

**Drivers behind Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy: Assessment of Systemic and Domestic Variables Related to the Hambantota Port Project (2005-2015)**

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My research focusses on the role of systemic and domestic factors in Sri Lankan foreign policy related to the Hambantota Port Project. My theoretical framework is based on neoclassical realism type III as interpreted by Ripsman et al. (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016). The study assesses the causal links between independent (international systemic stimuli), intervening (domestic pressures) and dependent variables (foreign policy outcomes). It employs a qualitative approach along with semi-structured interviews, process tracing, document analysis, and case studies.

The case study traces changing policy towards India and China under President Rajapaksa with regard to development of a port at Hambantota. Rajapaksa in 2005 decided to build an inland deep-water seaport in his home electorate, Hambantota, as promised by his political manifesto called *Mahinda Chinthana*. India's criticism of Rajapaksa's conduct of the suppression of Tamils in the internal war, Indian companies' refusal to invest money in the port project, and a general anti-Indian sentiment among the Sri Lankan population, inclined Rajapaksa away from India and towards Beijing. China proved to be sympathetic negotiator and generous lender of funds. The port project went ahead, and Rajapaksa secured re-election, in part because of his success in negotiating with China.

The finding of this study suggest that domestic factors -- leader perception; commitment to non-alignment; social bias; and executive institutional domination -- shaped Sri Lankan foreign investment policies and account for Colombo's shift of diplomatic and economic emphasis from India to China in the period 2005-2015.

**Keywords: Hambantota Port, neoclassical realism, Foreign Policy, China, India**