



# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND YAHAPALANA

## Part 3

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Before taking Sri Lanka into war, the US has to somehow loosen China's grip on Sri Lanka. Since India is unpopular in Sri Lanka, the US has entrusted this task to Japan. In Oct 2015 Japan and Sri Lanka signed a comprehensive partnership agreement. Japan will work with India on the Trincomalee port and also help in several major infrastructure projects including Light Rail and expressways.

Japan has openly expressed concern about China's growing investment in Sri Lanka and its influence over the government in Colombo. China's 'development looking' projects are in fact barely concealed tactics to increase its military abilities in the Indian Ocean. The new ports could be used as naval supply bases, said Japanese security expert Satoru Nagao, presently Research Fellow at the Sri Lanka Institute of National Security Studies (INSS).

China is not the only country that could help Sri Lanka, said Nagao. Japan could help fill the gap left by the Chinese. Closer ties to Japan and India would more than make up for any economic troubles caused by shunning the Chinese. Collaborative projects with them are preferable to accepting China's support, which would create strategic difficulties. Also Japan can be the perfect mediator between India and Sri Lanka, said Nagao.

Japan wants Sri Lanka to be a member of US led military alliance presently developing in the Indian ocean region and is taking action to push Sri Lanka in that direction. A Japan- India- Sri Lanka partnership in the security domain would be valuable. A win-win situation can be created under Japan-Sri Lanka-India cooperation, said Nagao. Sri Lanka can be the base for strategic maritime surveillance over the Indian Ocean. If Japan and India collaborate to establish a maritime communications network system in Sri Lanka serving the entire Indian Ocean, it would be easy for the three countries to know what is happening in the Indian Ocean.

Japan's military links with Sri Lanka are not completely new. The rank order of foreign warships visiting the Port of Colombo from 2008 to 2017 was India 73, Japan 64 and China 26. Today, Japan has established direct links with the Sri Lankan Navy and the Coast Guard. The training squadron of

the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) has been visiting the Port of Colombo and engaging in exercises with Sri Lanka Navy and Sri Lanka Coast Guards. In October 2016 by MSDF ships Kashima, Setoyuki and Asagiri visited. The MSDF also participated in 'Pacific Partnership 2017', a multilateral exercise with the participation of military and non-military personnel from the USA, Australia and Sri Lanka. Japan has stationed a Defence Attaché in Colombo, to coordinate the visits of MSDF vessels

In 2016, Government of Japan granted 1,830 million Japanese Yen (approximately Rs. 2.4 billion) to the Government of Sri Lanka, for procurement of two 30-meter patrol vessels from Japan, including construction of vessels, sea transportation from Japan to Sri Lanka, and familiarization training for coast guard personnel. In 2017, on a loan from Japanese government, the SLCG also placed an order for construction of two 85-meter Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPV) with the Colombo Dockyard (Pvt.) Ltd. (CDL) to enhance its capabilities in deep sea surveillance.

Japan has a clear anti-China, anti- North Korea, pro- America military policy. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on his re-election in October 2017 said My immediate task is to deal with North Korea and also continue Japan's policy of strengthening the alliance with the US. Japan wants a multi state coalition in the west Pacific. In 2012 Abe had suggested a strategy whereby Australia, India, Japan, and the US state of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific".

India and Japan issued a Joint statement in 2017, referred to enhancing maritime security cooperation, improving connectivity in the wider Indo-Pacific region, strengthening cooperation with ASEAN, and promoting discussions between strategists and experts of the two countries. For India, Japan made an exception to its rule of not conducting nuclear commerce with any state that is not a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The joint anti-submarine warfare training between the Indian Navy and Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) will be expanded.

India and Japan will also collaborate in the development of India through the India-Japan Act East Forum. Japan is providing assistance to North East India ranging from key infrastructure such as road connectivity, electricity, water supply and sewage, to social and environmental sustainability, as well as people-to-people exchanges including the "IRIS Program" inviting youth from the region to Japan. Four Japan-India Institutes for Manufacturing (JIMs) in the States of Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu are planned.

India and Japan also propose to expand their activities globally. The India-Japan Joint Statement of 2017 linked Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy with India's Act East Policy. India and Japan are also collaborating on the Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC).Japan is giving \$30 billion and India\$10 billion. The project is aimed at building capacity and human resource development in Africa.

Yahapalana has attached itself to another US satellite, Australia. Australia is seen as a neutral power in the Pacific. Sri Lanka could be a stabilizer in the Indian Ocean, protecting and creating a peaceful surround at a time when 'the rise of China and emerging India is happening in Asia', said Yahapalana. Our trilateral engagement between the US, India, and Japan are bringing in rewards. There is room to invite others, including Australia, to build on shared objectives and initiatives," said the US.

President Maithripala Sirisena visited Australia in May 2017 and signed a Joint Declaration under the heading 'security and defence cooperation'. This declaration spoke of a shared interest in regional security in the Indian Ocean and a commitment to closer cooperation. Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL) thereafter held a workshop in Colombo in October 2017, in collaboration with the Australian High Commission. At this workshop they discussed what the defence policy of Yahapalana should be.

It appears that Yahapalana is preparing a 'defence Policy' and it is unable to do so without Australia's assistance. The Ministry of Defence has sought Australian expertise in preparing its own white paper and 'viable defence policy' said the press release. the defence white paper could assist to resolve the complexity of the nation's defence strategy' and thereby help to abate public apathy." babbled Yahapalana. The creation of a viable defence policy would allow us to make an appraisal of the security environment we live in and adapt our military capabilities in proportion to what is required," said Yahapalana idiotically. It should be the other way. You assess the need and then draw up a policy.

There is a fourth country that Yahapalana may have to take into consideration later on. Russia is now starting to assert itself in the international scene. It has good relations with China. The heads of state of China and Russia are friends. It also has good relation with India. President Putin visited India in 2000. India recently held a joint military exercise with Russia.

Now the Middle East is turning to Russia. Moscow has become an undeniable political force in the Middle East, said analysts. US influence in the region is receding and Russia's is increasing. in the last few months we have seen a good number of Middle Eastern leaders including those of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, all coming to Moscow, realizing that Russia is an emerging power and the US perhaps a declining one, said Al Jazeera in October 2017.

The most significant link up is that of Saudi Arabia. The aging king of Saudi Arabia tottered into Moscow on a first ever visit in October 2017 and the two countries signed billion dollar arms and energy contracts. There is little doubt that Saudi Arabia greatly values its relations with Russia said political analysts. Saudi Arabia has been seen for decades as the staunchest ally of USA in the Middle East. This visit indicates that US influence in the Middle East is definitely waning.

The Pathfinder Foundation of Sri Lanka (PF), to its credit, has entered into a collaboration agreement with the Moscow based Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). The agreement, signed by Andrey Kortunov, Director General of RIAC and Bernard Goonetilleke, Chairman, PF, seeks to exchange analytical papers between the two institutions, implement joint projects to strengthen the stance of the two countries in the international arena, including conducting roundtable discussions and workshops; develop interaction between Russian and Sri Lankan institutions in international research activities; and engage in mutual informational support through the respective web-resources and social media channels.

Pathfinder Foundation, launched by Milinda Moragoda in 2006, is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan and advocacy think tank, which has played a catalytic role in promoting economic policy reforms in Sri Lanka. Among the areas focused by PF are promoting market oriented economic reforms, public-private partnerships, promotion of bilateral relations with major foreign countries and people-to-people relations as well as strategic issues.

Russian International Affairs Council a non-profit academic and diplomatic think tank that was established in 2010 pursuant to a presidential decree is aimed at strengthening peace, friendship and solidarity between peoples, preventing international conflicts and promoting conflict resolution and crisis settlement. It is recognized as one of Moscow's best-known and authoritative think-tanks. RIAC operates as a link between the state, scholarly community, business and civil society in an effort to find foreign policy solutions to complex conflict issues.(CONTINUED)

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