishing overseas bases is a logical extension, and a necessity if China is to protect its overseas interests and participate in peacekeeping, humanitarian, and disaster relief operations.”²⁸ It appears that Beijing is carefully defining “military expansion” and “military bases in foreign countries” to exclude supply and repair bases, and the resulting lack of transparency concerns India and the United States.²⁹ While these comments do not echo the official Chinese policy, they may be attempts to gauge international reaction. Still more concerning is the rhetoric that China is voicing over expansion into the India Ocean. The Chinese recently stated their readiness to “share responsibility for the Indian Ocean with the U.S.”³⁰ Even more ominously, ADM Zhao Nanqi declared “We do not accept the Indian Ocean as India’s Ocean.”³¹

It is debatable whether China is pursuing hegemonic interests in a long range “String of Pearls” strategy, or if they are simply following their official strategy of economic expansion and peacefully rising onto the global stage as a major actor. What matters is the *perception* in the Indian region; and India *perceives* that China is encircling them.³² In 2009,

former Indian national security advisor, Brijesh Mishra, stated, “The Chinese don’t do anything by accident. There is a deliberate plan with Pakistan to encircle India.”³³ India views the port projects and increased diplomatic relationships with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh as the opening moves in an effort to encompass them, and fears that China’s political influence, military modernization, and forward basing strategy will be used to contain India and undermine Indian influence.³⁴ Furthermore, there are many in India that feel the Chinese expansion will force them to spend large amounts of money on weapons designed to counter the Chinese, with money that could be spent on domestic projects.³⁵ India has already begun military expansion to counter the Chinese, including establishing listening stations in Mozambique and Madagascar, an air base in Kazakhstan, and a space monitoring station in Mongolia. It is also testing nuclear-capable missiles with ranges that can reach major Chinese cities, and activating air bases along the Chinese border.³⁶ If India feels threatened by Chinese expansion it may provoke India to take preemptive measures in perceived self defense against Chinese forces or countries that cooperate with China, and could lead to regional instability with global implications.

China and India are courting nations in the Indian Ocean region as they battle for influence, and recently both nations have focused attention on Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan people are from two major ethnicities; approximately 75 percent of the 21 million people are Sinhalese and about 10 percent are Tamil.³⁷ This seems like an overwhelming Sinhalese majority, but less than 20 miles across the Palk Strait is the Indian State of Tamil Nadu with 72 million Tamils.³⁸ In the past this has led to tension in Sri Lanka because the Tamils view Sri Lanka as a natural extension of the Tamil territory. Until 1956 the official language of Sri Lanka was English. In 1956, the Sinhalese government enacted the Sinhala Only Act which

made Sinhalese the only national language and eliminated English and Tamil as accepted languages. Viewed by the majority of Sri Lankans as a means to boost Sinhalese nationalism, the Act was “perceived by the Tamils as an abrogation of an important fundamental right that had been constitutionally granted.”³⁹ The Act has been systematically repealed; Tamil was made a regional language in 1965, a national language in 1978, and granted an equal status by constitutional amendment in 1987.⁴⁰ However, despite the rescission of the Sinhala Only laws, a lasting damage had been done causing a rift between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations. This ethnic schism was a major contributing factor that ultimately led to the 25 year civil war between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE terrorist organization.

During the war, India was placed in a precarious position; the government of Sri Lanka needed assistance to defeat the LTTE, but India could not provide adequate support without upsetting its own Tamil population. Traditionally India has provided financial aid, military training, disaster relief, economic assistance, and commercial development to their neighbor. Recently, however, if India refuses a Sri Lankan request for assistance, Colombo is quick to turn to Beijing. Consequently, any pressure or influence that India has historically placed on Sri Lanka is being negated by Chinese compliance.⁴¹ Even worse for India, Sri Lanka has turned to Pakistan in India’s stead. Pakistan sold arms to Sri Lanka in the last months of the war with the LTTE resulting in a multifaceted problem for India; Pakistan supplied weapons to defeat a Tamil people who had close ties to India, and sent the clear message that India’s dominant position is waning while China and Pakistan’s is on the rise.⁴²

In 1987 Sri Lanka signed the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord acknowledging India as the regional power, and India remains the preference for Sri Lanka when seeking assistance.⁴³ India could regain a more dominant position by acquiescing to the Sri Lankan needs;

however, the cultural tie between the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indian Tamils continues to concern India with respect to Sri Lankan support.⁴⁴ While India struggles with moral and ethnic issues, China is filling the vacuum. Between 2007 and 2009, China increased their presence in the Sri Lankan stock market and financial sector by 40 percent.⁴⁵ The increased economic influx of China resulted in a 2009 report to the Prime Minister's Office and Reserve Bank of India that stated, "China now exercises overwhelming economic control over Sri Lanka," and warned that "if timely steps are not taken it will create an untenable situation for India."⁴⁶ Faced with the possibility of losing further ground in the region, India provided assistance against the LTTE. In the final stages of the war, India provided critical intelligence that led Sri Lankan armed forces to LTTE supply ships and ultimately resulted in the LTTE's inability to resupply the rebel held areas in northern Sri Lanka.⁴⁷

With the formal conclusion of the war between Sri Lanka and the LTTE in May of 2010, India is in the delicate position of needing to increase assistance to Sri Lanka in order to regain influence while simultaneously placating its Tamil population. The Indian government is adroitly achieving these two disparate objectives by financing and assisting in projects that are mutually beneficial to the Tamil and Sinhalese ethnicities, such as infrastructural improvements, post-conflict reconstruction, and reintegration of displaced people. The preponderance of Indian assistance is in the war-ravaged northern sector of Sri Lanka where the majority of the Tamil population resides. India is financing a new railway in northern Sri Lanka from Omanthai to Palali,⁴⁸ and is renovating the port of Kankesanthurai on Sri Lanka's northern coast.⁴⁹ The port was severely damaged in the tsunami of 2004 and repairs were delayed due to the war. Additionally, India has extended a line of credit for \$200 million to build a 500 megawatt coal power plant in the northern city of Trincomalee.⁵⁰

Despite the enormous effort being expended on the infrastructural development in the north, India's greatest effort is in the demining efforts in Mallaitivu, where thousands of land mines remain following the end of the war. India has sent seven teams to demine and redevelop the land in order to allow thousands of IDPs to return to their homes.⁵¹

While India has balked at many Sri Lankan aid requests, China has been quick to assist Sri Lanka in the past decade. In 2007, Chinese banks funded the \$360 million first phase of the Hambantota port project. Completed in March 2011, the port is able to berth the largest ships in the world, and has the capacity to handle 20 million containers annually.⁵² Located less than 10 nautical miles off the major shipping lanes, over 100,000 ships (nearly 300 a day) pass by the port every year.⁵³ Ongoing peripheral projects at the port include a ship building facility and oil refinery.⁵⁴ China is also financing a \$200 million international airport outside Hambantota, and is building a highway from the airport to the capital city of Colombo.⁵⁵ Additionally, China is spending another \$100 million to upgrade Sri Lanka's railway system and has offered \$891 million to build a 900 megawatt power plant.⁵⁶ In total, it is estimated that China has invested over \$6 billion in Sri Lankan development.⁵⁷

Aside from economic assistance, China has transferred military hardware to the Sri Lankan armed forces. In 2008, China gave Sri Lanka six F-7 jets for use against the LTTE and agreed to sell Sri Lanka \$38 million in ammunition and ordnance.⁵⁸ Diplomatically, China utilized its position on the United Nations Security Council to keep a United Nations imposed truce off the Security Council agenda; thus allowing Colombo to finish the war with the LTTE without oversight from international community.⁵⁹ The methods that the Sri Lankan armed forces used to ultimately defeat the LTTE are viewed by many in the international community as excessive; thousands of civilians were killed, and hundreds of

thousands were displaced from their homes and placed in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps for many years. Despite international outcry directed at the Sri Lankan leadership over the civilian casualties and allegations of crimes against humanity, China has been a key factor in the prevention of the appointment of a U.N. special envoy charged with the investigation of war crimes.⁶⁰ Furthermore, China is a signatory of a counter-resolution that commends Sri Lanka for its victory over an internationally recognized terrorist organization and solicits funds from the international community for their efforts in combating terrorism.⁶¹ In return for their diplomatic assistance, Colombo awarded numerous contracts to China and granted China the first foreign exclusive economic zone in Sri Lanka.⁶²

The Indian Ocean region is trending towards instability due to a lack of understanding between China and India, and without a focused effort from the United States the situation could result in conflict between India and China.⁶³ As Robert Kaplan stated, “the United States will remain the one great power from outside the Indian Ocean region with a major presence there – a unique position that will give it the leverage to act as a broker between India and China in their own backyard.”⁶⁴ The United States must maximize the integrated use of diplomacy, information, military, and economic means to affect stability in the region. Sri Lanka is the ideal place for the United States to engage China and India, and can be used as a litmus test for Chinese and Indian intentions in the region.

Diplomatically, Sri Lanka provides an excellent opportunity for U.S. engagement. Sri Lanka sits squarely in the middle of the theater where Russia and China seek to challenge U.S. global strategy, and in 2009 Sri Lanka was invited by China and Russia to attend the Shanghai Co-Operation Council as a dialogue partner.⁶⁵ Despite the increased courting by China and Russia, Sri Lanka has maintained an independent foreign policy based upon non-

alignment since 1957.⁶⁶ Instead of alignment, Sri Lanka prefers to broker individual deals based on reciprocation, such as the exclusive economic zone it granted China in exchange for massive Chinese economic investment. Likewise, in 2007, Sri Lanka agreed to the Access and Cross Servicing Agreement with the United States which allows U.S warships and aircraft the use of Sri Lankan port and airfield facilities in exchange for American economic assistance.⁶⁷ Understanding this, the United States should pursue increased diplomatic engagement in order to establish further reciprocal agreements in the future.

Economically, Sri Lanka provides a plethora of opportunity for increased engagement efforts as well. The infrastructural developments in Sri Lanka over the past decade have significantly increased the commercial capacity of the country. Specifically, the Hambantota Harbor and international commercial airport developments are expected to project Sri Lanka to the status of a global mega hub, on par with the United States Pacific Coast, the United States Atlantic Coast, European, and Far Eastern mega hubs.⁶⁸ When ultimately completed, the port will have approximately ten times the capacity as Singapore or Rotterdam, and it will be the only major commercial shipping hub between Singapore and Fujairah.⁶⁹ This is particularly important because over 45 percent of the world's trade transits within 10 miles of this port, and therefore international shipping companies will incur no deviation costs to bring a ship into port.⁷⁰ Sri Lanka is already using the increased commercial capacity to seek economic partnerships with the emerging economic power base known as the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), and is poised to become their regional hub.⁷¹

Hambantota port is being financed and built by Chinese workers and is therefore providing few jobs or direct economic stimulus to the Sri Lankan people. However, the predicted economic influx resulting from the increased commercial traffic following the

port's completion is expected to double the GDP per capita in Sri Lanka over the next ten years.⁷² Nonetheless, international investment and economic assistance remain vital to Sri Lanka, as the war against the LTTE significantly impacted the economy for 25 years.⁷³ With adequate assistance Sri Lanka could transform into a robust international market. Therefore, the United States should increase commercial trade with Sri Lanka, and should maximize the use of Hambantota harbor as a commercial hub within the region.

International reactions to engagement between the United States and Sri Lanka can be used as indicators to determine Chinese and Indian intentions as well. If China is simply looking to peacefully increase its global influence, they should have no adverse reaction to diplomatic arrangements between Sri Lanka and the United States. Likewise, as a budding ally to the United States, India should not worry about diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and the United States. Adverse reactions by either China or India to increased diplomatic exchanges between the United States and Sri Lanka could be indicative of nefarious intentions. Additionally, increased American traffic in the Chinese-built Hambantota harbor can serve as an indicator of Chinese intentions as well. Robert Kaplan postulates that China's economic development in Sri Lanka is simply an attempt to take advantage of legitimate commercial opportunities in places that matter to its military and economic interests.⁷⁴ If China is primarily concerned with peaceful economic expansion, they should welcome the opportunity to increase mutually beneficial trade to the United States, China, and Sri Lanka. However, if the port is a guise for hegemonic intentions, China may try to dissuade Sri Lankan contact with the United States.

It could be argued that China is peacefully developing the Indian region, and therefore the United States does not need to increase presence in order to counter the Chinese

expansion. If Chinese developments are part of a “peaceful rise,” they should seek increased commercial interaction with the United States that is mutually beneficial. If, however, the Chinese are engaged in a long term strategy of infrastructural development with hegemonic objectives, a U.S. presence may deter nefarious intentions. Additionally, Sri Lanka’s recent history of alleged human rights violations may result in consternation within the United States and the international community over increased engagement with Sri Lanka. The United States is presently in a delicate position; they can either look to the past, place political prerequisites on assistance, and risk losing influence in the region, or they can look to the future and seek to increase influence in a region that is steadily destabilizing by offering assistance that is mutually beneficial to the United States and Sri Lanka with no moral or political strings attached. Finally, it could be argued that in a time of decreased budgets, the United States cannot afford to increase assistance to foreign countries like Sri Lanka. However, the potential for a destabilized Indian Ocean region creates a situation where the United States must increase assistance or risk losing influence to global players who will offer more palatable terms. In the end, money spent in the engagement of Sri Lanka to increase U.S. influence in the Indian region is a wise investment in global security.

PACOM and PACFLT have the ability to wield enormous influence in Sri Lanka and consequently throughout the Indian Ocean region. In PACOM’s strategy, it lists “Reduce Susceptibility to Violent Extremism, Strengthen and Expand Relationships with Allies and Partners, and Deter Military Aggression” as primary objectives.⁷⁵ Additionally it lists, “regional and military engagement, including exchanges, exercise programs, and military education and training to build regional capacity,” as means available to achieve those objectives.⁷⁶ Furthermore, PACFLT’s mission statement lists strengthening and deepening

alliances and partnerships to promote collective security” as a guiding principle.⁷⁷ PACOM and PACFLT can make significant advances in Sri Lanka towards those objectives.

PACOM can assist in the demining operations in northern Sri Lanka by providing Army engineers to assist the Sri Lankan efforts. The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations estimated that over one million land mines were placed by LTTE and Sri Lankan forces over the course of the 25 year civil war.⁷⁸ The danger of these land mines, coupled with the proximity of the fighting to the population in the north, resulted in over 300,000 internally displaced persons. With the conclusion of the war, Sri Lanka is now faced with the monumental task of locating and clearing the remaining land mines in order to allow the IDPs to safely return to their homes. Pressure is mounting within the international community to accelerate the process of returning IDPs from makeshift camps to their homes, but the methodical nature of mine clearing and the scarce resources that Sri Lanka has to dedicate to mine clearing operations make this a challenge. In 2009, the United States provided \$6.6 million to non-governmental organizations to assist in mine clearing operations in Sri Lanka,⁷⁹ and the Senate recommended continuing demining efforts in the north.⁸⁰ Additionally, as India is already assisting in the demining efforts, it provides an opportunity for the three countries to work together and increase relations.

PACOM should also seek increased International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding for Sri Lanka. In FY10, \$731 thousand was spent on training Sri Lankan officers in the United States. The FY12 request is only \$695 thousand.⁸¹ This amount should be significantly increased, and the United States should seek to train as many Sri Lankan officers as possible. Sri Lanka sends many officers to China and India for education each year. An American military education provides a unique perspective for our regional

partners; thus educating top Sri Lankan officers at the National Defense University, U.S. war colleges, and Joint Special Operations University should be a priority. Six of the last ten Chiefs of the Indian Navy were U.S. Naval War College graduates, and over 58 percent of the officers from India and Pakistan who attend the U.S. Naval War College achieve flag rank. As of May 2011, India has sent 72 officers to the Naval War College and 42 have achieved flag rank.⁸² Likewise, Pakistan has sent 91 officers and 53 have achieved flag rank.⁸³ Sri Lanka has sent only 35 officers to the Naval War College, and only 13 of those have achieved flag rank.⁸⁴ Through a targeted long term commitment, a strong relationship can be formed with Sri Lanka leading to more Sri Lankan officers trained in the United States, and ultimately resulting in increased influence with Sri Lankan military leaders.

PACOM should also seek to leverage Sri Lankan expertise through integrated training of U.S. special operations personnel with the Sri Lankan military instructors. Despite the use of morally questionable tactics, Sri Lanka remains one of the only militaries to successfully defeat a terrorist organization. Their knowledge of effective tactics in counterinsurgency warfare should be analyzed to determine applicability to the U.S. military as it continues to fight the war on terrorism. Additionally, the creation of On Board Security Teams (OBST) that deploy on merchant ships transiting through the waters surrounding Sri Lanka has resulted in the shipping lanes south of Sri Lanka being free of piracy for almost 30 years.⁸⁵ PACOM and PACFLT should study the OBST tactics to determine how they could apply in the fight against piracy in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

PACFLT can increase engagement with Sri Lanka through a coordinated port visit policy. Geographically, Sri Lanka is an ideal port visit for U.S. ships, as it is over 1600 miles from Singapore and almost 1200 miles from Diego Garcia, and there are three ports in Sri

Lanka capable of berthing all ships in the U.S. inventory. Economically, port visits are an excellent way for the United States to assist Sri Lanka while conducting required resupply and servicing to U.S. ships. It is estimated that when an aircraft carrier conducts a port visit, it boosts the local economy by over a million dollars. Additionally, in the day of the “strategic corporal,” every sailor, airmen, and marine is a walking ambassador of the United States while on liberty. With increased emphasis on local community relations projects and targeted strategic communications, port visits can significantly increase the U.S. image.

PACFLT should leverage the March 2007 Access and Cross servicing agreement and attempt to negotiate a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Sri Lanka that is similar to the MOU the United States has with Singapore. While Singapore is not considered an ally, they allow the U.S. nearly unrestricted use of their naval bases for bunkering and port visits. Additionally, they allow the United States to temporarily base C-2 Greyhound aircraft at their international airport when a U.S. aircraft carrier is operating in the vicinity, thus allowing the United States to conduct limited resupply without having to bring the ship into port. A similar MOU with Sri Lanka would greatly increase U.S operational capability in the region.

The *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* states that one of the Navy’s responsibilities is to “foster and sustain cooperative relationships with international partners,” and lists Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief as a new core capability.⁸⁶ In 2004, Sri Lanka was hit by a massive tsunami that resulted in over 35,000 deaths and destroyed over 100,000 homes.⁸⁷ In light of this new mission, PACFLT units should conduct training and exercises with Sri Lanka and other regional nations in preparation for future relief efforts. These exercises provide the benefit of forming multi-national partnerships with regional nations, and could be an area where traditionally disparate nations can work together.

PACOM and PACFLT should partner with the Department of Homeland Security to temporarily assign Coast Guard personnel to assist and train the newly formed Sri Lankan Coast Guard. The Sri Lankan Coast Guard was officially created on March 4, 2010 and is considered a non-military entity charged with the security, law enforcement, and environmental cleanliness of Sri Lankan waters.⁸⁸ It will also counter human trafficking, impede illegal fishing, and identify piracy.⁸⁹ By offering training to the Sri Lankan Coast Guard, the United States can foster the relationship between the two countries while simultaneously decreasing the threat in the region. Additionally, Coast Guard units operating as non-military entities should discourage the potential negative connotation with the countries in the region.

China and India are trending towards instability, and the United States is in a position to act as a broker to prevent the Indian Ocean region from spiraling towards volatility. Through increased engagement with Sri Lanka the United States can perform a litmus test for Chinese intentions by forcing interaction and challenging Chinese expansion in the tenuous geostrategic location before Chinese influence fully matures and U.S. influence is marginalized. PACOM and PACFLT should use all the diplomatic and economic means available to engage Sri Lanka in an effort to establish a long term relationship with this strategically important partner, thus facilitating greater stability in the Indian Ocean region.

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