

PATHFINDER INDIAN OCEAN SECURITY CONFERENCE(PFIOSC) 2020

10th November 2020

Key note speech by Admiral Prof. Jayanath Colombage, Secretary, Foreign Ministry and Director General Institute of National Security Studies (Sri Lanka)

Indian Ocean

- Sea has always been instrumental in defining the destiny of the world by bringing people closer, melting down cultures and supporting the global economy.
- Seaborne trade has been an engine for inclusive and sustainable growth.
- Maritime connectivity is the key to substantive economic development for many nations.
- Covering a massive water body of app. **70 million sq. km.** and a vast geographical area stretching from the eastern shores of Africa to Australia, the Indian Ocean region is home for app. **2.7 billion** people resident in the **littoral countries**.
- **Asia's** growing economic and political importance is undeniable
- With the rise of Asia, the political and economic balance is increasingly shifting towards the Indo Pacific.
- The region is becoming the **key** to shaping the international order in the 21st century.
- Latest initiative for this region- **Policy guide lines for the Indo-Pacific- shaping the 21st century together-**
“**Prosperity of our society depends on freedom of shipping**”. Hence need to participate in **functioning growth markets**
- Global value chains are intertwined here.
- Indian Ocean has been a well-connected ocean for trade, culture religion to move across
- This is part of a **Global Maritime Common-** All should be free to be here
- **Half** of the world's container ships, **one third** of the World's bulk cargo traffic and **72%** of global oil shipments depend on this water body for transit purposes.
- **Security of shipping** will remain a primary concern during times of **peace** as well as **conflict**. We very well know what happened during **Somali Piracy**
- After an **interval** of nearly **three decades**, there are signs of **IOR** once again entering into **another phase** of **big power rivalry** with potential for military confrontation.
- The Question is should the **littoral countries** get dragged into a **superpower confrontation** that is not of **their making** or in their **interest**?
- Shouldn't we be focusing of **economic** and **social development**? And achieving the **SDGs** by the target year of **2030**
- **ADB** report has estimated that **infrastructure needs of Asia** and the Pacific would exceed \$ 22.6 trillion through 2030.
- Where can this money come from? Donors? Bilateral and multilateral lenders? FDI?
- **Covid-19**
 - Old **certainties** are **questioned**
 - A **dangerous Recession**? slowing down economies

- **Socio-economic tensions** and **Human emotions** rising high and creates a **fear and insecurity**
- Extreme forms of **nationalism**
- There is and there will be **interruptions** to **Global Supply Chains**
- **Multilateral Health governance** may be the way forward. Health diplomacy is at it's best
- Attention to **Food** and **Medicine security**
- Countries choosing to **invest** more on **Hospitals** and **Laboratories?**

Geo-Political, Geo- Economical and Geo- Strategic landscape

- Indian Ocean has become significant in the 21st Century
- Two very significant initiatives are here
 - **Indo Pacific Strategy**- Free and Open Ocean
 - **Belt and Road Initiative**- maritime trade and infrastructure related development
 - Sri Lanka wishes for a free and open Indian ocean for maritime commerce, development of maritime related infrastructure and connect to the Global supply chain across the ocean
- Present day Indian Ocean has become a stage for strategic competition for regional and global powers
- Competition is for **RMB**- Resources, Markets and Bases(places)
- More and more **governments, organisations** and **institutions worldwide** are making the Indo-Pacific their **conceptual frame of reference** and thus the **basis of their policies**
- However, they differ, in terms of their objectives, emphasis on different policy fields
- Today, the *Quad* (India, Japan, US, and Australia) is being institutionalised with a special focus on upholding the *rules-based order for a free and open Indo-Pacific*.
- Quad's resolve to dominate Indo-Pacific high seas is being questioned
- Is Quad the principle driver of Indian Ocean security?
- **No one country can be the net-security provider in the IO as clearly evidenced by the Piracy if the Gulf of Eden and Western Indian Ocean**
- Is there a **Maritime 'Cold War'** or **'Cool War'**
- **Insecurity** of one country lead to **insecurity of others**
- IO Region is characterised by **rapidly increasing arms dynamics**.
- Identifying and Addressing Major Issues Including **'mistrust'** and **'trust deficiency'**

South Asia in the Indian Ocean

- South Asia is a complex security construct
- South Asia is **militarily, politically** and **economically** a **dynamic** region
- Region lack a common **security consensus**- lack of **interdependence** and **strategic ambiguity** is prevalent

- This is a **nuclearized region** with two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan who are enemies for the last 72 years
- Region borders another nuclear power- **China**
- We witness regional and national security interplay in this region
- Impact of geographic proximity on security interactions is strongest and most obvious
- For countries such as Sri Lanka, which is an adjacent state to nuclear India - this is a trilemma- 3rd party effects-
- Security of an innocent state can be impacted in someone else's war
- India's geographical centrality, size, population and economy are key factors
- Free and open Indian ocean for what? We need it for trade, investment, development, cooperation

Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean

- Centrality in the Ocean
- Close proximity to major SLOCs
- Close geographical proximity to India
- Amidst the spheres of influence of India, USA, China, Japan and Australia, EU, UK
- **Survival** of the state is most important for Sri Lanka
- We are a small state and do not have any **hegemonic intentions**
- Sri Lanka wishes for an Internationally accepted Rules based maritime order and freedom of maritime commerce
 - To overcome asymmetry
- We believe in Multilateralism and not in Unilateralism
- We do not like to see **securitization** of **maritime trade** and **development**
- We wish to see a '**balance of power**' and not a **mighty hegemonic power**
- Sri Lanka is not a piece of 'Real Estate'. Please respect Sri Lanka's National Interests

Sri Lanka's Economy and Foreign Policy directives

- There is a brewing economic crisis amidst the Covid-19 **induced** global economic meltdown
- Presidents' three pillar strategy
 - National Security
 - Economic Development and Empowerment
 - Foreign Relations
- **Five pillars of our foreign policy**
 - **Neutrality**
 - **Friendly relations** with everyone
 - Not to be caught up in **major power game**. We do not like to '**hedge**' or '**choose**' between states or '**Band Wagoning**'.
 - We need to maintain "**Strategic Autonomy**"

- Sri Lanka will not **cede control of strategic assets** to foreign concerns. Investment according to SLs vision articulated in Presidents' '**Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour**'
- Understand **India's strategic security concerns** specially in **maritime** and **air** domains and **not** to be a strategic security concern to India.
- MDA and NSA level talks between India, Sri Lanka and Maldives

What we the Indian Ocean Littorals wish to see taking place

We need a critical retrospection about Indian Ocean from within

- We wish to insulate the Indian Ocean from great power rivalries as in 1971 IOPZ (49 Years ago)
 - Free from Nuclear weapons
 - No great power rivalries
 - No bases to support such rivalries
- Peace and stability in the IO- to spread good will- to allow littoral states to develop economically
- Strengthen Economic Cooperation- SDGs UN 2030 Agenda
 - Create wealth for people
 - Ethically
 - Environment friendly
- Strengthen Global supply chain
- Strengthen defence cooperation
- Strengthen Maritime security Cooperation
- Technology cooperation- Education, Health
- Mutual respect and mutual benefit
- Partnerships- **Inclusivity** and not **Exclusivity**.
- Spirit of shared '**Global Responsibilities**'
- Indian Ocean to be an Open, Inclusive, Transparent, Rules based, Cooperative ocean may be under the UN
- Strengthen multi-lateral cooperation, for security, diplomatic and an economic architecture for **cooperative, collaborative Regional collective security** mechanism
- Alliances and partnership for the IOR to convert **Maritime Asia** in to **Continental Asia**
- There is a critical need for an **Indian Ocean Narrative**, Indian ocean **maritime security strategy, IORA** may be the way forward
- The essence of foreign policy is the relationship with the 'other': the ally; the foe; the friend.
- International diplomacy should work at its best in the IOR
- A journey of thousand miles start with the first step. PF IOSC
- President Elect Joe Biden stated during his victory speech "**You can be opponents but you do not have to be enemies**"

