
Anarchy and Small States: Sri Lanka's Survival Strategy vis-à-vis India, 1948-1956¹

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ABSTRACT

Survival in the international system was a tough task for the newly independent Ceylon (Sri Lanka after 1972), and adding to the bi-polarity's constraints was the sub-systemic pressure on the small state. Therefore, while responding to systemic constraints, Ceylon also had to countervail regional power India very often. Concerning India, Ceylon's strategy from the beginning turned to be one of forming alliances with extra-regional powers. The small state's dilemma of survival and security primarily owed to its long historical experience with India. And the elite leadership was never ready to rely upon assurances of security by the regional power, for they thought it would devour 'the small' in the absence of external guarantees of security. Therefore, Ceylon took off its journey of self-government with a security pact with the UK, and a strategy of engaging with the superpower USA. Ceylon looked reluctant to be aligned with India's regional strategy. It could not completely move away from India's normative shadow, but tried to define non-alignment or middle path pragmatically and used it as a pretext mostly. Throughout this period the concept of sovereignty did not seem a fundamental matter; the presence of the Royal military on its bases and being a member of the Commonwealth without opting for becoming a 'Republic' was regarded as essential for security. While its ruling elite were ardently anti-communist and conservative liberals, Ceylon was hugely under an economic compulsion to trade with China. Though the famous Rice-Rubber agreement earned much ire from the USA, Ceylon went on with it, as it valued economic survival in the absence of sufficient aid from the West. Following Kenneth Waltz's understanding of the anarchical international system, this paper considers South Asia as a regional sub-system in anarchy. However, this paper further wants to suggest that the realist strategy does not always advocates external balancing as the

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only option for a small state. Instead Sri Lanka needs to rethink India's hegemonic role from a systemic perspective and look for more cooperation with it since India is making rapid progress toward becoming a major power in Asia.

KEYWORDS:

Small States, Regional Powers, External Balancing, Security Dilemma, Non-alignment, Strategic-autonomy

1.0 Introduction

Among the different categories of states², the small or the weak states are the most vulnerable in the international system³. The small states constantly struggle for survival in a turbulent environment of international anarchy. These states in the international system, therefore, have to frequently review and revise their strategies and adjust them according to the changing dynamics of the political, security and economic environment. This paper reviews a case of a small state from the era of de-colonization, Sri Lanka, or Ceylon then. As a new small state, in the immediate aftermath of independence, Ceylon was just exposed to the high tension of the Cold War rivalry of superpowers, and also to the new distribution of power in South Asia in favour of India. Within that context of international and regional politics Ceylon had to struggle for ensuring its survival and security, and this study basically attempts to re-read that experience and identify its significance.

The study recognizes India as the key concern of Sri Lanka's post-independence external strategy, largely due to a 'threat perception' over it (*see De Silva, 1995*). Historically, India has been Sri Lanka's most immediate concern for security and survival (Mendis, 1992). India as the predominant power in the South Asian sub-region is the most influential actor in the region sharing historical, geographical, socio-cultural and political ties with all the other states. Yet, the study assumes that all types of proximities or linkages with India take a second stage when it comes to deal with the issues of state survival, autonomy, security and territorial integrity of its neighbouring small states.

² In the book, *Weak States in the International System*, Michael I. Handel (1990) provides a vivid discussion on different types of states or powers such as 'weak or small', 'middle' and 'great'.

³State vulnerability can be explained from several dimensions, but, here, we are mostly concerned with security, political and economic vulnerabilities, which affect small states due to their fragile political-economic conditions, power and capability limitations, and lack of resilience to face external forces. From a structural realist (Waltz 1979) perspective, it is the systemic anarchy which mostly renders the security and survival vulnerable for the small states.

After the British left, the status of regional power was assumed by India in South Asia. The new distribution of power was a main concern for small states in the region in relation to their external policies concerning survival, security and autonomy. The study mainly focuses on Ceylon's relations with the UK, USA and China from 1948 to 1956. These relations largely constitute Ceylon's external strategy that could possibly work as a countervailing strategy vis-à-vis India too. In general, the study attempts to touch upon the survival strategy of Ceylon, in its multiple dimensions, in the international and the regional system during the first eight years after independence. Theoretically, this study is an attempt to analyse the effects of the international system, its polarity, as well as the sub-systemic structure on the external behaviour of small states existing in anarchy.

The paper first explains the methodology, hypothesis and research problem and reviews the available literature while clarifying some of the key concepts employed in the study. Then it presents the findings and the discussion under a few themes. The final section presents the summary and suggests possible recommendations too.

1.1 Methodology

The overall methodology is constituted of a hypothetico-deductive method through a case study. This study follows a qualitative approach and analyses primary data (mainly derived from archival sources such as Hansard Reports, declassified government documents, speeches, diplomatic reports and Treaties etc.). According to this particular method of analysis, the research should first derive its propositions from available theories, in this case from Political Realism and Structural Realism in International Relations, and tests the hypotheses against empirical data. The study attempts to investigate the security concerns of small states through a case study. It proposes to study Sri Lanka's first phase of independence, 1948-1956, as a fitting case for the continuation of the way security concerns were historically thought of as taught in the Realist thinking. The period from 1948 to 1956 is significant for studying security concerns of small states, particularly because that period experienced much tension due to the Cold War in bi-polarity and the new distribution of power in the regional system of South Asia which influenced Sri Lanka to rethink its survival and security. Therefore the study contextualised in bi-polarity in the international system and within a new regional distribution of power in the post-independence era employs systemic variables to explain the central argument.

1.2 Hypothesis and Research Problem/Questions

This paper agrees with the Realism's proposition that the prime motive of any state is survival and employs it to study as to how small states strive for their survival in regional sub-systems of the international system while perceiving 'a possible threat from the larger states' (Walt, 1987). The struggle for survival is the most fundamental issue for all states, but small states which lack capabilities that can be translated into power and influence cannot simply afford to survive without power capabilities available only for the major powers. Therefore, this study presumes that small states have to be clever enough to design their own strategies which could be constituted of unique practices or a blend of several existing practices. The central question of the empirical work of this study therefore is how the small state, Sri Lanka, attempted to survive in the absence of its guarantor of security, the British, in an anarchical sub-system while similarly facing the international systemic consequences as well. The perceived 'threat of India' in the subsystem may be because of its sheer size as well as Sri Lanka's reading of India's 'motives' and historical experience of being intermittently threatened by South-Indian invaders (Mendis, 1992) up to the 16th century. Second, the study argues that when facing a security dilemma the states would give less priority for cultural and geographical proximity of the big states and instead would consider proximity too as a security threat (Muni, 1993). All in all this study is an attempt to re-contextualize a structural realist understanding of state survival in a regional sub-system where the conundrum of state autonomy and sovereignty surfaces very often.

The major hypothesis of the study in relation to the main research question is that the post-independence, small state of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) attempted to strategize a survival mechanism vis-à-vis India despite India's long-time historical relations or assurances of security; and secondly, the small state took security and survival as the most important issues at the initial stage of its state building and awarded a lesser or no place for the concept of sovereignty. Some basic research questions being explored include how did the new leaders of Sri Lanka realise the concept of security? How did Sri Lanka respond to its understanding of insecurity and how it managed or fail to receive assistance from major powers? Did it completely antagonize India or manage friendship with it while attempting to balance a possible security threat from it? Lastly, how the policy of non-alignment should be understood in relation to the main issue of state survival?

1.3 Literature Review

This survey of literature mainly looks at the existing readings of some major themes and concepts relevant to the study, including basically, the concept of small or weak state, regional power, and anarchy and security dilemma. Second a brief attempt is made to understand the nature of Sri Lanka's relations with major powers and presents its importance for the current study.

1.3.1. The Concept of Small State

There is no definite definition of the concept of small state in the study of International Politics (Sutton and Payne, 1993, p.581). Smallness is a relative idea and the concept of the small state has been differently defined with the help of both quantitative and qualitative variables (Mass, 2009). Though legally all states are equal, in reality hierarchy among them prevails exposing them to 'structural anarchy' in the system. According to Realism in International Relations (IR) what matters mostly to the states are 'power and capabilities'; economic, military geographic, demographic and several other variables together constitute relative 'power status of states and they could be classified in a typology of states including the Weak/Small/Middle/Great and Super Powers (see Baldwin, 1989; Handel, 1990; Hobson, 2000; Mearsheimer, 2001 and Yamasaki, 2009).

The small states can be relatively defined in relation to the great powers. As Morgenthau views it; "A Great Power is a state which is able to have its will against a small state [...] which in turn is not able to have its will against a Great Power" (Morgenthau, 1948, as cited in Neumann and Gstohl, 2004, p. 13). Thucydides' observation that 'the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must' also depicts how the sheer lack of capability endangers the survival of small states in the hands of the strong states. Smaller nations are "security seekers" and their independence depends on the balance of power in the international system and the ability to make alliances with others (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 196).

The state of "being small and vulnerable" could be explained from many perspectives; yet the correlation between sheer lack of capabilities and 'being small' is one of the chief factors (Charles, 1997). Sutton and Payne (1993) present quantifiable, but some qualitative yardsticks to define "smallness" of small states. This framework is constituted with certain values commonly

observable in small states; namely, 'openness', 'islandness', 'enclaveness', 'resilience', 'weakness' and 'dependence'.

Political, economic and social systems of small states may be highly penetrable and permeable. Specially, the foreign economic sector is much more vulnerable in small states as they have more imports than exports. Ceylon at the time of independence had a sizable economy owing to the export of raw materials, but its weakness was later on seen during the decline of prices and demand for such products in the world market. Secondly, smallness is related to 'islandness' meaning 'remoteness from international markets, environmental precariousness, insularity, right to Maritime zone and military indefensibility'; a detailed study of all these features would show that Sri Lanka is a small state and was such during the period under study (Ibid). 'Enclaveness' refers to smallness in size' and contains almost similar characteristics of 'islandness'. The other features, 'resilience' refers to the conservative nature of the political system, that it can favour the Westminster parliamentary democratic system, etc. Sri Lanka's elites were highly conservative and attempted retain the system inherited from the colonizers. The small states depend on aid and third world countries; they are weak economies lacking capabilities. Sri Lanka at the time of independence was a small state with all these characteristics. Therefore, its survival had to be considered from many dimensions, not only from external security perspectives or internal security, but economic survival, social cohesion etc.

1.3.2. Regional Power India and South Asian Sub-system

The concept of regional powers too warrants a brief explanation in this study because the analysis of Sri Lanka's survival strategy is observed only in relation to its regional hegemony. International system of states consists of different subsystems (Thompson, 1973; Prys, 2012, p.14). These subsystems are led by regional powers. The great powers are different from regional powers and can influence all the lesser powers and the phenomena of regional powers hold sway over different regions, mostly geographically defined in the international system. The post-1990s has resurfaced the concept of the regional powers in a unipolar world. In attempting a typology of regions Prys (2012) following Neuman (1994) identifies 'three ontologically and epistemologically differentiable strands of thoughts': 'geopolitical (outside-in), cultural (inside-out) and region-building (constructivist)' approaches. Geopolitical approach considers 'geography and natural strategic remarks' in defining the region.

Geo-politics is a major trend of analysis in Realist school of thought. Particularly, neo-realism is a theory that underlies the global structural implications of politics and the regional powers are less stressed than 'great, middle or small powers'.

The study envisages that India became the regional power in South Asia once the British denouement had taken place, though it rose to its real hegemonic power status much later displaying a 'spectacular hegemony' in 1980s (Krishna, 1999). As Acharya (2013) argues during Nehru's period (1947-1964) India was leading the South Asian region as an international normative power. The tension was often seen between Nehruvian socialist approach to international relations (Ganguli, 1964; Sachi, 1964) and the leaders of the first government of Ceylon. Sri Lanka's security dilemma as a historically driven discursive constriction was a result of India's behemoth presence just a few miles above its territory. Looking through the prism of Realism the paper suggests that India has always been a regional great power for Sri Lanka, as India's regional interests were to be adhered to by the small state very often.

1.3.3 Anarchy and Structural Realism

Anarchy is the most central concept of the realist approach to study international relations. Simply anarchy stands for the idea that there is no overarching authority that can guarantee the survival of the states in the international system where mostly 'power and capability' stand a bigger chance than 'ethics and norms' (Art and Waltz, 1983). Waltz (1979) who espoused a new theoretical interpretation of Realism in his book, *Theory of International Politics* points out that the 'organizing principle of international system is anarchy'. Therefore a structural perspective of international politics assumes that the international system remains anarchical despite all the legal guarantees or the existence of international normative codes (Sagan, 2004). By theoretically abstracting an anarchical international system structural realism does not propose that the survival of states is in constant danger or there is the war of all against all. Yet, the idea of international anarchy maintains that states need to provide security for them by themselves, and hence the system becomes a 'self-help' one. In order to serve the interest of the state, mainly national security, and guarantee their place in the system, structural realism advocates that the states need to enhance their capabilities – military, economic, etc. Thus the international system is made of distinct, but functionally similar (all want to survive and therefore strive for it) units (states) which interact with

each other in anarchy. Applying the same 'logic of the system-wide anarchy' proposed by Waltz (1979), this study attempts to analyze the strategic behaviour of small states in regional systems, particularly resisting the hegemonic powers posing threats to their security that perhaps no credible external assistance would be available to counter them (*see for a discussion on anarchy; Buzan, Jones and Little, 1999*).

1.3.4. Sri Lanka and Major Powers

Sri Lanka's 'formation of external relations' with major powers seems to be its major strategy for assuring itself autonomy and security in the regional and international realm of politics (Gajameragedara, 2011). Therefore, since independence Sri Lanka has chosen to be in the alliances of several major powers, including, mainly, "Britain, USA, Russia, and China" and its relations with India are contingent upon the dynamics of the relations with these powers (Basrur, 2004; Kronstadt, 2009; Gajameragedara, 2011). And this behaviour is very much the way many small states are used to practicing for long (Charles, 1997). However, the ability of countering any possible existential threat to territorial integrity without India's help has been proven to be very less as is evident from the post-1983 encounters with and interventions and mediations by India in the ethnic conflict (*see Dixit, 1998*). Nevertheless, Sri Lanka has continued to rely on external major powers and the first era of relations with Britain is a vivid case in point (*see Melagoda, 2000; Gajameragedra, 2011*). In *The Policies of Three Prime Ministers of Ceylon: 1948-1956*, Melagoda (2000) constructs an argument that emphasises the prominence of domestic variables in determining external policy. Also Nissanka (1984), Jacob (1973) and several others have approached the analysis of Sri Lanka's external policy with an emphasis on domestic determinants; political party ideology, leadership, etc. Some analysts such as Kodikara (1986) and De Silva (1993) attempt to present a systemic analysis, though none of them could be regarded as structural realists.

The 'encounter with the West' (Dewasiri, 2008; Schrikkar, 2007; Wickremasinghe, 2001) put Sri Lanka in what theorists call the 'perceptual quandary' of being a small state (Amstrup, 1976). In fact the 'smallness' of colonies as a 'discursive construct' (Lee and Smith, 2010) surfaced during the post-colonial era. Sri Lanka under the British Empire from 1815 up to 1948 did not have to think of its security by its own; yet, once the British left, the elite leaders felt insecure as never before or 'security dilemma' overwhelmed

the states' psyche, since a new structure of politics and security was in place in South Asian region.

Subsequently, during the early post-independence era, Sri Lanka had to rely on security agreements with the UK, thus showing its inability to provide security for itself (Kodikara, 1992; Jayawardane, 2005; Krishna, 1999). Throughout the post-independent period Sri Lanka strived to maintain close relations with regional or extra regional powers. In 1971 when the first post-independent anti-state rebellion erupted, Sri Lanka had to heavily depend on the security and military assistance from the great powers. "Mrs. Bandaranaike approached India, UK, USA, Yugoslavia, USSR and Pakistan for military help. India promptly responded, sending five frigates to seal off approach to Colombo harbor" (Suryanarayanan, 2012). The post-economic liberalization era too seems to have pushed Sri Lanka into the alliances with extra regional powers. The security threat that the state faced from the internal conflicts in this period made her dependent on regional and extra-regional relations. Especially, Sri Lanka's conduct of the ethnic war for nearly three decades required great power assistance in terms of military, economic and political cooperation (Goodhand, 2005 and 2006; Uyangoda, 2007).

1.4. Findings and Analysis

This section of the paper presents the findings of the research and the data analysis. It consists of a few subsections. The first part of this section deals with the notion of Sri Lanka's security dilemma; the second and the third section analyses the findings on Sri Lanka's relations with the British during the period of study and the fourth part is concerned with relations with China. In the fifth part, the relations with the USA is analyzed which is followed by a discussion on the idea of non-alignment of the UNP Government, 1948-56.

1.4.1 Security Dilemma of Sri Lanka (Ceylon)

Once the British transferred political power to the local 'political elite of Ceylon' with "fully responsible status within the Commonwealth of nations" on 04th February 1948, the leadership of the new nation state was responsible for the design of the national security apparatus of the state. It was very clear to the leadership of the first independent government of Sri Lanka (under the United

National Party) that in the absence of the British, Sri Lanka would fall into the chore of “safeguarding of the territorial and sovereign independence and identity of a state from invasion, occupation and acquisition by a foreign power” (Mendis, 1992, p. 43). Moreover, the lack military capability could make Ceylon vulnerable to local conflicts, which possibly could be precipitated by the international Communist movement during the period, according to the thinking of the conservative elite leadership (Silva, 1993). Also, as a nation with fresh memories of the World War II wreckage and historical experiences of invasions, not only from the immediate neighbourhood of India, but from far away regions in the West, the idea of national security overwhelmed the leadership of the first government (Mendis, 1992). Further, the strategic vulnerability facing the country lying in a strategically significant place in the World, Sri Lanka had to plan immediate options for national security (De Silva, 1993 and 1995).

Moreover, it could be the Indian factor that was foremost in the minds of the leaders who were yet to occupy the vacant seats of power left by the British colonial government. Presumptuously, once the British denouement from the Asian region was complete, India would be a competitor with China for the regional supremacy (Kabir, 2000, p. 190). And in South Asia, India’s new leadership has gained ground since independence (*see* Brewster, 2012), putting the small state, Sri Lanka, in the quandary of suspicion over the existence of a preponderance of power a few miles away from its Northern most end. DeVotta (2010) points out that “Post-independence India viewed itself as Britain’s successor in terms of ensuring South Asia’s stability and superintending the Indian Ocean” (p.38). De Silva’s (1995) seminal work *Regional Powers and Small State Security: India Sri Lanka 1977-1990* captures vividly and in detail Sri Lanka’s relations with India, emphasising the issue of survival and security as the most challenging for the small state after 1977. While Pakistan openly resisted India’s approach to the regional leadership status (Ibid), other small states like Sri Lanka and Burma remained suspicious of India’s moves in the regional sphere of relations. Further, the strategic scholarship from India had shown the importance of attaching Sri Lanka and Burma into a strategic alliance in South Asia, mostly making the elite politicians of Ceylon very suspicious of Indian motives and possible designs of its security in the region (Panikkar, 1945). Indian security analysts knew the significance of the Indian Ocean in case of military conflicts in the region. Sri Lanka’s natural harbours on the eastern coast were regarded as the most ‘strategically significant’ in case of an international war in the region (Hiranandani, 2005, p. 184).

At this juncture, the realization of its weak power status drove Sri Lanka to search for clear strategies for its national security policy for 'safeguarding of the territorial and sovereign independence and identity' from 'invasion, occupation and acquisition by a foreign power' (Mendis, 1992, p. 40). The foreign power that in elite's perception would have jeopardised Sri Lanka's independence was India. Because, India had openly wished for a Federation of South Asian states before the independence was granted to the region by the British. In *The Discovery of India*, Nehru writes that "...the small national state is doomed. It may survive as a cultural, autonomous area but not as an independent political unit" (Nehru, 2002, p. 550). Nehru's socialism aside, his early convictions that 'India is destined to become a great power' are well revealed in his writing that was no secret to Sri Lanka's elite. Some said Nehru had 'wild ambition' to expand the Indian state (*People's March*, 2005). He wrote that India would become the center of everything in the Asian region and it could be expanded even further (Ibid).

On the other hand Sri Lanka had a major issue to settle with India, i.e., India's unwillingness to accept back and the UNP's dilly-dallying to grant 'citizenship for the 'Tamils in plantations' (Phadnis, 1967; Shastri, 2007). Sri Lanka's first government continued its negotiations with India regarding this issue throughout its tenure in office, but with no conclusions. The emerging Indian leadership wanted its interests prevail in this and several other issues in the bilateral sphere. In this context, the small state's fear of the new regional power grew slowly and its survival strategy during its first eight years of independence saw that Sri Lanka was taking an array of diverse efforts to safeguard its territorial integrity, autonomy and sovereignty (though the UNP had no issue over sovereignty with regard to the UK's shadow over the entire political and diplomatic landscape of the government) and we will discuss them in the following sections.

1.4.2 Sri Lanka's Defence Pact with the UK

Sri Lanka received dominion status for self-governing from the British under Ceylon-Independence Order and the Independence Act of 1947 on 04th February 1948 (Jayawardane, 2005, p. xxv; Jennings, 1949). While the British had ceded its power and transferred administrative powers to a Parliament Executive it had still kept some important powers with it.

The most important matters reserved for the Crown included the personal prerogatives, defence and external relations. Significantly, it was also envisaged that legislation affecting religious or communal minorities would be reserved for discretionary assent (Welikala, 2013).

For strategic purposes the British still had wanted to maintain military bases in the South-East Asian region (*Daily Telegraph*, 1956, as cited in Melagoda, 2000, p. 81). The Chiefs of the Staffs of the British prior to the independence had advised the government that to lose the military bases and communication facilities would be detrimental to its security interest in the Indian Ocean (Melagoda, 2000). The USA also had wanted to obtain military rights from Sri Lanka as it had made that explicit at an alter stage (US Government Documents No711.56346E/4-1453 in Claussen, Lee, and Mabon., et al, 1983). Nevertheless, the Western bloc of democratic and capitalist states had wanted the UK to remain as the security partner of Sri Lanka as long as the small power wanted it to continue, because they knew about the strategic importance of such a partnership.

Also Sri Lanka suspecting India that it would ask for base facilities at the Trincomalee harbour had liked to surrender it to the British. With the signing of the Defence Agreement which came into effect on the date of independence Ceylon had agreed to follow the resolutions of the previous imperial conferences which had asked the colonies to maintain closer relations with the UK in their defence and external affairs.

As per the Defence Agreement with the UK, Sri Lanka had agreed to the following proposals.

1. The Government of the UK and the Government of Ceylon will give to each other such military assistance for the security of their territories, for defence against external aggression and for the protection of essential communications as it may be in their mutual interest to provide.
2. The Government of Ceylon will grant to the Government of the UK all the necessary facilities for the objects mentioned in Article 1 as may be mutually agreed. These facilities include the use of naval and air bases.
3. The Government of the UK will furnish the Government of Ceylon with such military assistance as may from time to time be required

towards the training and development of the Ceylonese armed forces.

4. The two Governments will establish such administrative machinery as they may agree to be desirable for the purpose of cooperation in regard to defence matters and to coordinate and determine the defence requirements of both Governments.
5. The Agreement will take effect on the day when the constitutional measures necessary for conferring on Ceylon fully responsible status within the British Commonwealth of nations comes into force (see *Ceylon-UK Defence Agreement November 1947* in Jayawardane (Ed.), 2004, pp. 64-65; also in Mansergh (Ed.), 1953, pp. 749-750; Melagoda, 2000, pp. 253-254, Appendix A; Jennings, 1953, Appendix V).

While the UK undertook the external security of the island, Sri Lanka had to look after its local security. The new nation was provided with military equipment and training for its military by the British. Sri Lanka established three forces, Navy, Army and Air Force and all the three had the adjective 'Royal Ceylon' to explain that they were partly British and partly Ceylonese. However, the idea of anarchy in the international system and Sri Lanka's security dilemma served the interests of the British as well as the elite leadership of Sri Lanka. The first Prime Minister had always maintained that no country other than the UK could be trusted for its genuineness and friendship with Sri Lanka. While he suspected India as a possible aggressor, he trusted the former colonizer, as it had, according to him, willingly abdicated its authority in Ceylon and entrusted it to the local leadership in its place (Gajameragedara, 2011; Melagoda, 2000; Jacob, 1973).

1.4.3 The External Affairs Agreement and the Commonwealth

Under the External Affairs Agreement with the UK in 1947 Sri Lanka agreed to "adopt and follow resolutions of past Imperial conferences: that as regards external affairs, the communication of information and consultations the UK will accord to Sri Lanka for its practices and principles observed by members of the Commonwealth" (Mendis, 1992, p.44). The UK also promised to support Sri Lanka's membership in the UN. The Commonwealth membership of Sri Lanka was highly sought after by the UK, whereas India had still not decided over it. As Jennings (1956) analyses Sri Lanka's membership of the Commonwealth accepted the British's monarchical presence over Sri Lanka's Government.

Ceylon rejoices with the rest of the Commonwealth...As long as Ceylon chooses to remain within the family of free nations linked by allegiance to democratic ideals and as long as constitutional monarchy remains consistent with those ideals Britain's King is Ceylon's King (Jennings, 1956, p. 138).

Sri Lanka considered its sovereignty a secondary matter in the case of relations with the UK, and gave priority to security, diplomatic and economic relations with the West. The Prime Minister was worried about Sri Lanka's 'smallness and its vulnerability' in the Indian Ocean said that; "Ceylon, a small dot on the map of Asia, should always retain and promote her friendship with Britain and the Commonwealth" (Fernando, 1963, p. 36).

Sri Lanka's leadership had always maintained its anti-war stance in international politics. The Commonwealth was a platform for small states to attack the aggressive interests of the major powers. At the 1948 Commonwealth meeting in London, Sri Lanka's Prime Minister told the BBC that:

It is natural for the people to ask what use Ceylon will make of her newly won freedom...She will use her freedom in the first place to improve her own conditions...In relations with other nations, it will be her endeavour to assist to the utmost of her ability to maintain the peace of the world. No one wants war in these civilized days (The United National Party Paper, 22 Oct 1948, as cited in Melagoda, 2000, p. 104).

During the period from 1948 to 1956 Sri Lanka never expressed of the necessity of being a Republic. When India became a republic Nehru expressed that 'We shall go our way and they will go their way...'" (Proceedings of Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference, 1949; as cited in Melagoda, 2000, p. 104). Nehru's words showed that while India had embarked on finding its own niche in international politics, its neighbour Ceylon was not yet ready to be independent on its own by removing itself from the clutches of the UK. Sri Lanka by holding the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Conference in Ceylon in 1950 became the first country to hold such a conference outside the United Kingdom since the War (Melagoda, 2000, p. 105). Sri Lanka's Prime Minister valued the Commonwealth membership and the diplomatic, political and defence relations with UK as they had provided Sri Lanka the necessary clout to face the security and political challenges during his era. Sri Lanka's stance on world peace and its anti-war image were all proof of its desire for survival in a conflict free environment regionally and internationally. The next section views the economic strategy of Ceylon to enter into a trade agreement with China for its economic survival at the peak of Cold War tension.

1.4.4 Economic Survival: Trade with Red China

From 1948 up to 1953 Ceylon's major trading partners were the USA and UK. Many of the exports were sent to these two destinations and imports were also made from them. Yet, the looming economic crisis with the declining export earnings, 'mounting pressure from the opposition urging an increase in trade with China' forced the government to temporarily forget its ideological bias in the West (Melagoda, 2000, p. 151). Ceylon's frustration with the US open market trade policy and aid is revealed in the following words of Commerce Minister R. G. Senanayake of the D. S. Senanayake Government in Parliament:

We waited for foreign aid, foreign assistance. As you know Sir, over and over again, we made appeals for Point Four aid, we waited four long years. We have got in the form of assistance only a cook for the Kundasale Girls' School. Therefore in these circumstances, it was necessary that we should go where it was possible to get our requirements (cited in Kelegama, 2002).

In the context of the declining market for rubber and the local crisis of rice supply the Government had to rethink relations with the Communist world during the Cold War and it went on to negotiate a Trade Pact with China despite the possible dangerous outcomes it could face from the USA. The major development of Sri Lanka-People's Republic of China (PRC) relations during the first phase of the Ceylonese post-independence Government occurred with the signing of Trade Agreement between the two Governments on 04th October 1952 (*Treaty Series (Ceylon)*, No. 1 of 1953 as in Jayawardane (Ed), 2005, p.163-5). This Agreement made provision for an annual volume of approximately 250 million Ceylon Rupees of exportation on each side (Article 1). Accordingly a number of items from both sides were to be traded for each other. On 14 November 1952 Sri Lanka made a General Trade Agreement between Sri Lanka and China in the run up to the signing of "Rice-Rubber" deal with China in another month's time. Commerce Minister R. G. Senanayake commenting on the Trade Agreement with China said that;

It is bad enough to see a world divided on political grounds, but to divide it still further economically, cannot surely conduce to the peace and prosperity of the people. To maintain a non discriminatory market is a measure of special significance to a small country such as ours. I am encouraged to entertain and persist in this view by the reflection that even the late Prime Minister insisted that there should be no destinational restrictions or bans on the export of our commodities. I know personally that the late Prime

Minister even went so far as to protest against the imposing of bans on the export of rubber from Malaya to China (in Jayawardene (Ed), 2005, p.167).

Though the Prime Minister of Ceylon did not want to highlight the political dimension of the trade relations with China, Commerce Minister seemed to have considered the Trade Agreement as a victory as well as kind of finding a 'friend in need'. As is evident from the above words Ceylon had badly wanted to recover its economy from the trade embargos the USA had imposed on it and the helping hand of China was welcomed greatly by the Ceylonese leadership, which hitherto had a loyalty to the West, which in fact had failed its small ally in time of want. The next big incident was the signing of the Sino-Ceylon Rice-Rubber Agreement in December 1952; the Agreement gave a positive advantage for the rubber trade of Ceylon.

Under the leadership of R. G. Senanayake a Ceylonese delegation visited China in December 1952. The Rice-Rubber Agreement was signed on 18 December 1952 (Jayawardane (Ed), p. 169-174). As per the five year Rubber-Rice agreement China was ready to buy 50,000 tons per year at a price of 32 pence per pound. Also the major issue facing Sri Lanka, the supply of rice, had received an attractive solution when China offered to sell 80,000 metric tons immediately under a short term contract. The terms of the Rice -Rubber pact favouring the small country it was in an advantageous position. Under the agreement Sri Lanka was to supply and China to buy 50,000 metric tons of sheet rubber each year for a period of five years, from 1952 to 1957. China agreed to pay a price in excess of the average Singapore F.O.B. market price for Ceylon's rubber. The government of Dudley Senanayake successfully implemented the agreement and Ceylon stabilised its foreign exchange earnings during the period.

When Dudley Senanayake resigned abruptly before the end of his full term in office in 1953 John Kotelawala was appointed the Premier, an ardent anti-communist personality during that day. Though Kotelawala's tenure did not see that the Rice-Rubber pact came to an end due to his anti-communist and pro-American bias, he happened to justify the agreement before the international community several times. He also referred to the same domestic political and economic issues that the country faced at the time of signing the agreement and projected that China's assistance was the only available option before the country as the West and the US could not be of much help to avenge the emerging crisis (*see* Das, 2000; Muni, 2000). Addressing the Pacific and Asian Affairs Council held in Honolulu on 14 December 1954, Kotelawala

expressed that;

We understand the reactions of the American people towards our decision to trade rubber for rice with China. But, as I said, it was not a decision out of choice; it was a decision to which there was no alternative, in the circumstances in which we were placed. The alternative might have been the prospect of a discontented and hungry people falling into the hands of the extremist elements. It might also be mentioned here that Ceylon is not a member of the United Nations (Kotelawala, 1954, pp. 39-40).

The Rice-rubber deal with China was well received domestically by a majority of the ruling party, including the Senanayake brothers and the opposition parties, left the SLFP under S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. However, some elements in the UNP government under Kotelawala wanted to scrap the agreement in order to retrieve the goodwill of the USA. Nevertheless Kotelawala had to defend the country's 'national interests' and he too continued the Agreement with China for another term. Particularly, Kotelawala, "an archetypal anti-Communist" (De Silva, 1981, p. 519) leader of the UNP praised China for assuring Ceylon's survival when its allies had failed in his comment on the agreement in his address to Pacific and Asian Council Affairs held in Honolulu, 14 December 1954.

In this impasse, China offered us our requirements of rice at reasonable prices and was also ready to purchase our rubber at prices well above those prevailing in the world market. Any Government, which refused to deal with the Chinese in these circumstances, purely for extraneous political reasons, would have failed in its duty to the people, and would not have survived long (in Jayawardane, 2005, 1974, as cited from Kotelawala, 1954, pp. 39-40).

Moreover, he also mentioned that Ceylon had not made a choice of its own when entering into an agreement with China when the Western world was opposing. And here he wanted to justify Ceylon's action in the eyes of the USA;

We understand the reactions of the American people towards our decision to trade rubber for rice with China. But, as I said, it was not a decision out of choice; it was a decision to which there was no alternative, in the circumstances in which we were placed. The alternative might have been the prospect of a discontented and hungry people falling into the hands of the extremist elements (in Jayawardane, 2005, 1974, as cited in Kotelawala, 1954, pp. 39-40).

While the Government of Ceylon under Kotelawala could not do anything that would undermine the Trade Agreement with China it too supported China's admission to the UN in place by Formosa even when Ceylon was still not a member of the world body. In May 1954, the South-East Asian Prime Ministers' Conference was held in Ceylon and the Issue of the Admission of China to the U.N was discussed in it. Ceylon's premier agreed the matter be discussed at the Conference.

1.4.5. Engaging the USA, regardless of Aid

Today, we can argue *post factum* that Sri Lanka had managed to successfully engage the USA in its external relations after 1950, even if the superpower had acted harshly imposing 'the Battle Act' in 1952 and did not offer economic aid during the entire period (Mendis, 1992, p. 49). Though the USA regarded Ceylon as 'a peripheral' country on its strategic map of South Asia and it was closer to the UK, as a democratic power it was by the side of 'the small' state in the political arena. D.S. Senanayake revealed his attitude regarding the great power stating that "As far as the U.S. is concerned, there is not the slightest doubt that she holds the view that we hold. That is, they are for democracy" (Hansard, vol. 8, 7. July 1950, col. 487). Until Ceylon opened trade relations with China becoming the only export destination to trade 'strategic' materials to China, the US-Ceylon trade relations too were normal and stable. The following Table shows US-Ceylon Trade during the first eight years of the UNP Government of Sri Lanka. According to the data in **Table: 1**, the years after 1953 till 1956 indicate some decline in both exports and imports due to the deteriorating political situation between the two countries.

Table: 1. Sri Lanka's Trade with the USA, 1948-1956

Source: Statistical Abstract of Ceylon and Statistical Abstract of USA, 1948-1956, cited in Sinha 1992, p. 181.

Year	Import		Export	
	Value (Rs Thousands)	Percentage (%)	Value (Rs. Thousands)	Percentage (%)
1948	74414	7.59	165260	17.65
1949	72991	7.09	114591	11.45
1950	34779	2.98	332740	22.35
1951	82725	5.31	198232	10.90
1952	149680	8.79	156207	11.10
1953	52126	3.24	118524	7.98
1954	36464	2.61	117069	6.83
1955	47165	3.16	176672	9.47
1956	40226	2.47	140092	8.50

Trade with the USA aside Ceylon did not receive any aid from the great power. The Point Four Program of the Truman Government had promised a million dollar aid, but due to the Battle Act of 1951 that was not offered (Sinha, 1992, p. 25). Ceylon under Dudley Senanayake from 1952 onwards waged a huge diplomatic struggle to get the USA to assist its declining economy all those efforts had failed and Ceylon was choosing China as its leading trade partner. The non-economic cooperation with Ceylon after 1952 and coercive diplomacy was a result of the USA's general policy on the countries trading with the communist bloc during the Cold War. Yet, despite the roughshod of USA Ceylon attempted to woo it and when Kotelawala assumed the role of Prime Minister again political relations began to grow.

1.4.6. Anti-communism

Prime Minister John Kotelawala's famous speech at the Bandung Conference in 1954 received much publicity in the Western media and the Governments and they praised Ceylon then for its strong stance against Communism. Kotelawala in this speech referred to 'Soviet Communism' as just another type of colonialism in the world (Acharya, 2009, p. 57). In the aftermath of the Bandung Conference in 1954, the US relaxed its policy of coercive economic diplomacy. The Congress and the White House started to reconsider the economic embargo on Sri Lanka. However, Sri Lanka received US economic aid only in 1956 under a different Government led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike.

When the diplomatic war was on between the USA and Ceylon over the trade deal of Ceylon with China, the US also wanted to obtain military rights from Sri Lanka to first establish a 'heavy bomber staging base' and second to establish 'communication facilities' in Ceylon (US State Department Doc. No 711.56346E/4-14531). Sri Lanka under Dudley Senanayake was somehow not so enthusiastic to offer the US military bases, and the US also on the advice of the UK did not push the matter so long. However, when Sri Lanka knew that it wanted to keep the goodwill of the USA, under John Kotelawala it was willing to offer the USA military facilities. Oliver Goonetilleke and a faction of the UNP even wanted to abrogate the Rubber-Rice deal with China.

Under Kotelawala the USA had hopes that Ceylon would abrogate the deal with China. Kotelawala's anti-Communism was reciprocated by the USA by offering him an official visit to the USA. On November 1953, the US Vice-President Nixon visited Ceylon in an attempt to 'establish an understanding' over the Chinese deal (Gajameragedara, 2011, p. 221). Ceylon clarified to the US that its trade deal with China was not aimed at helping the 'enemy'.

The US also indicated that it had realised the situation that Sri Lanka had confronted with the economic crisis and further accepted its devout ideological opposition to Communism. As the US stated while it was convinced of Ceylon's economic constraints for the deal with China, it was the only point of 'irritation for relations between the two countries (Gajameragedara, 2011, p. 222). In another development of relations with the USA and Ceylon, the US Vice President arrived in Sri Lanka on 27 November 1953 during his tour of the countries South and South-East Asia. Richard Nixon became "the first holder of that office to pay a call on this country, and also the first top-ranking American politician of recent times to come here" (Watson, 2009).

The relations between the two countries improved despite the Rubber-Rice deal with China and in 1954 the US invited Prime Minister Kotelawala for an official visit to the country. Kotelawala wanted to use the opportunity to "explore the possibility of obtaining American aid whenever the Government need financial assistance" (Ibid). If the USA had proposed adequate economic aid to Ceylon there was the possibility that the Ceylon Government would have abrogated the deal with China. From the US side, it never wanted to commit up to that level. As a report in the *New York Times* said Ceylon's Premier had 'suggested that Ceylon should be included in any new economic assistance programme for the Asian Countries' (cited in Gajameragedara, 2011, p. 223). Nevertheless, US aid to Ceylon only began after 1956, but the smaller state

managed to keep the great power engaged, and that strategy itself seemed a part of what a small country adopts for the security keeping the diplomatic channel active at all times.

1.4.7. Middle Path a Cover-up for Alignment

The initial years after the independence were marked by Sri Lanka's allegiance toward the West and its anti-Communist stance in international politics. Yet, the first Prime Minister of Sri Lanka enunciated his foreign policy as 'a middle path', 'non-entanglement in power and ideological politics of the Cold War' (De Silva, 1981, p. 508). The pragmatism entailed in this philosophy is much revealed by analysts. For fear of superpowers, the USA and USSR, small states could hardly afford to take ideological positions and often tried to display neutrality. However, the UNP government's 'middle path' was tilted far-right, and was beneficial to the West. The UNP during the first eight years were never a non-aligned government or had 'a middle path' as such, for clearly it had favoured the West (Nissanka, 1984). The USSR had continued to veto Ceylon's applications for the membership of the UN; for it believed the small state was not independent yet due to its political and defence links with the UK (De Silva, 1981, p. 508).

In the issues of power-politics, peace and prejudice of international organizations, the small states in particular had to follow 'the middle way'. If they were identified as a member of a certain bloc they fear it would affect their survival. Therefore, Sri Lanka's first leader used the term 'middle way' to define his policy. The normative values of peaceful co-existence were the highlight of his ideas of the middle way. The persuasion of power politics - arms race, etc., - should end and peace must be recognised as the organising element of world politics.

The second and third Prime Ministers also believed that they were on the middle path in international politics. Kotelawala used the term non-alignment to define his external policy. He has also emphasised the danger of bloc-politics and war in the international arena. Kotelawala's efforts at forging regional unity are well-known. He had seen the importance of regional unity among nations who were then averse to power-politics. Avid support for disarmament and Arms Control also became a major external policy direction of Sri Lanka. Anti-colonialism was another major normative principle that Sri Lanka supported internationally during this period of international struggles for national freedom in various regions in the world. However, while attacking

western colonialism Kotelawala also defined Soviet communism as another kind of 'imperialism' and stated that every type of colonialism should be abhorred by free nations. In his controversial Bandung speech Kotelawala brought these ideas to the fore.

And if we are united in our opposition to Colonialism, should it not be our duty openly to declare our opposition to Soviet colonialism as much as Western imperialism? Finally, if we are against both these forms of Colonialism we must also make it clear that we are opposed to any form of colonial exploitation by any power in this region, now or in the future. Unless our own conscience be clear in this respect and our own (Kotelawala, 1955).

As a small state, Sri Lanka played a leading role in several international forums and used normative politics to oppose the high politics of war. Mostly the influence of India's political leadership had a greater effect on Sri Lanka's decisions to take a secondary role when it came to deciding on great power politics of war and the formation of military organizations in the region.

Membership of the South East Asian Treat Organization (SEATO), a similar organization of NATO in Asia, became an issue in Sri Lanka as it had to choose between a better policy option in relation to the regional and international political developments. India stance that it would not become a member of SEATO, however, quite strongly influenced Sri Lanka. However, much the USA wanted Prime Minister Kotelawala to decide on it following the way of Pakistan, Sri Lanka could not decide it joining the Treaty. The five-Colombo powers had to decide together on the membership of SEATO. British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden wanted the Colombo Powers to consider about the membership of SEATO. Sri Lanka attempted to assemble the Colombo powers to discuss the issue, but failed to do so since India, Burma and Indonesia declared that they were not interested in joining the Organization which they considered as a breach of Nonalignment policy. Ceylon Premier, a hardcore anti-communist, facing India's objection, was found himself to be in an ambivalent position (Jacob, 1973, p. 51).

Kotelawala stated that "There are these two blocs - Russia and China on the one hand side, America and England on the other - trying to prevent each other from upsetting the *status quo*. ...Therefore, small countries like Ceylon are in a position to say that they will continue to follow the democratic way of life" (cited in Jacob, 1973, p. 51). However, Kotelawala had not taken a firm decision on not joining SEATO, particularly because of the US influence. In

South Asia only Pakistan joined the SEATO and Sri Lanka's domestic constituency, the ruling party and the opposition, and its public opinion rose against the Premier's wavering mind. The opposition in Sri Lanka attacked the SEATO as "a dirty and dangerous proposal to sabotage the Geneva and Colombo Conference decisions" (cited in Jacob, 1973, p. 51).

Kotelawala's vehement anti-Communism had raised doubts of his stance to join the security pact once the chance arose from it. He stated Sri Lanka 'kept an open mind' on the membership of the SEATO. Further, Ceylonese leader had expected SEATO to play a role in maintaining peace. He had told, "The nature of the machinery for maintaining peace was the important question..." (Jacob, 1973, p. 52). In the meantime, India's stance was quite clearly expressed by a report in *Hindustan Times*. "It is time Sir John Kotelawala made up his mind about SEATO in the interests of Ceylon and a hundred years of development he is so concerned about and of the Colombo Powers who should know where he stands" (cited in Jacob, 1973). As Jacob views (1973) Kotelawala was "caught between contending forces- both international and internal - and prevented from declaring himself clearly. Internationally, one of the Colombo Powers- Pakistan- had signed the pact while the other three - India, Burma and Indonesia- had boycotted it" (p.54). Further, "If Ceylon came out either for or against at this stage, the unity of South East Asia for Sir John had worked hard, would have been lost, creating two opposing camps in the region" (Ibid). Even the English press in Ceylon had not much support for Ceylon's membership in SEATO, instead they viewed that Ceylon had already received military security from the UK (*Ceylon Daily News*, 10 Sep 1954 cited in Jacob, 1973, p. 54).

As the above discussion highlights Sri Lanka used the international multilateral forums and normative sphere as another area for ascertaining its place in the regional and the international system, though its real commitment for norms such as non-alignment was questionable. Sri Lanka always wished to assume equal status among the major powers in the international audiences and Sri Lanka's leadership also used such forums to perpetuate the small state's interests of peace and economic development as against the high politics of making military alliances and regular wars. Ceylon's inability or indecision to join a military alliance like SEATO, however, largely due to regional pressure, also shows that 'when world tension was much softer' its leaders preferred not to join any of the blocs since rival blocs 'would begin to fight each other' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 November 1955).

2.0. SUMMARY

At independence in 1948 Sri Lanka's vulnerability in the anarchical international political and economic system was highly visible. Its first fears emanated from the regional power India, which was assuming the leadership in the region; and unlike Pakistan, Sri Lanka could not openly resist India. The transfer of powers to Ceylonese elite by the British relied on three agreements - the most important among them being External Affairs and Defence. Ceylon's realization of independence without its own security capability and external sovereignty could not be viewed as complete and realistic; but without following India's footsteps, it remained a dominion when India had soon turned into a Republic. Having possessed no military capabilities, the small state had no choice but be aligned with the UK for security. Ceylon received the former colonizer's assistance to improve its military and police, but had to offer naval and air bases as compensation for use by the Western allies and USA. Thus, surrendering the state sovereignty and autonomy to an extra-regional power, Ceylon's first government assured the new state of its security.

Ceylon Anti-Communism of the UNP leadership too was a part of its conservative political ideology following the Westminster system. The UNP really valued the membership of the Commonwealth while India was a leading actor in new Third World forums. The Afro-Asian leader's summit and other regional conferences provided Sri Lanka to be with other Third World nations, but it preferred to voice its anti-Communism all the time. In the economic sphere, Sri Lanka benefited from Colombo Plan, which was aided by Western nations. Amidst the economic crisis the country faced during 1950s, Sri Lanka opened up relations with Communist China. Facing the ire of the USA Sri Lanka risked to trade with China, but it kept its diplomatic channels highly activated to pre-empt any possible punishment. Initially USA reacted aggressively by imposing terms of the Battle Act on Sri Lanka, but Ceylon's trade continued with China despite all coercive diplomatic tactics of the great power.

Though the USA was no help in the economic sphere, Sri Lanka liked to be under its shadow during Kotelawala's period. The USA too had a soft-corner toward the small state, though it did not immediately relax the constraints under the Battle Act of 1951. While Communism thrived locally against the USA's policy toward Sri Lanka, the UNP attempted to crush the movement of Communism with coercion. Sri Lanka clearly was sitting with the Western

ideological bloc, but in the region Nehruvian socialism and non-alignment too were influencing its external policy. In that context the UNP tried to pretend as a follower of a 'middle path', but certainly it was biased to the West as was evident from its permission to use the military bases by the USA, UK and their allies during military operations in South-East Asia.

In an overall analysis of the external policy of Sri Lanka during the first eight years of independence, it is seen that Ceylon did still not trust the regional leadership and hence was countervailing it in many instances. The elite perception of the West and the West's interest in Sri Lanka matched well together, and the Cold War context too provided the small state to remain within the orbit of extra-regional powers. And until the next Government was elected in 1956, Sri Lanka continued to engage the major powers in military, economic, political and cultural spheres, which were hardly a situation that the regional leadership was willing to tolerate to have committed by its small neighbour. Theoretically, the sub-systemic anarchy was the major drive that persuaded Sri Lanka to strategize its external policy through a particular external balancing method and the bi-polarity provided the necessary conditions for such a strategy as was seen in this study.

Lastly, within the conditions of the current global international environment, in which India is playing a leading role, Sri Lanka should realise the importance of and work toward a favourable regional policy that could benefit from India's gains. A persistent external balancing strategy vis-à-vis India would take Sri Lanka nowhere, but only toward jeopardising relations with its great neighbour and subjecting it more vulnerable to sub-systemic and systemic constraints.

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