

ABSTRACT

No state can survive in this anarchic self – help international system without a coherent and a pragmatic foreign policy. Especially, for a small island state like Sri Lanka whose diplomatic dexterity is of paramount importance in chartering a safe voyage through the murky waters of international politics. In this context, the Foreign Policy Executives are burdened with the responsibility of calibrating a robust foreign policy for Sri Lanka which will safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the national interest.

This study is an examination of Sri Lanka’s foreign policy from 1994 to 2019 with a particular emphasis on Sri Lanka’s professed policy of non – alignment and Sino – Lanka bilateral relations. This 25 year time period encapsulates the administrations of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Mahinda Rajapaksa, and Sirisena – Wickremesinghe. The objectives of this research were to analyze the foreign policy strategies orchestrated by the said administrations which led to the gradual alteration of Sri Lanka’s professed policy of non – alignment; to examine the impact of internal and external variables on bilateral relations between China and Sri Lanka; and to explore the impact of leader perceptions / images on Sri Lanka’s foreign policy making, through the Neo – Classical Realist lens.

This research is a qualitative case study which utilizes the deductive method. It has further incorporated the ‘research onion’ in simplifying and providing a detailed account of the research process. Moreover, the literature which were surveyed clearly reflect that a void exists with regard to the knowledge on Sri Lanka’s foreign policy between 1994 and 2019 from a Neo – Classical Realist perspective. In addition, existing literature on the subject has failed to amalgamate the influence of leader perceptions on foreign policy making within the stipulated 25 year time period. As with regard to the research strategy, this study has deliberated the case of Sino – Lanka bilateral relations with a particular emphasis on Sri Lanka’s policy towards China hence research is conducted from Sri Lanka’s perspective. The employment of a cross – sectional time horizon invites attention to Sri Lanka’s diplomatic relations between 1994 and 2019.

In conclusion it is emphatically emphasized that the foreign policy shift from non – alignment to pro – China is attributable to the foreign policy practices of the above Executives who are at the very heart of foreign policy making. It is further established that the elevation of Sino – Lanka relations to a strategic cooperation partnership is an indication of Colombo’s growing dependence on Beijing *vis-à-vis* Washington.