



Bandaranaike Centre  
for  
International Studies



BCIS Emerging Scholars' Symposium  
*'Empowering thinkers of Tomorrow'*

# Rethinking the Future of International Relations

## Emerging Scholars' Symposium 2025

August 28, 2025  
Colombo, Sri Lanka

# **BCIS EMERGING SCHOLARS' SYMPOSIUM 2025**

**28<sup>th</sup> August 2025**

**Colombo, Sri Lanka**

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## Message from the Executive Director / BCIS



This year's Emerging Scholars Symposium, under the theme "Rethinking the Future of International Relations", drew an impressive response from over one hundred and fifty (150) young researchers under the age of 35 from Sri Lanka and across the South Asian region. In a global and regional context where the core realist concepts of international relations state-centrism, anarchy, national interest, security, and power politics are playing out in ways that increasingly disregard established international norms, rethinking the future of the discipline poses an urgent challenge for the survival of both people and planet. My congratulations go to all those who embraced this challenge and submitted their abstracts. While not all made it to the final round with full paper acceptance for presentation at the Symposium on 28 August 2025, every submission reflected a commendable intellectual commitment worthy of recognition. Ultimately, fifty-nine (59) emerging scholars will present papers interrogating a broad spectrum of conventional international relations theory and practice, offering their own perspectives on the path ahead.

The BCIS Research Team, as in previous years, has worked tirelessly to make this Symposium possible; mentoring young scholars at each stage of the paper-writing process, drawing on the expertise of colleagues and external reviewers, moderating the sessions, and providing the logistical support essential for a successful event. We are especially grateful to Mr. Shiran Illanperuma, journalist, political economist, and researcher at the Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, for generously accepting our invitation to deliver the Keynote Address and setting the tone for the day's discussions.

On behalf of the staff, the Academic Affairs Board, and the Council of Management of the BCIS, I extend my best wishes for the success of the 2025 Emerging Scholars Symposium.

Priyanthi Fernando

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## **MORNING SESSION**

### **REGIONAL COOPERATION & POWER DYNAMICS (I)**

# Comparative Analysis of European Union and NATO Strategies in Mitigating the Russia-Ukraine War

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The European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are notable forms of regional integration that emerged in post-war Europe, founded on key principles and values such as freedom, peace, security, and democracy. Over the past few years, both the EU and NATO have engaged in their security and defence policies in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, recognizing it as a clear challenge to the vision of both organizations.

This context highlights the importance of a comparative analysis of the key strategies taken by the EU and NATO, as regional organizations, in the Russia-Ukraine war to promote peace and security regionally as well as globally. The main objective of this research is to identify the key strategies executed by the EU and NATO to resolve this ongoing war. Apart from that, this study also attempts to examine the similarities and differences between the EU and NATO strategies in mitigating Russia-Ukraine war. This study adopts a qualitative approach, enabling an in-depth understanding of both organizational functions to maintain regional security and peace. The study utilizes both primary and secondary data, while Neofunctionalism serves as the theoretical framework for the present study. Additionally, the case study analysis and comparative analysis have been employed to analyze the data.

The analysis revealed that both the EU and NATO initiated measures to address the key challenges to European security that could arise in the coming years based on this conflict. Key similarities of the strategies are that both organizations started strengthening allies, neighboring countries, capabilities in terms of the military and economy, increased defense spending of member states, and implemented sanctions in different sectors. Notably, the EU supported Ukraine with approximately € 134 billion and reduced energy dependency on Russia, and NATO did so under the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP). These are key strategies adopted by both the EU and NATO to present their strategic image in managing the conflict. However, the study also identified key differences. Both organizations have different capacities in producing military equipment, and their efforts to mitigate the war increased the security dilemma within the EU and NATO member states. As a founding member of NATO, the USA believes the EU should invest more in resolving this war. Moreover, disparities occurred in the defense market, and NATO faced a lack of efforts in standardizing equipment, while the EU faced issues in integrating standardization within its member states.

In conclusion, these unified strategic responses have reinforced continued support for Ukraine while intensifying the security dilemma among the member states of both organizations. Furthermore, domestic factors within member states, especially the USA, emphasized the need for deeper engagement of the EU, highlighting disparities in conflict mitigation. Nevertheless, the enhanced military framework of NATO and economic and political mechanisms of the EU are essential to maintain long-term regional stability, peace, and security.

**Keywords:** Atlantic Treaty Organization, European Union, Regional integration, Strategies.

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## **Disaster Management in the Indo-Pacific Region: Comparing ASEAN and BIMSTEC Approaches, Frameworks, and Responses**

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The Indo-Pacific is one of the world's most disaster-prone regions, facing recurrent tsunamis, earthquakes, cyclones, floods, and glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs). Major events such as the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the 2023 GLOF disasters in Bhutan and India's Sikkim, and the 2025 Myanmar earthquake underscore its acute vulnerability. These disasters, often transboundary, have severe consequences for human and ecological security. Rising climate risks amplify the frequency and intensity of extreme events, challenge national capacities, with disparities in preparedness and coordination. Therefore, regional collaboration becomes necessary. This research addresses the problem of regional disaster governance, focusing on how existing organisations can strengthen collective capacity for disaster preparedness, mitigation, and recovery while promoting human security.

The objective of this study is to analyse and compare the disaster management frameworks, operational mechanisms, and strategic approaches of two key regional organisations: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Specifically, it aims to (1) Examine their legal, policy, and operational frameworks—particularly ASEAN's Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) and BIMSTEC's Expert Group on Disaster Management; (2) identify institutional strengths and weaknesses; (3) explore opportunities for synergy between the two organisations. The paper is grounded in the theory of the 'new regionalism' in international relations. The theory of the multidimensional impact of the regionalisation of a particular issue area. The research employs a qualitative comparative methodology using policy analysis and a review of organisational documents, supplemented by secondary data on regional disaster profiles.

The findings show that ASEAN has developed a mature, institutionalized framework, with legally binding agreements, operational agencies such as the AHA Centre, and initiatives like the ASEAN Joint Disaster Response Plan and SASOP. These enable coordinated and timely responses, as well as long-term capacity-building. ASEAN's experience reflects resilience shifting from traditional security to multidimensional cooperation. BIMSTEC, while recognising disaster management as a priority since the mid-2000s, remains at a formative stage, with activities largely centred on joint exercises, technical cooperation, and early warning systems. Its subregional focus on the Bay of Bengal allows targeted interventions but also limits geographic reach. ASEAN's long-term vision and operational capacity contrast with BIMSTEC's still-emerging institutional depth. However, BIMSTEC's emphasis on technological cooperation offers several advantages, especially satellite-based weather monitoring and early warning systems. Both face shared challenges, including unequal member capacities, financial constraints, and competition or overlap with other regional frameworks such as QUAD and IORA.

The study concludes that enhancing ASEAN–BIMSTEC collaboration could significantly strengthen Indo-Pacific disaster resilience. ASEAN's established legal frameworks, and operational expertise could serve as models for BIMSTEC, while BIMSTEC's focused scope could complement ASEAN's wider network. Recommended measures include creating formal mechanisms for joint training, interoperable early warning systems, and harmonised disaster response protocols to ensure human security.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pacific, disaster management, ASEAN, BIMSTEC, regional cooperation

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# Nash Equilibrium and the Dynamics of Deep Sea Mining Governance

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The governance of deep-sea mining has become increasingly important as rare earth minerals play a vital role in powering emerging technologies, including renewable energy systems and advanced electronics. The Clarion-Clipperton Zone (CCZ) in the Pacific Ocean is one of the most resource-rich areas, drawing global interest for potential extraction. As nations seek sustainable solutions to meet mineral demands, the CCZ stands at the center of international attention. However, despite economic incentives, no nation has initiated full-scale mining in the CCZ.

This research necessarily addresses the gap by analyzing the reasons that discourage states from being activated in the region through the lens of Nash Equilibrium. It focuses on understanding the strategic motivations behind the actions or inactions of both major powers like China and the US, as well as smaller states, in governing the CCZ and how geopolitical rivalries, national interests, and environmental concerns collectively influence state decisions. By combining game theory with a qualitative analysis of state behaviour, this study aims to explain the stable yet suboptimal patterns of regional governance and propose practical approaches that may shift the equilibrium towards more cooperative and inclusive engagement in the CCZ.

Several factors explain the reluctance to begin deep-sea mining. Environmental concerns are paramount, as studies suggest that deep-sea mining can harm biodiversity 25 times more than onshore mining, with some species at risk of extinction. The Clarion-Clipperton Zone contains an estimated 5,000 ocean species, many poorly understood. Public and scientific protests have been sparked by fears of irreversible ecological damage. Additionally, the regulatory framework remains inadequate. As of early 2024, the ISA, tasked with managing seabed resources, had not finalized comprehensive rules for mining, leaving enforcement and environmental protection concerns unresolved and creating confusion for governments. The third factor is geopolitics. While some countries like the UK, Sweden, and Ireland call for a ban, others, such as Norway, move toward supporting mining despite environmental concerns. Governments continue to balance economic gains with ecological risks and their international reputation.

The results show that what appears to be inaction is a rational outcome driven by interdependence and mutual restraint. States are locked in a situation where initiating action could trigger legal or normative challenges, while waiting offers a safer, passive position. This strategic inaction produces a deadlock where all players prefer the status quo rather than risk unpredictable outcomes. The analysis reveals that this impasse is unlikely to break without a shift in the underlying incentive structure or a more robust regulatory mechanism under the ISA or a broader multilateral framework.

In conclusion, the study finds that deep-sea mining governance is delayed not only by environmental or legal challenges but by strategic behaviour leading to collective inaction. The research recommends that international actors focus on developing a transparent, enforceable legal framework to reduce uncertainty and rebalance incentives. Coordinated efforts are needed to move beyond the current equilibrium for environmentally responsible and economically viable seabed resource exploitation.

**Keywords:** Clarion-Clipperton Zone (CCZ), Deep-sea mining, Interdependence, Nash Equilibrium

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## Arctic-Antarctic Gambit: New Frontiers for a Triangular Great Power Competition

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In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the search for hydrocarbons, rare-earth elements, new shipping routes, and strategic advantage has propelled great powers to engage in scrambles for the Arctic and the Antarctic. Triangular strategic competitions, involving the United States (US), Russia, and China, are intensifying in the two polar regions, which are becoming more accessible owing to global warming. These three great powers, along with several middle and minor powers, have become embroiled in a complex web of rivalries in the northern and southern extremes of the world. While there are numerous studies on geopolitical competition in the Arctic and in the Antarctic, few studies focus on the connections between the geopolitical imperatives in these two regions.

Accordingly, this study explores the interconnections between the complex dynamics of the triangular strategic competition in the Arctic and the Antarctic and demonstrates how it is going to shape the future of geopolitics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Using the qualitative method of social research, this study would seek to decipher the connections between the triangular competitions in the two polar regions. In doing so, this study would use both primary sources of data, including key informant interviews and government documents, and secondary sources of data, including books, journal articles, and briefs, reports and commentaries of think tanks.

While the Arctic and the Antarctic are two distinct and geographically disconnected regions, the triangular competition among the US, Russia, and China is progressing in both regions in a similar way. First, since the space for the expansion of great powers has shrunk considerably, the Arctic and the Antarctic are the only regions where these powers can create new spheres of influence. Moreover, the US, Russia, and China are using a wide range of tools, including military build-up, political rhetoric, the publication of strategy papers, resource exploration, the creation of research stations, and efforts at intelligence-gathering, to bolster their claims over these two regions. In addition, the three powers are engaging in strategic gambits to bolster their influence over the Arctic and the Antarctic, illustrated by the US altercations with its treaty allies Canada and Denmark, Russian squabbling with Norway and Chile, and Chinese strategic positioning as a 'near-Arctic' and 'near-Antarctic' state. Taking these factors into account, this study employs the theory of offensive realism, conceptualized by John Mearsheimer, to explain the dynamics of triangular competition in these two polar regions.

Consequently, albeit receiving considerably limited media attention, the Arctic and the Antarctic have emerged as new potential flashpoints in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the triangular competitions in these two regions are closely connected with each other. Hence, the international community should undertake a concerted effort to contain strategic rivalries in these vital regions and instead focus on addressing the environmental challenges facing the regions.

**Keywords:** Arctic, Antarctic, gambit, triangular competition

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## BRICS & THE NEW MULTIPOLARITY

## Reimagining Global Power: The Renewed Relevance of BRICS in an Unstable World Order

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As the international system navigates the turbulence of the 21st century, established power hierarchies are being reshaped by geopolitical fragmentation, strategic competition, and the assertive rise of non-Western actors. Traditional power structures are being challenged, particularly as multilateralism faces setbacks due to shifting policies in major Western states. Against this backdrop, the BRICS consortium comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa has emerged not merely as a coalition of emerging economies, but as a strategic counterweight to Western hegemony and a potential architect of a more multipolar global order.

As the strategic competition between the Western-led powers continues, the Global South seeks a greater voice and representation in shaping the conservative international structure. In this regard, BRICS offers a platform for asserting collective agency among the emerging powers. However, the extent to which this bloc can effectively champion the interests of the Global South while promoting multilateralism remains contested, given its internal asymmetries and geopolitical tensions. This paper examines the renewed relevance of BRICS within the shifting contours of international relations, especially in the aftermath of the second Trump administration's foreign policy, marked by unilateralism, transactional diplomacy, and a retreat from multilateral norms. It also analyses the institutional mechanisms and diplomatic initiatives employed by BRICS to promote alternative models of global governance while assessing the challenges in achieving internal cohesion amid competing national interests.

This study uses secondary data through qualitative research approach to examine BRICS policy statements, summit communiqués, and institutional developments, such as the New Development Bank, to assess the bloc's potential to present an alternative model of global governance. The analysis draws from concepts of multipolarity and multilateralism, seeking to understand how BRICS navigates international politics while exploring BRICS's evolving stance on sovereignty and development cooperation. It highlights how the bloc's strategic agenda has been shaped by disillusionment with the current liberal international order and desire among Global South states for greater representation and agency. While BRICS articulates a shared vision for global reform, internal asymmetries and geopolitical frictions could hinder its collective cohesion. Nevertheless, the bloc has demonstrated increasing institutional maturity and coordination, positioning itself as more than a symbolic alliance.

Findings suggest that BRICS has emerged as a meaningful actor in global affairs, especially for the countries seeking alternatives to Western-led institutions. Its growing appeal stems from its ability to articulate a collective Global South perspective and structural reform in the global order. While internal tensions persist, the bloc's strategic convergence in shared interests that aspires to redefine the rules of engagement in international diplomacy, finance, and development underscores its potential as a transformative force. The study recommends continued institutional strengthening and the pursuit of inclusive partnerships to enhance BRICS's credibility and effectiveness on the global stage.

**Keywords:** BRICS, Global South, U.S. Foreign Policy, Geopolitical Realignment, Multilateralism

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## **BRICS and the Push for De-dollarization: Implications on The U.S.-Led Financial Order**

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The United States dollar has played a central role in the global financial system, functioning as the dominant reserve currency and frequently used globally for international trade and investment. This has remained mostly uncontested, sustained by the economic scale and geopolitical influence of the U.S. Nevertheless, the recent incidents point to a potential realignment, with the BRICS coalition comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, emerging with the efforts to challenge the dollar's supremacy. The BRICS countries' pursuit of de-dollarization is driven by the ambition to create their economic independence against US dollar supremacy.

The main objective of this study is to examine the key drivers of BRICS' de-dollarization efforts and to assess how these efforts may reshape the global financial dynamics. This study has employed a qualitative approach to achieve the objectives. This study is predominantly based on secondary data from books, journal articles, relevant academic discourse, and websites etc.

When Russia's reserves were frozen by Western sanctions, which distressed other powerful economies like China, the push for de-dollarization accelerated. Even though the BRICS countries are not satisfied with the current dollar supremacy, their advancement as a group is constrained by prevailing internal differences that range from political ideology to economic institutions. The US's historical opposition to alternatives indicates that such resistance will probably be encountered in the future. As a result of the complexities, a coordinated de-dollarization system is considered a difficult but achievable attempt.

The research concludes that the goal of de-dollarization by the BRICS nations is part of a larger effort to strengthen economic sovereignty, reduce their dependence on Western financial systems, and change the global financial order, countering American hegemony, offering insights on potential implications for the structure and stability of the global financial system. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the change depends on BRICS' technical expertise, unity among themselves, and ability to manage the institutional challenges and geopolitical risks associated with developing a viable alternative to the US dollar.

**Key Words:** De-Dollarization, Dollar, Supremacy, BRICS

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## **BRICS and the Politics of De-dollarization: A South-South Strategy for Reshaping Global Finance**

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The dominance of the U.S. dollar in global finance has long been a hallmark of American geopolitical and economic influence. However, the emergence of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), an intergovernmental bloc, has introduced a formidable challenge to this entrenched order.

This paper investigates the research problem of how the politics of de-dollarization serves as a strategic maneuver within the broader framework of South-South cooperation, aimed at reducing dependence on Western-led financial systems and asserting greater autonomy over global economic governance. The objectives of this study are to examine the key financial initiatives undertaken by BRICS aimed at de-dollarization; analyze how these initiatives promote fiscal sovereignty and challenge the dominance of dollar-based institutions; explore the ways in which BRICS critiques global tax governance frameworks such as the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) and Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS); and understand the broader implications of de-dollarization for the architecture of global financial governance.

Mounting dissatisfaction with dollar hegemony, coupled with the extraterritorial reach of U.S. tax and sanctions policies, has intensified the urgency for alternative systems. As the Global South seeks a voice in reshaping the rules of international order, BRICS presents a critical site of resistance and reform. This study draws upon the theoretical lens of geopolitical economy, particularly postcolonial critiques of global capitalism and dependency theory, to analyze how de-dollarization reflects both a structural response to systemic inequities and a symbolic act of postcolonial resistance. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing document analysis of BRICS declarations, policy papers, multilateral financial reports, and secondary literature to interpret the economic and political motivations behind de-dollarization.

The paper also examines the link between de-dollarization and international tax governance, highlighting how U.S.-led frameworks such as the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) and Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) disproportionately affect emerging economies. BRICS counters these imbalances by promoting a more equitable fiscal order through South-South financial cooperation and by questioning the legitimacy of dominant tax regimes.

Furthermore, the study argues that de-dollarization is not merely a technical adjustment in currency usage, but a strategic political effort to pluralize global financial governance. As BRICS forges alternative pathways for trade, development, and cooperation, it challenges existing power structures and advances a more inclusive, democratic, and multipolar international order—despite internal economic disparities and ongoing geopolitical tensions.

**Keywords:** De-dollarization, BRICS, South-South Cooperation, Global Financial Governance, U.S. Tax Policy

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## **BRICS Expansion in the World Economic Power Structure and Its Implications for a Multipolar World Order**

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This study analyzes the expansion of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries in the current global economic power structure and places greater emphasis on its important initiatives and role in the multipolar world order in achieving its economic goals. This study examines how the expansion of the BRICS organization is reshaping the global economic power structure and contributing to the emergence of a multipolar world order. It further considers the economic and strategic motivations behind the expansion of the BRICS and how the newly admitted countries have influenced the internal dynamics and goals of the BRICS. Meanwhile, the research studies how the role of the rising China, which is inevitably dominant within the BRICS, affects the group and the current Western-dominated world economic system.

The impact of BRICS on the existing multipolar international order is complex and multifaceted, and this essay makes a systematic and critical attempt to consider at a theoretical level the potential of BRICS to strengthen the world order by harnessing its economic potential. The study is grounded in world-systems theory and neorealism, and this analysis adopts a mixed-method that includes a literature review. Also, through quantitative analysis, the research explores how the BRICS' growing share of global GDP (Gross Domestic Product), trade networks, energy resources, and technological capabilities are challenging traditional Western dominance. Furthermore, this study relies primarily on secondary data and assesses the expansion of BRICS and its impact on the global economy through World Bank, World Trade Organization, and IMF (International Monetary Fund) reports, and national statistics of BRICS countries, OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) reports, BRICS summit declarations.

The expansion of BRICS is not merely symbolic, but marks a new realignment of international power dynamics, fostering alternative economic and political centers of influence that support a more decentralized and pluralistic global order. Thus, the study aims to examine the motivations and determinants accompanying the new expansion of BRICS, as the collective economic weight, political influence, and institutional initiatives of the emerging BRICS+ group increasingly challenging the international system, traditionally dominated by Western powers, particularly the G7 (The Group of Seven) nations. This paper also addresses the questionable nature of accelerating the transition towards a multipolar international system in the face of certain internal deviations within the group and strategic responses from established powers. It ultimately evaluates whether the expansion of BRICS will truly foster a multipolar world order or whether the existing power imbalances will lead to bipolarity.

The study finds that China's rising dominance within and outside the group could at times act as a countervailing force, reversing initiatives that strengthen the multipolar world order of BRICS, challenging the hegemony of Western countries led by the United States. The study therefore suggests that to fill a void in the challenges to multipolarity through the multilateralism of the group, based on the emergence of a certain hegemonic nature of the group.

**Keywords:** BRICS, balance of economic power, multipolarity

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## GLOBAL NORMS & DOMESTIC IMPLEMENTATION

# **The Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Armed Conflict: A Critical Analysis of the Legal Framework and Persistent Challenges**

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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage". The protection of ICH in the context of armed conflict is an underexplored but a pertinent domain in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), further compounded by failures in international relations and diplomatic responses to contemporary conflicts.

While the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Protocols establish comprehensive frameworks for tangible cultural property, Article 1's definition explicitly excludes intangible heritage. The definition remains incomplete, and protections for ICH receive insufficient recognition within the existing provisions because of inadequate definitions in the 1954 Hague Convention. The study investigates how legal uncertainty affects real-world situations by examining conflicts in which intentional destruction of ICH has taken place while international legal mechanisms remained insufficient.

The study employs a mixed methodology combining doctrinal legal analysis with international relations theory to examine the existing efforts to strengthen ICH safeguards. The research will delve into the current statutory frameworks on ICH and evaluating their strengths and limitations and proposing pathways for their more effective evolution and implementation. As such, this research demonstrates how political considerations cultural appropriation, and resource allocations have hampered the creation of strong ICH protection criteria.

The study identifies numerous critical diplomatic failures, including the absence of ICH-specific provisions in diplomatic negotiations, insufficient integration of cultural experts into humanitarian response mechanisms, and a lack of accountability mechanisms for ICH violations, despite documented cases of cultural persecution in conflict zones. The study will also highlight that successful diplomatic interventions that illustrate that effective ICH protection necessitates ongoing diplomatic involvement, funding, and the incorporation of cultural factors into peace-building efforts.

In conclusion, this study adds to the emerging literature on cultural rights in armed conflict by providing empirical evidence of the diplomatic dimensions of the protection of ICH and its failures and achievements. The findings advocate for immediate legal reform to explicitly incorporate ICH into IHL frameworks, as well as strengthened diplomatic institutions that prioritise cultural preservation in conflict prevention, response, and post-war reconstruction activities.

**Keywords:** Intangible Cultural Heritage, International Humanitarian Law, Armed Conflict, Legal Protection

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## **The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age: International Framework and the Challenges of Government Surveillance**

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The growing technological advancement in ICT has brought a radical transformation in people's lives and making life easier and smarter. However, technological advancement becomes a challenge to the right to privacy. While the right to privacy is recognized as a human right, government surveillance becomes a threat to privacy. The states justify the surveillance on the grounds of national security, national interest and counterterrorism. Therefore, ordinary citizens and individuals desire to have adequate legal protections for their privacy rights. However, government surveillance activities often lack accountability, transparency, proportionality and misuse the surveillance powers to gather private data.

The research problem is the inadequacy of existing international legal framework to address the issue between the right to privacy and government surveillance in the digital era and how can implement international standards to balance safeguard privacy rights and national security in the digital era. The main objective of this research paper is to explore how international frameworks protect the right to privacy in the digital era against government surveillance. Privacy is a cornerstone of individual freedom and human dignity. While foundational international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) recognize the right to privacy, recent developments have further expanded. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has issued several thematic reports addressing digital privacy and surveillance, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy has provided detailed recommendations on safeguarding privacy in the digital era. Incorporating an International Relations perspective, this study examines how diplomatic engagement, multilateral cooperation can contribute to establishing global privacy standards. This research uses a qualitative approach with doctrinal legal research method. The doctrinal legal research method is followed to analyze the primary sources and secondary sources such as international instruments, legislations, case laws, journal articles, and scholarly articles.

With the development of digital technology it has become easy to monitor, track and collect personal data on a large scale. There has been a constant conflict of interest between the government and the citizens. In several instances, the government has encroached into the private data of citizens online, relying on the sole justification of 'national security'. Their argument is that human rights and fundamental rights are not absolute and those can be restricted due to national interests. However, the large scale and detail of mass data collection restrict individual privacy. This is going to remain a grey area until laws and stricter regulations are formed and enforced by the international community by enforcing an international convention.

These findings aim to suggest recommendations to strengthen privacy protections globally, emphasizing the need for harmonized international laws and national laws to balance the right to privacy and national interests. Therefore, a stronger global corporation is required to address this issue in the digital era. Surveillance should assess the potential human rights impacts of their actions and strictly ensure compliance with international human rights law.

**Keywords:** Right to privacy, Government surveillance, National Security, Human Rights

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## **The Role of International Human Rights Law in Addressing Systemic Discrimination Against HIV-Positive Communities**

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Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) patients are facing human rights violations in Sri Lanka and throughout the world. Ensuring health security is used as an essential factor in Sri Lanka and throughout the world. Accordingly, science and public awareness have improved accordingly. However, in many countries, these people even face criminalization due to this situation. More than 130 nations continue to criminalize HIV transmission, exposure, or non-disclosure, according to United Nations, undermining public health objectives. Limited legal protections and pervasive disinformation fuel institutionalized discrimination in Sri Lanka, particularly in the workplace and medical field. According to the United Nations Development Programme and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, these kinds of settings serve to further marginalization rather than to strengthen communities. These rights-based concepts are not always implemented.

As international human rights law continues to develop, there is a question of whether it is sufficient to ensure the protection of marginalized communities living in the world, and to develop more progressive international relations. According to international human rights law, individuals living with HIV are entitled to certain fundamental protections. This includes improving global legal frameworks to identify the needs of HIV patients, including comprehensive and barrier-free access to timely needs. Based on international agreements like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), this study uses a qualitative legal-normative technique. Examples of judicial responses addressing HIV-related human rights abuses - for example. HIV-based discrimination in immigration - will be discussed. In addition to applying comparative case studies from sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe, the paper addresses policy recommendations from international organizations.

The study demonstrates that these rights are frequently not implemented. These vulnerable communities are disproportionately impacted by the stigmatizing and punitive policies that are now in place in many nations. These include making HIV transmission a crime, requiring testing, and restricting travel. Other variables that worsen the issue include poverty, prejudice based on sexual orientation, gender, and race. This has become an issue because, despite the efforts of international organizations to improve the legal situation, the political side has not taken the initiative to pass legislation that would be compatible. A legislative framework that prioritizes HIV-positive communities and integrates it into international law is required to guarantee meaningful change. Decriminalizing HIV exposure, incorporating HIV-specific safeguards in international legal documents, and enhancing cooperation are among the recommendations.

**Keywords:** HIV, human rights law, discrimination, international relations, stigma

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## **The Role of Multilateral and Bilateral Cooperation for Justice Mechanisms in Post-Genocide Rwanda**

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The 1994 Rwandan genocide is one of the most dreadful cases in the history of international human rights protection and conflict resolution, which systematically killed approximately 800,000 people. In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda was presented with the daunting task of national reconstruction, as well as a dire need to restore its international cooperation, justice, and reconciliation. Although an extensive amount of research has been done on administrative processes like the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the Gacaca courts, minimal research has been conducted on the role of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in justice mechanisms in post-genocide Rwanda. This study examines the impact of bilateral and multilateral actors on post-genocide judicial processes with regard to capacity-building, contributing to the overall transformation of Rwanda. Given the backdrop of international failure during the genocide, Rwanda's subsequent dependence on global collaboration to establish justice mechanisms provides an important prism through which to rethink presumptions in international relations, particularly those pertaining to autonomy, intervention, and transitional justice.

The research problem of this paper is to investigate how multilateral and bilateral cooperation have contributed to the development, execution and effectiveness of justice mechanisms in post-genocide Rwanda. The research objective is to understand the impact of the role of multilateral and bilateral cooperation on the design, execution and outcomes of justice mechanisms in post-genocide Rwanda. This study utilizes a qualitative methodology, relying on secondary sources from peer-reviewed academic journals, government reports and institutional documents. The theoretical foundation is Constructivism, which emphasizes how identities, norms and societal connections shape actions of the state and influence interactions in the global stage. This theory is well-suited because Rwanda's post-genocide reconstruction is influenced by novel narratives around justice and global cooperation. By using constructivism, the research explores how international norms about justice were socially constructed and institutionalized through multilateral and bilateral cooperation.

The discussion critically analyses how multilateral cooperation, particularly through the ICTR, aided international legal accountability, and how bilateral partnerships, such as capacity-building aid from Belgium, empowered Rwanda to create both global and local justice mechanisms. It interrogates the effectiveness of these relationships while revealing the power imbalances between the priorities of international actors and Rwanda's national control of justice mechanisms.

The study concludes that Rwanda's post-genocide justice resulted from strategic global collaboration. Findings demonstrate that bilateral and multilateral partnerships, when aligned with local demands, can yield context-sensitive justice mechanisms. This challenges to rethink conventional notions of sovereignty and intervention, suggesting fostering of adaptable, norm-driven cooperation that integrates local agency and international norms in order to achieve sustainable peace and justice in post-conflict societies.

**Keywords:** Post-genocide Rwanda, Multilateral Cooperation, Bilateral Cooperation, Justice mechanisms

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## MIGRATION & DISPLACEMENT

## **The Climate Refugee Nexus: Analyzing Pakistan's Regional Role in South Asia's Environmental Security**

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Climate change has emerged as a critical human security challenge in South Asia, with Pakistan increasingly affected by floods, glacial outbursts, droughts, and heatwaves, resulting in mounting displacement. Despite its vulnerability, there is no formal recognition of climate induced migrants in Pakistan's domestic legal system. The governance vacuum is further compounded by the inaction of regional organizations such as SAARC and BIMSTEC, which lack coordinated frameworks to address environmental migration.

This paper addresses the research problem that although Pakistan is experiencing intensifying climate induced displacement, it lacks a legal and policy framework for recognizing, protecting, and integrating climate migrants. This institutional absence at the national level is further complicated by the lack of regional cooperation mechanisms, leaving both internal and cross border climate mobility outside the purview of policy and law. The study aims to examine Pakistan's institutional responses to climate displacement and to assess the country's potential leadership role in shaping a regional environmental security agenda. The focus remains on internal displacement in Pakistan, while also analyzing South Asia's broader regional governance landscape.

Drawing on Barry Buzan's Human Security framework, the study repositions climate induced migration as a multidimensional threat to human rights, economic stability, state legitimacy, and regional peace. Regional cooperation theory further supports the analysis of Pakistan's diplomatic potential and institutional capacity to lead coordinated action within SAARC and BIMSTEC. The research employs qualitative methods, including thematic content analysis and case study approaches. Core data sources include national policy documents, academic research, and international reports such as those from UNHCR and the IPCC.

The study contributes to the underexplored intersection of climate displacement and regional governance by reframing displacement not only as a humanitarian challenge but as a systemic threat requiring multilevel policy intervention. Findings reveal that Pakistan's response remains reactive and fragmented. While the National Climate Change Policy acknowledges environmental risks, it does not prioritize displacement. Subnational institutions, particularly in climate affected provinces, remain under resourced and poorly coordinated. At the regional level, SAARC and BIMSTEC lack the institutional coherence and political momentum to develop binding mechanisms.

The paper recommends a National Climate Displacement Strategy, the legal recognition of climate refugees, and the integration of displacement into urban and development planning. It also calls for Pakistan to initiate a South Asian climate mobility framework under SAARC or BIMSTEC, focused on data sharing, adaptation finance, and safe, dignified migration pathways.

**Keywords:** Climate Displacement, Human Security, South Asia, Pakistan, Environmental Migration

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# Strategic Leverage or Silent Compliance: A Comparative Study on Migration Diplomacy of Sri Lanka and the Philippines

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Cross-border labour migration has been a primary source of foreign remittances of Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Both countries export Migrant Domestic Workers (MDWs) and their foreign policy, towards labour receiving countries, is shaped by their labour migration relationship. While Sri Lanka and the Philippines are facing similar structural pressures, they have distinct institutional and diplomatic approaches to the migration of MDWs, and Philippines is considered as a global model for the governance of MDWs. This study examines how the Philippines employ migration diplomacy to navigate the intersection of state interests and the protection of MDWs, with the aim of drawing from the Philippines model to improve Sri Lanka's migration diplomacy.

The objective of this research is to contribute to the understanding of migration diplomacy of states. The theoretical foundation based on the concept of migration diplomacy draws from liberal and realist international relations theories. It looks at the use of diplomatic tools, processes, and procedures to manage cross-border mobility. The study employs a qualitative comparative method, drawing on official government documents, bilateral agreements, international labour reports, even diplomatic visits and secondary literature. A comparison between Sri Lanka and the Philippines were selected due to their shared status as low skilled labour-sending countries, with the Philippines regarded as a model for effective labour migration governance, and Sri Lanka, in which the institutional frameworks remain in development.

The findings reveal that the labour governance structure and diplomatic strategies to protect MDWs in these two countries differ. The Philippines has institutionalized labour migration through a robust governance system and has integrated labour migration into its broader foreign policy. They have a proactive approach to migration diplomacy, gaining them more leverage in negotiations. In contrast, Sri Lanka adopts a more reactive form, lacks a strategic framework to integrate it into foreign policy and treats it as an economic priority rather than a diplomatic necessity. The difference in their approach becomes apparent when responding to major challenges. The Philippines has engaged in coercive migration diplomacy, laying negative conditionalities while Sri Lanka has opted for more soft diplomacy approaches. Despite non-binding agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and Bi-Lateral Agreements (BLAs) that are binding in nature are in place, the effectiveness of these only depend on the enforcement mechanisms and the compliance of the host state. Therefore, Sri Lanka's lack of enforcement mechanisms and limited diplomatic assertiveness would limit the protection of MDWs.

In conclusion, both countries have space to learn from each other's experience and framework on migration diplomacy. The Philippines offers valuable insights into how migration can be embedded within foreign policy to safeguard migrant rights. In contrast, Sri Lanka's reactive and fragmented approach underscores the need for stronger institutional capacity, diplomatic engagement, and policy coherence to enhance the protection of MDWs.

**Keywords:** Migrant Domestic Workers, Migration, Diplomacy, Foreign policy

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## Securitization Dynamics of the Displacement of Afghan Women

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The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021 has marked a new era of intensified instability and systematic human rights violations, particularly targeting Afghan women. This study addresses a critical research gap by focusing on the displacement of Afghan women under the Taliban regime, investigating the broader securitization dynamics at play. Women in Afghanistan have faced a dramatic erosion of their rights—an obliteration that has not only pushed them into the margins of society but has also caused large-scale displacement due to gender-based persecution, conflict, and economic collapse. At the heart of this research lies the question of how the international norm of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) has been neglected in the Afghan context, especially concerning women. The study explores how Taliban governance has systemically erased women's rights through policies that exclude them from public life, education, and employment. These conditions have catalyzed forced displacement and have pushed Afghan women into extremely vulnerable situations.

The key objectives of this research are twofold: first, to identify how draconian patriarchal norms, economic warfare, and geopolitical power plays intersect to weaponize displacement against Afghan women; and second, to evaluate the extent to which the international community has failed in implementing R2P in the face of these violations. By focusing on gender apartheid—a term used to describe the systemic exclusion of women based solely on their gender—the study places the displacement of women in a broader security and human rights discourse.

Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative approach, drawing on data from case studies and statistical reports related to the displacement crisis in Afghanistan. This approach allows for a deeper, more nuanced exploration of the complex social, political, and cultural dimensions influencing the displacement of Afghan women. It also uncovers the everyday strategies of resilience and resistance employed by women in the face of structural oppression and insecurity.

Preliminary findings reveal that 53% of displaced Afghan women have lost access to community safety nets, exacerbating their vulnerability and pushing many toward harmful coping mechanisms such as child marriage. Moreover, systemic securitization failures—where gender-based violence (GBV), institutional indifference, and political inaction continue unchecked—have perpetuated cycles of displacement and insecurity. These patterns reflect the broader neglect of gender-specific protections under the R2P framework, which remains largely symbolic in the Afghan case. Furthermore, the Taliban's refusal to engage meaningfully with international actors has obstructed humanitarian access and undermined women's rights initiatives. This situation has politicized humanitarian aid, particularly those programs focused on women's empowerment and protection. To mitigate further harm, international actors must condition all forms of engagement with the Taliban on tangible progress in safeguarding women's rights and protecting displaced persons.

In conclusion, the displacement of Afghan women under Taliban rule is not merely a byproduct of conflict—it is a calculated outcome of gendered governance and securitization failure. This study calls for a re-evaluation of R2P implementation mechanisms and advocates for more gender-sensitive international responses to crises marked by institutionalized misogyny.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Women Displacement, Securitization, R2P

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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & SECURITY

## **The China – India Rivalry in the Indian Ocean Region and its Impact on Sri Lanka’s Sovereignty and National Security**

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Sri Lanka faces a growing difficult challenge in preserving its national sovereignty amidst intensifying strategic competition between China and India. Sri Lanka as a critical focal point in the Indian Ocean Region, this research addresses a timely and complex question How can a small state like Sri Lanka navigate the growing China–India rivalry without compromising its sovereignty and national security? China’s expansive presence in Sri Lanka, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has fostered deeper economic ties and strategic alignment, raising concerns about debt dependency and potential political leverage. India, viewing China’s influence as a threat to its own regional security interests, has increased its diplomatic and economic engagement in response. This dynamic has led to heightened competition for strategic space in Sri Lanka, placing the island nation in a vulnerable yet pivotal position.

This study aims to examine how the China-India rivalry affects Sri Lanka’s sovereignty and national security, and to explore the strategies adopted by Sri Lanka to balance these competing external pressures and also investigate how external pressures from both powers are reshaping Sri Lanka’s geopolitical positioning and testing its capacity to remain autonomous. By situating this study adopts a qualitative methodology, combining both primary and secondary data. In-depth interviews with policymakers, academics, and security analysts offer grounded perspectives on how Sri Lanka is internally negotiating external pressures. The secondary data situates these insights within broader historical, economic, and geopolitical frameworks. This methodological triangulation strengthens the credibility of the findings and enhances the depth of analysis.

This Paper identifies several key impacts of the China–India rivalry on Sri Lanka. Especially economic dependency, strategic vulnerability, diplomatic pressure, and security realignment. It reveals a complex pattern of strategic balancing, where Sri Lanka seeks to derive benefits from both powers while attempting to avoid overdependence on either. This dynamic may, however, reduce Sri Lanka’s ability to act independently in foreign policy and increase its exposure to external influences that could destabilize its internal governance.

The findings reveal that Sri Lanka’s approach is not merely reactive but increasingly strategic leveraging its geostrategic location to gain concessions, investments, and diplomatic support from both India and China. However, this balancing act is fragile, especially in the context of shifting global alliances and internal political instability. The study highlights that preserving Sri Lanka’s sovereignty requires not only external balancing but also internal resilience through institutional strengthening, transparent governance, and a coherent foreign policy.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the broader international relations literature on small state behaviour in regions dominated by great power rivalry. It emphasizes the importance of understanding how small states exercise agency under pressure and how their choices impact regional security. Sri Lanka’s experience offers valuable lessons for similarly positioned nations navigating competing external powers in a multipolar world.

**Keywords:** Sri Lanka’s Sovereignty, China–India Rivalry, Strategic Balancing

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# Information Warfare and Narrative Power: Rethinking Security through the Lens of Media and Propaganda

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In today's globalised environment, the convergence of media, propaganda, and security has become a pivotal force in international relations. The rise of digital communication and social media has transformed how state and non-state actors engage in information warfare, reshaping public opinion, political legitimacy, and the way modern conflicts are fought. Yet despite its growing importance, the role of media and disinformation in shaping security outcomes remains under-theorised in international relations. Traditional security theories, such as realism and liberalism, often treat media as a secondary tool rather than recognising it as a central arena of influence and contestation.

This study addresses a critical gap in security studies: the limited understanding of how control over narratives, imagery, and online attention influences both the conduct and perception of warfare. It argues that media should be recognised as a core element of power and strategy in contemporary conflicts. The research investigates how state actors and insurgent groups use traditional and digital media to shape public discourse, manipulate information environments, and gain strategic advantage. Drawing on critical media theory, security studies, and post-colonial perspectives, it employs a qualitative methodology that combines discourse analysis and media content analysis. Through detailed case studies including the war in Ukraine, the Syrian civil war, and tensions in the South China Sea, the study examines how media operates as a weapon of political warfare and how propaganda is constructed and deployed to influence both domestic and international responses.

The findings argue that modern warfare is increasingly mediated through the manipulation of narratives, disinformation campaigns, and algorithmically amplified messages on social media. These narrative battles often dictate the success or failure of military interventions, peace initiatives, and diplomatic negotiations. As such, control over the narrative has become as vital as physical control over territory. This analysis suggests that narrative dominance is a key axis of power in the international system.

The study concludes that the intensifying role of media in shaping global security dynamics requires states and international organisations to rethink their strategic approaches. Emphasising media literacy, counter-disinformation strategies, and digital diplomacy will be crucial in navigating future conflicts. The paper recommends integrating these components into comprehensive security frameworks to better address the destabilising effects of information manipulation in contemporary warfare.

**Keywords:** information warfare, international conflict, media and propaganda, narrative power, security

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## Meaning behind the Missiles: North Korea through a Constructivist Lens

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North Korea's missiles and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programs have long been viewed through a traditional security lens by the Western world, with most analyses emphasizing deterrence, coercive disarmament and strategic balance in East Asia. However, such interpretations often grossly overlook the ideological, identity-based, and symbolic dimensions that underpin Pyongyang's persistent militarization efforts. In the face of international sanctions and diplomatic isolation, North Korea's pursuit of developing nuclear missiles and conventional militarization raises critical questions about the material insecurity and constructed national narratives in the country. Understanding this situation is essential in rethinking international responses that often default to containment or coercion without grasping the internal logic of the regime, which might look irrational unless we dig deeper into their thought process. This is essential to better navigate denuclearization policies in the Korean peninsula and to indirectly curb a major global supply point of illegal arms.

Current analytical frameworks, as mentioned earlier, systematically overlook how North Korea's missile program operates as a tool embedded in the regime's survival strategy creating a critical knowledge/narrative gap that undermine effective policy responses. This paper therefore aims to: 1) Explore North Korea's missile program through Constructivist lens as both hard deterrent and performative legitimacy action, 2) Conduct discourse analysis of DPRK official communications and military displays as identity construction mechanisms, and 3) Evaluate alternative diplomatic pathways of adopting a nuanced understanding of such performative actions.

Methodologically, the study conducts a qualitative discourse analysis of official Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) statements, state media, and military parade recordings. Theoretically, the paper is grounded in Constructivist international relations theory, drawing particularly from Alexander Wendt's notions of identity formation and the social construction of threats. Also, supplementary insights from allied international relations & sociological theories will be used to unpack the symbolic meanings behind North Korea's militarization.

In other words, the paper argues that North Korea's missile program operates not only as a mechanism of deterrence but also as a performative act that reinforces internal legitimacy and projects external strength to a global stage which is perceived as hostile to the existence of Kim Jong Un's regime. Military parades are communicative acts aimed at both domestic and international audiences, a form of saber-rattling that signals the regime's longevity.

The study concludes that meaningful engagement with North Korea must move beyond sanctions and aggressive denuclearization demands to a more nuanced understanding of how its leadership interprets survival, legitimacy, and threats. By going through Constructivism, addressing the roots of Pyongyang's strategic culture its narratives, identities, and symbolic performances—may open new avenues for diplomatic talks and engagement. Policymakers and scholars alike must reconceptualize disarmament diplomacy not only as a security challenge but as an intricate sociopolitical expression.

**Keywords:** North Korea, Constructivism, Nuclear Weapons, Nuclear Symbolism, Missile Program, National Identity, Strategic Culture

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## **AFTERNOON SESSION**

### **REGIONAL COOPERATION & POWER DYNAMICS (II)**

## **BIMSTEC and Non-Traditional Maritime Security in the Bay of Bengal: Gaps, Challenges, and Opportunities**

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A vital maritime area for trade, energy transit, and regional connectivity, the Bay of Bengal is bounded by seven countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. However, it also has to contend with an increasing number of non-traditional maritime security threats, drug and human trafficking, maritime terrorism, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and piracy. Beyond conventional state-centric defense paradigms, multilateral cooperation is required to address these transnational challenges. In this regard, a regional framework that has the capacity to jointly address these security issues is provided by the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

The central research question guiding this study is, to what extent is BIMSTEC effective in addressing non-traditional maritime security threats in the Bay of Bengal, and what key gaps and challenges limit its regional cooperation efforts. This paper aims to examine the effectiveness of BIMSTEC in addressing non-traditional maritime security threats in the Bay of Bengal, identify the key institutional, strategic, and operational gaps that hinder regional cooperation, and explore potential opportunities for enhancing BIMSTEC's role in maritime security governance in the region. The study uses a qualitative approach based on theories of institutional cooperation and regional security. Both primary and secondary data sources are used. Interviews with decision-makers, and academics have yielded primary data that offers a grounded understanding of the realities on the ground. Official BIMSTEC documents, member state national maritime policies, policy papers, scholarly literature, and local news reports are examples of secondary data.

According to the research, BIMSTEC's maritime security initiatives still lack institutional depth, primarily focusing on platforms for coordination and discussion like the yearly National Security Chiefs' Meetings. The lack of a specific maritime security strategy, operational coordination body, and ongoing funding source significantly limit implementation, even though these forums show a growing political will to address maritime issues. Furthermore, the organization's function as a unifying force is diminished because regional BIMSTEC-led initiatives are frequently subordinated to bilateral and trilateral maritime agreements.

In summary, BIMSTEC's involvement in maritime security represents an untapped potential as well as a promising framework. The study concludes that although the organization has set the groundwork for regional cooperation, it still needs to develop a regional maritime strategy, establish a formal maritime security task force, and significantly strengthen its institutional framework. These actions could improve response to non-traditional threats, coordination, and surveillance. In order to strengthen BIMSTEC's maritime security capabilities, the paper suggests more capacity building, intelligence-sharing frameworks, and trust-building activities among member states. BIMSTEC's role in securing the Bay of Bengal must move from rhetorical commitment to practical frameworks as the region's geostrategic importance continues to grow.

**Keywords:** BIMSTEC, Maritime Security, Regional Security, Member States, Bay of Bengal

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## Foreign Policy Tensions between the European Union and its Member States: A Case Study on Hungary

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The European Union, comprising 27 member states, has emerged as a prominent example of regional integration. Since the introduction of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 1993, the EU has sought to coordinate its external actions across foreign affairs, security, and economic domains. This ambition is further reflected in subsequent integration efforts, such as the 2000 free trade agreements and the broadening of policy scope to include environmental concerns. According to Neo-functionalism theory, these developments exemplify the “spillover effect,” where progress in one area of integration stimulates further cooperation in others. Despite these advances, the EU’s aspiration for supranational authority in foreign policy is persistently challenged by the divergent interests of its member states. Tensions between collective EU foreign policy and individual national agendas, exemplified by Hungary’s migration policy, raise a critical question about the effectiveness and future trajectory of the EU as a global actor.

The overarching objective is to examine the evolving nature of the EU’s foreign policy and identify the various factors involved in causing tension between EU-level and member state foreign policies while assessing the outcomes of the tension. This research primarily relies on a qualitative approach and follows a thematic analysis. The sources of secondary data include journal articles, policy reports, and government documents accessed via electronic sources. The analysis is grounded in Type III Neoclassical Realism, which posits that domestic political dynamics and policy decisions interact with systemic international pressures to shape foreign policy outcomes. This theoretical lens is particularly suitable for analyzing the EU’s internal-external policy tensions, as it illuminates how national interest and contextual needs influence member states’ willingness to align with supranational objectives. The unanimity rule in foreign policy decision-making grants each member state power, often resulting in policy gridlock or diluted outcomes. National interests remain paramount, with member states leveraging their influence to advance domestic priorities even at the expense of EU-wide objectives.

The case of Hungary’s migration policy demonstrates how national security concerns and political objectives can directly conflict with collective EU frameworks, generating persistent tension and undermining the EU’s external coherence. As research findings, this research confirms that although member states collectively agree on the European Union’s foreign policy for successful integration, this does not always happen in practice. Therefore, it can be raised whether the collective efforts and foreign policies of the European Union should be further strengthened. Likewise, when examining why member states do not agree on these foreign policies, it is clear that the divergence arising from the dynamics of the agendas and contextual needs that shape the foreign policies of those states leads to the creation of tense situations.

As a case study, it can be identified that Hungary prioritized its national security and national interest, which created tense situations. And through this, it is possible to gain an understanding of the strengths, weaknesses and areas that need to be updated in the collective efforts of the European Union’s foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Tension, Neoclassical Realism Type III

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## Nationalism, Protectionism, and the USMCA: A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Trade Politics

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This research examines the societal impacts, particularly protectionism and nationalism, on the trade politics shaping the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), signed in 2020 as a replacement for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The study investigates how societal factors, particularly protectionism and nationalism, shaped the USMCA's provisions and trade negotiations, addressing three key questions: (1) the impact of U.S. nationalism on renegotiating NAFTA into the USMCA, (2) the influence of protectionist policies on automotive and dairy sector provisions, and (3) how the USMCA balances societal pressures with the economic imperatives of free trade, with objectives to analyze societal influences on trade policy and outline USMCA provisions about domestic public sentiment toward international agreements.

This study uses neoclassical realist theory to explore how global power dynamics and domestic factors like public opinion, political lobbying, and government perspectives shape trade politics. It employs a case study approach, drawing on secondary data from trade reports, government publications, and academic literature. The USMCA trade policy is analyzed by comparing pre- and post-USMCA policy changes and dynamics, while thematic analysis of stakeholder discussions tracks societal attitudes.

The key findings of this research indicate that the Trump administration introduced its America First policy, grounded in nationalist ideals, to renegotiate NAFTA through negotiations that prioritized U.S. economic interests while aiming to secure domestic employment. The USMCA included protectionism through heightened automobile production requirements set at 75% North American materials and expanded U.S. dairy market entry to Canada through a 3.6% duty-free quota. The provisions demonstrate both industry protection through tariff-free trade between nations while allowing zero-tariffs for most goods, which shows a political compromise. The implementation of labour and environmental standards shows government responsiveness toward social issues by maintaining economic integration between nations alongside domestic industry protection. U.S. nationalist and protectionist policies encountered opposition from Mexico, Canada and American businesses that restricted their ability to implement major restrictions.

The research concludes that societal factors, particularly protectionism and nationalism, were pivotal in shaping the USMCA, illustrating the complex interplay between domestic politics and global trade. This case study underscores the importance of aligning trade agreements with public sentiment while maintaining economic cooperation, offering insights for future trade policy negotiations.

**Keywords:** USMCA, nationalism, protectionism, trade policy, neoclassical realism

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## Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Sri Lanka's Membership

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Since its founding in 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a political, economic, and security alliance spanning Eurasia, has increased its strategic clout. As a sign of its increasing interest in regional multilateralism and connectivity with Central and South Asia, Sri Lanka is the first dialogue partner.

This study explores why Sri Lanka has remained only a dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) since 2009. This paper aims to examine the underlying reasons behind Sri Lanka's prolonged status as a dialogue partner in the SCO, identify the strategic, political, and institutional factors influencing this limited engagement, and evaluate the potential opportunities and challenges Sri Lanka may face in pursuing deeper integration within the SCO framework. It adopts a qualitative methodology and draws from both primary and secondary data sources to investigate the political, strategic, and institutional factors influencing Sri Lanka's limited status within the SCO, and to assess the implications for its future engagement.

Interviews with Sri Lankan policymakers, foreign policy analysts, and specialists in regional affairs are used to gather primary data. Official documents, SCO declarations, scholarly works, policy briefs, and pertinent news articles are examples of secondary data. This mixed methods approach helps to provide a complex view of Sri Lanka's position and possibilities inside the SCO. The results imply that Sri Lanka's objective to diversify foreign relations, improve connectivity with Central Asian markets, and acquire strategic leverage in regional security issues without sacrificing its non-aligned foreign policy posture drove its first entry into the SCO as a dialogue partner. Its peripheral geographic location, internal political swings, and lack of proactive involvement have, however, limited practical advantages from its dialogue partnership. Maintaining diplomatic independence, challenges include juggling relations with India and China, two major powers in the SCO. Further down SCO engagement also offers access to counterterrorism frameworks, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure development projects, and more general economic and technological cooperation. The debate also highlights how Sri Lanka has to carefully evaluate the expenses of a more integrated role inside the SCO against possible geopolitical concerns, especially in a polarized Indo-Pacific environment.

In summary, Sri Lanka's SCO dialogue partnership status offers both difficult diplomatic issues and strategic opportunities. Sri Lanka should take a flexible, non-aligned stance that enables it to benefit from several alliances while preserving its sovereignty and national interests, as opposed to becoming overly aligned with any one power bloc, whether Western or Eastern. Sri Lanka must carefully re-evaluate its economic policies, implement governance reforms, and have a long-term strategic vision that synchronizes external partnerships with internal development objectives if it decides to increase its involvement with the SCO. This study suggests a measured, cautious course of action that avoids cutting Sri Lanka off from international power structures or making it overly dependent on any one geopolitical axis.

**Keywords:** Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Sri Lanka, Economic Policies, Non-Western, SCO

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## SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

# Climate Change Adaptation in the Small Island Developing States (SIDS): Promise and Pitfalls of South-South Cooperation

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Climate change has become an existential threat in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it profoundly affects the very way of life on the earth. Countries of the Global South and especially the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are particularly vulnerable to climate change-induced events like erratic rainfall, sea level rise, frequent floods, and intensified coastal storms, among others. In this context, South-South Cooperation (SSC) has emerged as a catalyst to foster deep collaboration in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Various initiatives such as the India, Brazil, South Africa Fund (IBSA), the India-United Nations Development Program Fund, the Perez-Guerrero Fund etc. have facilitated knowledge sharing, resource mobilisation, capacity building, and sustainable development to tackle climate-related hazards in the SIDS. However, despite increasing engagement through SSC to enhance climate resilience in the SIDS, there is limited information available in the academic domain about the robustness and effectiveness of this strategic collaboration. This paper seeks to fill this gap.

The research objective of this paper is to analyse the effectiveness of South-South Cooperation in climate change adaptation in the SIDS. It investigates how adaptation financing mechanisms are helping SIDS address climate vulnerabilities, and whether these initiatives are meeting their stated objectives. Using the Resource Dependence theory, the paper analyses the relationship between SIDS and the donors, that is, the Global South cohort via funding programs. Through this lens, the paper explores how funding relationships shape climate adaptation outcomes, sometimes aligning more with donor priorities than local needs. The paper has followed a qualitative approach, involving document and content analysis of policy reports, government publications, and official statements to fulfil its objectives.

SIDS faces structural vulnerabilities due to its geographic location, small economies, and dependence on climate-sensitive sectors. The lack of access to sufficient climate finance and technology transfer further exacerbates their challenges. While SSC has provided important platforms for climate adaptation in SIDS, its effectiveness is constrained by institutional limitations, unequal power dynamics even within the Global South, and fragmented implementation. There is a need for more robust, sustained, and strategic collaboration in terms of enhanced financial assistance, real-time data and information sharing, for SSC to be truly helpful to SIDS communities.

It is beyond doubt that SSC has played a significant role in supporting climate adaptation in SIDS through funding, capacity building, and technology transfer. However, the findings of this paper reveal that the need of the hour is to adopt a systemic approach to ensure inclusivity, accountability, and sustainable long-term partnerships.

**Keywords:** Global South, Climate Change, Adaptation

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## Sri Lanka and the Belt and Road Initiative: Cooperation or Dependency

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China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has emerged as one of the most ambitious international development strategies of the 21st century, positioning itself as a flagship model of South-South Cooperation (SSC). Promoting mutual benefit, infrastructure development, and enhanced connectivity among countries of the Global South, the BRI claims to advance a more equitable global development agenda. However, increasing concerns about debt sustainability, sovereignty, and strategic dependence have called into question whether the BRI truly reflects the foundational principles of SSC- namely, solidarity, equality, and respect for national ownership. Sri Lanka, one of the earliest South Asian participants in the BRI, has become a focal point in these debates. Its experience with high-profile Chinese-funded projects, such as the Hambantota Port and the Colombo Port City, raises critical questions about the nature of SSC in practice and whether such engagements promote sustainable development or reinforce asymmetric power dynamics. This study situates Sri Lanka's BRI engagement within the broader discourse on SSC to evaluate the initiative's implications for development partnerships in the Global South.

The study aims to critically assess the extent to which Sri Lanka's BRI experience reflects the principles and intentions of South-South Cooperation. It specifically investigates whether the strategic infrastructure projects supported by Chinese financing promote equitable development and national agency or entrench structural dependency. Grounded in the SSC framework and Dependency Theory, the research adopts a qualitative case study approach, drawing on content analysis of policy papers, financial data, and academic literature. This method allows for a critical and context-sensitive understanding of how BRI projects are framed, experienced, and contested within Sri Lanka's national development landscape.

The analysis reveals a complex and ambivalent reality. On one hand, the BRI has enabled much-needed infrastructure investments, enhancing Sri Lanka's regional connectivity and economic prospects. On the other hand, the terms of financing- particularly tied loans and commercial rates- have contributed to a growing debt burden and raised concerns over national sovereignty and long-term strategic autonomy. The 99-year lease of the Hambantota Port to a Chinese state-owned enterprise has become emblematic of these tensions, sparking domestic and international scrutiny. While the BRI is presented as a cooperative model for mutual gain, in practice it raises critical questions regarding transparency, governance, and the equitable distribution of benefits. The study argues that Sri Lanka's participation in the BRI reflects both the opportunities and the vulnerabilities inherent in contemporary SSC engagements.

The paper concludes that Sri Lanka's BRI experience offers important lessons for other developing countries engaging with China under the SSC banner. While infrastructure and investment flows can be beneficial, they must be guided by stronger institutional safeguards, inclusive decision-making, and more balanced partnership terms. Recommendations include enhancing project transparency, bolstering domestic capacity for contract negotiation, and prioritizing national development objectives. Ultimately, the findings contribute to broader discussions on the future of SSC, the evolving role of China in global development, and the need for more accountable and context-aware cooperation among Global South nations.

**Keywords:** Belt and Road Initiative, China, South-South Cooperation, Sri Lanka

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## **A Comparative Analysis of China's South-South Cooperation in Kenya and Argentina between 2021–2023**

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This research focuses on comparing the implementation and impact of China's cooperation in Kenya and Argentina between 2021 and 2023, situating the analysis within the broader discourse of South-South cooperation. The study addresses the research problem of understanding how China's engagement strategies differ across distinct regional and developmental contexts, and why such differences matter for long-term development outcomes. It examines the relevance of this topic by linking China's role as a major development partner to debates on global economic restructuring, equitable partnerships, and the quest for sustainable development in the Global South.

The primary objectives are to explore how China's engagement manifests in each nation, identify the benefits and challenges that arise, and assess how regional dynamics shape the outcomes of such cooperation. The study is guided by Liberalism Theory, which emphasizes cooperation, mutual benefits, and institutional frameworks as central to international relations, alongside the concept of Economic Interdependence, which underscores the significance of reciprocal economic ties in fostering stability and growth. Using qualitative methods, the research draws on official documents, policy statements, and secondary sources, ensuring a comprehensive examination of China's South-South cooperation in both case studies.

The analysis argues that while both Kenya and Argentina gain tangible benefits from China's development initiatives. In Kenya, cooperation is deeply embedded in infrastructure development, trade facilitation, and technology transfer, aligning with regional integration goals in East Africa. In Argentina, China's engagement is more closely tied to energy projects, agricultural trade, and financial arrangements, reflecting the nation's integration within Latin American economic frameworks. The study discusses how these variations are shaped by regional political dynamics, domestic policy priorities, and the degree of institutional capacity to negotiate terms. It also highlights that South-South cooperation is not a uniform model but a flexible, adaptive process responsive to specific national contexts.

The findings reveal that China's cooperation is tailored to each country's needs, strengths, and strategic challenges, offering substantial opportunities for development. However, it also carries the risk of fostering asymmetric dependencies if not strategically managed by the recipient nations. The research concludes that the future success of South-South cooperation will depend on balanced, transparent, and strategic negotiation processes that safeguard sovereignty while maximizing mutual benefits. Recommendations include strengthening domestic policy frameworks, enhancing institutional capacity, and fostering regional collaboration to ensure that cooperation contributes to sustainable and equitable development across the Global South.

**Key words:** Economic Interdependence, Liberalism Theory, South-South cooperation

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## GENDER & THE POLITICS OF MARGINALIZATION

## **Marginalization of the LGBTQIA+ Community in Sri Lanka: Examining the Gap between International Human Rights Norms and Domestic Policy Responses**

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As the global order of international relations keeps evolving, the inclusion and treatment of marginalized groups within certain states have become increasingly important in guiding diplomatic dialogue and advancing human rights. The marginalization of Sri Lanka's LGBTQIA+ community and its consequences for domestic social harmony as well as Sri Lanka's global reputation, is explored in this research. Despite global efforts towards inclusivity, Sri Lanka still suffers from far-reaching effects of firmly ingrained cultural, religious, and legal barriers to the acceptance, protection, and recognition of those with non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities.

Examining societal attitudes, lived experiences, and legal realities of LGBTQIA+ persons in Sri Lanka, a topic that is mostly underrepresented in the scholarly literature, this study closes a major research gap. The study uses a qualitative, descriptive, desk-based approach to analyse secondary sources and critically evaluate national and international legal frameworks on LGBTQIA+ rights, focusing on Sri Lanka's sociopolitical context.

The findings show a significant gap between international human rights norms and Sri Lankan public opinion. Discrimination is still fuelled by cultural and religious beliefs, which results in widespread social exclusion, mental health problems, and restricted access to equal opportunities, health care, and legal redress. Sri Lanka is lagging behind some other countries in protecting the rights of LGBTQIA+ people. Sri Lanka's national policies continue to be mostly oblivious to the increasing protection and inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals. The primary research problem is that despite increased discussion on LGBTQIA+ issues in Sri Lanka, societal attitudes remain conservative, and there is still no adequate legal framework to address related human rights concerns, highlighting the need for urgent social and legal reforms. The research gap lies in the limited scholarly examination of LGBTQIA+ issues within Sri Lanka's diverse cultural and religious context. This study addresses this gap through comparative analysis with other countries, offering insights to inform inclusive and equitable policy development.

The main takeaway from this study is that in order to protect the rights and dignity of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Sri Lanka, legislative and social change are desperately needed. In addition to improving social justice in society, raising awareness, dispelling myths, and promoting inclusive policymaking are necessary to bring the nation into compliance with its international human rights commitments. Furthermore, analyzing Sri Lanka's situation in relation to other nations outlines possible avenues for advancement and provides insightful lessons about cross-cultural processes.

This study contributes significantly to the broader discussion about marginalized groups in international relations. It promotes the strategic participation of both domestic and foreign stakeholders by emphasising the value of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. In addition to being a domestic imperative, addressing the systemic issues facing Sri Lanka's LGBTQIA+ community is an essential first step towards a society that is more inclusive, just, and internationally regarded society.

**Key Words:** LGBTQIA+, Marginalization, Discrimination, Human Rights, Criminalization, Public Perspective

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## Gender Inclusive Constitutional Reforms in Nepal: Lessons for Sri Lanka

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Democracy, by its very definition, calls for representation of all its citizens. In Sri Lanka, even though women make up over 52% of the population, they are represented miserably in politics. Despite, being the first country to elect a woman as Prime Minister in 1960 and its commitments to international gender equality and norms, it still ranks 179 out of 189 countries in terms of women's representation in the national parliament with a shocking 5.33% representation. This research attempts to seek why there is such a strong systemic gender imbalance Sri Lankan politics considering that the country has signed numerous treaties like CEDAW and claimed to pursue sustainable development goal 5.5, which advocates for the comprehensive involvement of women in leadership positions at all levels. To a Feminist IR, then, this absence is not viewed as a domestic issue in itself but as an instance of how international political norms interact with institutional, cultural, and historical local configurations to sustain gendered hierarchies of power.

The research problem is to understand the disjuncture between Sri Lanka's international commitments to gender equality and its national failure to create inclusive political spaces for women. The objectives of the research are threefold: (1) to evaluate how universal gender equality norms shape and are shaped by domestic political processes in Sri Lanka; (2) to identify both formal and informal barriers including party structures, patriarchal attitudes, and policy non-implementation that restrict women's political participation; and (3) to conduct a comparative analysis with Nepal, a South Asian neighbour that has achieved far greater levels of female political inclusion through constitutional reforms and strongly enforced gender quotas. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative content analysis of political party manifestos, parliamentary debates, gender-equality policy, media discourse, and national election outcomes. Employing a comparative case study, Nepal is utilized to discern how the same international commitments have resulted in more favourable outcomes, and under what contextual circumstances; post-conflict reconstruction, international aid coordination, and constitutional guarantees that success has been enabled. While Nepal is a culturally and regionally appropriate comparator, the study also refers to Rwanda in the literature review briefly as a prominent global example of how nation-building and international feminist intervention in a post-conflict context can result in transformative representation, with women holding over 60% of seats in parliament.

The findings show that in Sri Lanka, political gender inequality is reproduced by weak institutional accountability, cultural backlash, low level of party-level commitment to inclusion, and the absence of robust legal frameworks for operationalizing global gender norms. In contrast, the case of Nepal illustrates the scope for structural transformation where international norms are highly localized. The study concludes that democratic legitimacy and international credibility for Sri Lanka are contingent upon the substantive political inclusion of women. Prescriptions include national gender quotas, political education campaigns, and regional collaboration in South Asia. The study contributes to the feminist IR agenda by linking global norms and local exclusion, arguing the case for inclusive governance as paramount to an orderly international system.

**Key words:** Systematic Marginalization, Women's Political Representation, Feminist International Relations, Sri Lanka, Nepal

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## Silenced Survivors: Tamil Women and UN Inaction in Post-War Sri Lanka

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Gender-based violence (GBV) against women in armed conflicts remains a serious issue that often does not get adequate attention in International Relations discussions. In Sri Lanka, the civil war that officially ended in 2009 did not mark the end of suffering for many Tamil women, particularly those from marginalized, rural communities. These women, who were disproportionately affected by conflict-related violence including rape, torture, forced displacement, and surveillance, have continued to face structural discrimination, societal stigma, and political neglect in the years following the war. Despite widespread documentation and reports by international human rights organizations, meaningful justice and protection have remained infeasible. Examining these correlated issues helps us better understand how International Relations often overlook the voices and needs of the most vulnerable women during war.

The central research problem this study addresses is: Why has the United Nations (UN), despite its peacebuilding and human rights mandates, failed to adequately address gender-based violence against Tamil women in post-war Sri Lanka? By drawing concepts from postcolonial criticisms, decolonial frameworks, and feminist International Relations theories, the study aims to understand how global systems tend to leave out marginalized voices, especially women from ethnic minority backgrounds and war zones. This research takes a qualitative and comparative approach, examining case studies from Sri Lankan reports, survivor stories, and institutional responses. This will depict how the exclusion of these women from decision-making increases their vulnerability during times of conflict.

The study argues that gender-based violence during conflict isn't just a side effect of war; it's a sign that International Relations frameworks are failing vulnerable groups. Marginalized women, whether because of ethnicity, displacement, or economic status, are especially at risk and often ignored by the international community. The situation in Sri Lanka reflects this too, where women who survived the civil war still face discrimination and abuse today. This suggests that international efforts tend to focus on state interests and negotiations, often overlooking the gendered and ethnic issues involved in post-conflict recovery. By pointing out these gaps, this research challenges the traditional priorities of International Relations, mainly state sovereignty and diplomacy, emphasizing how they often ignore the real experiences of disadvantaged women during and after war.

The research concludes by emphasizing the urgent need to rethink international relations, which have historically made marginalized women invisible in war and peace-building efforts. The study recommends shifting international frameworks—especially within the UN—to adopt intersectional approaches to conflict resolution, prioritizing survivor voices, and making states and international organizations accountable for gender-based harms. By focusing on the real experiences of marginalized women, both in Sri Lanka and across global conflict zones, international relations can evolve from a state-centered field into one that genuinely supports justice, dignity, and lasting peace.

**Keywords:** gender-based violence, marginalized communities, armed conflict, postcolonial feminism

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## GLOBAL DIPLOMACY

## Education as a Tool of Russian Public Diplomacy: A Case Study on Sri Lankan Medical Students

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Spanning vast geographical expanses, Russia emerged as a formidable global power after World War II, propelled by a distinct political and economic ideology. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Noncommunist Russia withdrew its intention to become the global education leader. But this stance changed when Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, and since then, the Russian government has started using education again as a tool in its public diplomacy.

This research examines how Russia has employed education as a tool of public diplomacy to exert soft power over foreign students, focusing on the period from 2000 to 2020, and contrasts this strategy with the use of military and geopolitical methods in shaping its foreign policy and global influence.

The objectives of this study are to develop a conceptual understanding of Russia's public diplomacy, to examine Russia's use of education as a tool of soft power, and to assess the influence of this approach on Sri Lankan students. Neoclassical realism forms the theoretical foundation of research, with public diplomacy and soft power serving as the key conceptual lenses. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Primary data were collected through questionnaires from 20 Sri Lankan medical students at Tver State Medical University, while secondary data were obtained from public statements made by five Russian foreign policy-making elites. Content and descriptive analyses were used to interpret the data. The core argument of this study is that Russia, under Putin's leadership, strategically employed education as a key instrument of public diplomacy to enhance its soft power. This approach was aimed at reshaping its global image, countering Western hegemony, and cultivating influence among future global powers. Education served not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as a channel for promoting Russian cultural values, political perspectives, and diplomatic narratives, particularly among students from developing countries like Sri Lanka.

The findings reveal that Russia's use of education as a form of public diplomacy under Putin is shaped by a combination of international dynamics, leadership-driven narratives, and domestic factors such as lower tuition costs, access to recognized medical training, and bilateral agreements. This strategic use of education has contributed to Russia's efforts to counter Western hegemony, promote its cultural values abroad, and project a more favorable image globally. The increasing number of international students, including Sri Lankans, reflects the effectiveness of this approach. In particular, the study finds that education has positively influenced Sri Lankan medical students' perceptions of Russia, demonstrating the role of public diplomacy in fostering international goodwill and soft power influence.

**Keywords:** *Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, Education, Russia, Neoclassical Realism*

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## China's COVID-19 Vaccine Diplomacy

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The global power structure is shifting from unipolar to multipolar, with China, Russia, and the United States (U.S.) as the main players. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in late 2019, U.S.-China rivalry has intensified. While the COVAX initiative was launched to help poorer countries access vaccines, China has pursued its own vaccine distribution strategy—both donating and selling doses directly to countries, many of which are involved in its Belt and Road Initiative. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, China has used the COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy strategy to enhance its soft power influence on the international stage. There is an urgent need to comprehensively examine the effectiveness, motivations and implications of these vaccine diplomacy efforts within the broader context of soft power competition.

This study explores how China utilizes vaccine diplomacy to enhance its soft power on the global stage. The objectives of this research are to identify the key motivations behind China's COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy and to understand how it has been used to enhance the country's soft power and global influence. Furthermore, to explore recipient countries' perceptions of Chinese-made vaccines, their responses, and the underlying reasons, and to examine the broader benefits and risks of vaccine diplomacy in achieving China's diplomatic and strategic objectives. Soft power refers to a country's ability to influence others through attraction and presentation rather than coercion. This research aims to conduct a comparative analysis of China's COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy initiatives, focusing on understanding the challenges and opportunities they pose in international relations and reshaping the perception of China as a global actor. This study conducts qualitative research using secondary data such as publications, academic articles, reports, media analysis, and speeches.

Officially, China frames this effort as altruistic and aimed at promoting global health equity. However, critics argue that the vaccine program—sometimes referred to as “vaccine diplomacy”—serves China's strategic interests, advancing its national security and global influence. The true motivation behind China's actions remains ambiguous, making it hard to determine whether its goals are humanitarian or self-serving. Concerns regarding the efficacy of Chinese vaccines compared to Western offerings, coupled with a lack of transparency in data sharing, cast a shadow on China's altruistic narrative. Additionally, recipient countries grappled with the potential for political and economic strings attached to vaccine deals, raising questions about coercion and debt diplomacy.

China's COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy boosted its global image by supplying vaccines to developing nations, especially when Western countries faced shortages. This helped build goodwill and showcased China's manufacturing capabilities. However, concerns about vaccine efficacy, lack of transparency, and political strings attached limited its success. The study concludes that China's long-term impact as a global health leader depends on greater transparency, international cooperation, and respect for recipient countries' autonomy. Recommendations include refining messaging, addressing efficacy concerns, promoting multilateral cooperation, navigating geopolitical tensions, and building transparent, long-term partnerships.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Soft power, China, Vaccine diplomacy

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## Successes and Failures of Global Environmental Governance in Addressing Trans boundary Environmental Challenges

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The increasing severity of global environmental challenges, such as climate change, extreme weather events, biodiversity loss, deforestation, ocean acidification, rising sea levels, habitat destruction, resource depletion, and pollution, necessitates coordinated global responses. These responses have intensified due to rapid industrialization, unsustainable resource consumption, and inadequate policy interventions. These challenges pose serious threats to international stability, economic development, and human security, transcending national borders and requiring collective action through diplomatic negotiations and legal frameworks. However, existing international mechanisms often face limitations due to weak enforcement, conflicting national interests, and the voluntary nature of commitments. Furthermore, traditional approaches to international relations frequently prioritize state sovereignty over collective environmental action, resulting in ineffective treaties and policy deadlocks.

This study critically examines the intersection of international relations theory, international law, and environmental diplomacy, exploring how they influence negotiations, treaty compliance, and multilateral responses to ecological threats. Using a qualitative, comparative approach, it analyzes major global agreements such as the Paris Agreement, Kyoto Protocol, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study evaluates both the strengths and weaknesses of current frameworks and proposes a redefined governance model that promotes legal accountability, cooperation, and the active participation of non-state actors, urging a paradigm shift in international relations to prioritize sustainability alongside politics and economics.

The shortcomings and limitations of current international environmental frameworks, weak enforcement mechanisms in treaties and agreements, the lack of binding commitments in voluntary environmental agreements, divergent national interests leading to compliance gaps, the role and contributions of international organizations such as the United Nations and regional diplomatic cooperation, proposed reforms for a more effective global environmental governance system, the future of international relations in addressing environmental challenges, success stories in cross-border environmental collaboration, the need for stronger accountability measures and dispute resolution mechanisms, implementing a global carbon pricing mechanism and sustainable financing models, and encouraging regional and local governance models to complement international efforts should be taken into consideration as successes and failures. While international agreements like the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have laid the foundation for global environmental governance, they suffer from major limitations. Many of these treaties rely on voluntary commitments.

Environmental challenges transcend national borders, affecting countries regardless of their level of development. Historically, international relations have been dominated by political alliances, economic agreements, and security concerns, with environmental issues being treated as secondary considerations. The realist school of thought, which views international relations as a competition for power among sovereign states, has often hindered the development of binding environmental agreements. A paradigm shift in international relations is necessary, one that moves beyond political rivalries and embraces a collective vision for environmental resilience. Strengthening global institutions, fostering equitable international partnerships, and integrating non-state actors into governance structures will be crucial in shaping a sustainable future. The world is at a crossroads, and the decisions made today will determine the environmental security of future generations.

**Keywords:** - International Relations Theory, Environmental Governance, Multilateral Agreements

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## MILITARIZATION, ARMED CONFLICT & THE GLOBAL ORDER

# The Militarization of Artificial Intelligence: Strategic Stability and Global Security Risks in the 21st Century

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is being rapidly militarized, and the world is undergoing significant changes, including in terms of international security, which raises pressing challenges for international law, the ethics of war, and strategic stability. Major powers, including the United States (US), China, and Russia, have rapidly developed, and in some cases, AI-enabled defense technologies at a rate more rapid than expected. While AI-enabled technology may improve military precision and military operational efficiency, it is accompanied by risks that include algorithmic bias, loss of human control, and unpredictable behaviors of autonomous systems.

The research examined how the militarization of AI can threaten international security through arms races, shortened decision times, increased probability of both accidental and preemptive conflict, and by undermining norms of warfare. The research gap is in the fast militarization of AI and the slow, fragmented, Western-focused legal, ethical, and strategic frameworks, with little integrated analysis, cyber-geopolitical comparisons, and a lack of effective accountability mechanisms, where the military uses AI-enabled warfare. In the case the autonomous system creates harm, it will be unclear to whom, if anyone, legal and moral accountability attaches.

The research aims to understand the strategic consequences of military AI deployments for global stability, how these deployments challenge or contribute to arms control mechanisms. Using a qualitative approach, the research draws upon defense white papers, international legal analyses, AI ethics reports, and expert interviews. Interviewees include military analysts, AI ethicists, and policy advisors from multiple global geopolitical regions. The research includes a comparison of US, Chinese, and Russian military AI strategies. There is an emphasis on critical differences, relative to doctrine, transparency, and governance.

The results of thematic coding helped to elucidate potential emerging threats and pressing governance issues. The findings demonstrate that AI integration can have tactical advantages but may also exacerbate escalation dynamics by reducing escalation thresholds and time to consider actions in high-pressure situations. The erosion of strategic stability in already dangerous geopolitical environments is troubling. In addition, existing international treaties do not have the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) or compliance constructs for AI-enabled wars. In summation, the unregulated militarization of AI presents a considerable danger to global security and strategic stability.

The research advocates for the immediate development of international proscriptions, verification, and transparency for military applications of AI. Options suggested include separate arms control discussions on AI, a moratorium on lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS), and cooperative research on the appropriate use of AI for defence. The research highlights the importance of bridging the divide between technological advancement and international law and makes clear that the need for forward-looking policy is urgent in a world that is increasingly becoming possessed of algorithmic conflict.

**Keywords:** Military AI, Autonomous Weapons, Global Security, Algorithmic Warfare

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## **Rethinking War in the 21st Century: Decision-Making and the Future of the International Order**

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On February 24, 2022, Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This became one of the most serious military conflicts in Europe since World War II. The invasion raised many questions about why a state would choose war despite high costs and political risks. It also challenged existing theories in International Relations that aim to understand the underlying causes of warfare. As the global order becomes increasingly unstable, it is crucial to comprehend how and why states make such decisions.

This paper seeks to answer a fundamental research question: Why do states, particularly in the contemporary era, engage in conflicts that appear irrational in terms of material losses and political isolation? The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine provides a critical case study to examine this question. The research combines two IR theories, rationalism and constructivism, to study Putin's decision-making. The goal is to examine how these theories can help explain state behavior and the limits of rational choice in IR.

The study employs a theoretical analysis rooted in IR paradigms. It analyzes official speeches, policy documents and academic sources. First, the rationalist view looks at Russia's strategic goals, expected benefits and cost calculations, with a focus on rational actor and game theory perspectives. Second, the constructivist view focuses on ideational factors like national identity, history and prestige, which may have shaped Putin's thinking.

Through discourse analysis, the paper shows how rational and ideational factors are connected. While rationalist interpretations suggest that Russia's invasion was a strategic attempt to counter NATO expansion and strengthen its regional power, constructivist perspectives emphasize that the role of national identity, historical grievances and Putin's worldview were central to shaping the decision. The study argues that the invasion cannot be understood solely through the lens of material interests but must also account for Russia's self-perception as a great power and its historical narrative regarding Ukraine. This analysis challenges the assumption that state actions are purely driven by rationalist cost-benefit calculations and underscores the importance of ideational factors.

The study concludes that while both theories offer valuable insights, each has limitations. However, constructivism proves more effective in capturing the subjective and psychological dimensions of political decision-making. This has significant implications for IR theory, particularly in understanding the balance between material interests and normative influences in state decision-making.

**Keywords:** Constructivism, National Identity, International Relations

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## **The Israel-Gaza Conflict: Impact on the Enforcement of International Humanitarian Law Regarding Civilian Protection**

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The ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza has brought public attention to the effectiveness of international humanitarian law (IHL), especially when it comes to protecting civilian populations during times of armed conflict. Despite a thorough legal framework, there are significant questions regarding the practical application of IHL due to the Geneva Convention's claims of civilian casualties and the destruction of vital infrastructure. The legal, political, and structural barriers that prevent the consistent implementation of IHL in asymmetrical warfare in which one party is a state and the other is a non-state actor are critically examined in this study. In order to uncover legal shortcomings and suggest workable remedies, the study attempts to evaluate the efficacy of IHL enforcement mechanisms in the context of the Israel-Gaza war. The effectiveness of current procedures, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), UN monitoring agencies, and international courts, in conflict areas with intricate power relations and how is it more difficult to enforce IHL, especially with regard to accountability and proportionality, when state and non-state actors have different legal obligations are major problems.

This study examines key IHL texts, such as the Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocols, UN General Assembly and Security Council decisions, and ICC case reports, their effectiveness, practical application and shortcomings, using a doctrinal legal methodology. Case studies from Syria, Afghanistan, and past Israel-Gaza such as heavy Israeli bombardment of Gaza's civilian areas, disproportionate deaths of Gaza women and children in recent times and dozens of deaths in strikes on schools used as shelters in Gaza happened in 2024 have been meticulously analyzed in this study. A legal commentary will be used to analyze documented infractions, along with further discourse analysis of reporting from foreign media outlets and NGO investigations. Both legal examination and contextual comprehension of narrative framing surrounding compliance and infractions are made possible by this mixed-method approach. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, this approach allows for a more nuanced analysis, not only of the legal principles at play but also of the broader socio-political contexts in which compliance is constructed, challenged, or violated. With regards to that context, three main issues are highlighted in the study. The uncertainty of applying legal norms to non-state actors enhances the redundant protection for them under the larger legislative umbrella, the structural constraints of current enforcement systems which are supposed to be the flag bearers of legal proportionality, lack political will or jurisdiction, and geopolitical considerations that lead to selective accountability which seems to be outright unfair. For example, political protection and strategic alliances frequently allow disproportionate responses and a lack of difference between civilians and combatants to go unpunished.

Results show that although IHL offers strong theoretical protections for civilians, in contemporary asymmetrical wars, its application is nevertheless uneven and politicized. This study ends with specific suggestions, such as strengthening international mechanisms on the legal obligations of all conflict parties, building the political will and public pressure to operationalize civilian protection, and creating more independent legal bodies for investigations.

**Keywords:** Israel-Gaza conflict, international humanitarian law, civilian protection

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# **Accountability in Shadows: Evaluating Initiatives of International Humanitarian Law Responding to Hybrid Warfare by Russia and the United States**

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Hybrid warfare, a blend of conventional, irregular, cyber, and economic tactics has obscured the traditional boundaries between war and peace, combatants and civilians, and lawful and unlawful engagement. This evolution reveals key gaps in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), especially regarding state accountability in distinguishing military objects and objectives. The practices of Russia and the United States illustrate how legal ambiguities stemming from conflicting interpretations, weak enforcement mechanisms, and deliberate exploitation of legal loopholes undermine accountability. As hybrid tactics proliferate through covert actions, disinformation campaigns, and economic coercion, IHL struggles to address the complexities of attribution and civilian protection. This study explores existing IHL frameworks and initiatives of Russia and the United States (US), emphasizing the need for scholars and policymakers to develop new normative tools that enhance legal clarity, close accountability gaps and provide normative tools to safeguard peace and human right.

This study aims to understand the adequacy of IHL in addressing accountability gaps in hybrid warfare and explores how legal ambiguities are exploited. It seeks to evaluate existing legal frameworks and to propose normative reforms and practical accountability mechanisms. Drawing from a qualitative research methodology, the study utilizes doctrinal and comparative research methodologies. Primary data sources include Geneva and Hague Conventions, national legislation, United Nations (UN) reports and international tribunal cases and secondary academic literature. It incorporates constructivist and critical legal theories to analyze how legal norms function in asymmetric conflicts. Using interpretive content analysis and norm contestation theory, it investigates evolving discourses on hybrid warfare to propose broader theoretical advancements in IHL in providing for accountability.

The study finds that few studies offer direct comparisons of violations by major state actors across geopolitical contexts or examine how great powers influence normative shifts in IHL. Thus, the existing research on hybrid warfare has largely concentrated on strategic and technological aspects, with limited focus on its legal and normative dimensions. While foundational work has explored cyber operations and the principle of distinction, significant gaps remain in understanding accountability mechanisms within hybrid conflict settings. This research addresses these gaps by juxtaposing Russian and American practices, revealing how international law is selectively interpreted and used to evade accountability. It also incorporates post-colonial critiques, highlighting how Western legal dominance shapes the application of IHL in non-Western conflict zones, challenging its claims to universality.

In conclusion, the research reveals that hybrid warfare exposes critical vulnerabilities in IHL's capacity to enforce accountability and uphold civilian protection. The findings suggest that hybrid conflicts, by their nature, exploit the legal gray zones that current IHL frameworks struggle to regulate. As a recommendation, the study advocates for the expansion of IHL definitions to include non-traditional domains such as information warfare and autonomous systems, along with the establishment of an independent international accountability mechanism specifically designed for hybrid conflict scenarios. Ultimately, the research calls for a reinvigoration of IHL through more inclusive, context-sensitive, and forward-looking legal innovations to address the realities of modern warfare and uphold the integrity of international legal order.

**Keywords:** Hybrid warfare, International Humanitarian Law, Accountability, Legal Norms.

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## Unheard Cries: Understanding Unequal Global Responses to Human Right Violations during Armed Insurgencies

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Across the world, many people raise their voices in desperation during times of violent conflict, yet not all are heard equally or with the same urgency. Armed insurgencies, characterized by internal rebellions, government crackdowns, and widespread suffering among innocent civilians, often receive very different levels of attention from the international community. While some crises attract widespread media coverage, strong condemnation from global leaders, and coordinated action by international organizations, others remain largely ignored, leaving victims without justice or support. This uneven global response to human rights abuses during armed conflicts reveals the ongoing difficulties faced by many affected communities in gaining recognition and meaningful assistance

This research is based on the central question: *Why do some armed conflicts receive strong global recognition and response, while others remain mostly unnoticed?* Throughout history, the world has responded very differently to similar human rights violations, depending on the conflict. In some cases, there is increased media attention, international condemnation, and humanitarian action. In others, violence and suffering are met with silence. This uneven response raises important questions about fairness, global responsibility, and the factors that influence which crises are acknowledged. Understanding the reasons behind this imbalance is the key problem this study aims to explore.

This research aims to explore the unequal international responses to human rights violations during armed insurgencies by focusing on three main objectives: first, to investigate the reasons behind the selective global attention given to certain internal conflicts; second, to assess the roles of international media, political interests, and historical context in shaping these responses; and third, to explore how such imbalances impact the affected populations and broader narratives of global justice. The study will use a qualitative approach, relying primarily on comparative case studies, specifically the second JVP insurrection (1987-1989) in Sri Lanka and the Shining Path conflict in Peru. Document analysis will be conducted through a close examination of academic literature, human rights reports, media coverage, and relevant United Nations documents. This study is grounded in constructivism and critical theory, which together provide a framework for understanding the selective nature of global responses to armed insurgencies.

In conclusion, it is argued here that international responses to armed conflicts are shaped by selective criteria beyond the traditional Global North–South divide. By comparing two insurgencies from the Global South—Sri Lanka’s JVP insurrection and Peru’s Shining Path conflict—the study highlights how unequal recognition can occur even between similarly situated countries. Observed through constructivist and critical theory perspectives, it explores how political interests, media framing, and historical ties influenced Peru’s global attention, while Sri Lanka’s conflict remained largely ignored, revealing the biased nature in global humanitarian responses.

**Keywords:** Armed insurgencies, inconsistent global attention, human right violations.

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## **EVENING SESSION**

### **THE FUTURE OF THE UN SYSTEM**



# Reevaluating Multilateralism: The UN's Legitimacy Crisis through the Indian, Brazilian, and South African Perspectives

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The United Nations (UN) has played a central role in global crisis management since its inception, aiming to uphold international peace, security, and multilateral cooperation. However, its legitimacy and impartiality are increasingly contested amid intensifying geopolitical polarization, and it is facing renewed scrutiny. Particularly among influential states in the Global South, concerns have arisen regarding the UN's representational fairness, consistency in applying international norms, and susceptibility to great power politics. These concerns raise fundamental questions regarding the changing character of multilateralism and UN credibility as a global crisis manager.

This research examines how India, Brazil, and South Africa (IBSA), as influential Global South actors, perceive and contest the UN's legitimacy in managing two major international crises: the Syrian Civil War (2011–present) and the Russian invasion of Ukraine (February 2022–present), covering the period from March 2011 to April 2025. The theoretical framework is grounded in constructivist institutionalism, which explores how shared norms and values influence institutional behaviour. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how these Global South actors' perceptions of the UN are shaped by historical experiences, cultural contexts, and evolving geopolitical dynamics. The study employs a qualitative content analysis approach with a structured, focused comparison and hybrid deductive-inductive coding. Data are drawn from two main sources: targeted academic literature review and primary diplomatic materials, including UN speeches, voting records, explanations of vote, official foreign ministry statements, and BRICS/IBSA/G20 communiqués. This structure supports both within-case and cross-case comparison, understands patterns, divergences, and shifts in IBSA's diplomatic discourse on legitimacy, intervention, and reform.

The analysis finds that India, Brazil, and South Africa adhere in principle to multilateralism, but increasingly question the UN's legitimacy as a crisis manager when its actions undermine sovereignty or procedural fairness. It further underscores a deepening normative rift between Western and non-Western UN members over intervention, sovereignty, and humanitarian responsibility. On the Syria and Ukraine crises, IBSA has acted less as an ideological force than a collective voice of critique of Western dominance, and while pursuing distinct national strategies largely defined by different diplomatic priorities. This dynamic also illustrates the contributions of rising Global South powers to challenging established hierarchies and shaping the evolution of norms in global governance.

In conclusion, the study underscores IBSA's dual stance of supporting multilateralism and pressing for its transformation to safeguard sovereignty and procedural justice. Their stand presents a nuanced yet unwavering challenge from the Global South against the legitimacy of the UN. Therefore, institutional reforms must be considered to ensure representational fairness and acknowledge normative pluralism. Required reforms would restore credibility to the UN among emerging powers and re-equip it to defend its principles in handling contemporary international crises.

**Keywords:** UN Legitimacy, Multilateralism, International Organizations, Crisis Management, Global Governance

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## Evaluating the Efficacy of Universal Periodic Review under the Charter Based Mechanism of the United Nations

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Being the only location on Earth where all of the world's nations may meet to debate on common challenges and human rights violations and develop shared solutions that benefit everyone, the United Nations has been designed to provide solutions on the human rights violations in the world. The international human rights protection mechanisms as stipulated under UN System are in twofold as treaty-based bodies and Charter-based bodies. The Charter-based mechanism is entrenched with UN Human Rights Council which had been established to promote and protect human rights, to address violations and to make recommendations for preventing such violations and it acts as the uppermost stratum of the UN human rights mechanism. Special procedures, Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Human Rights Council mandated investigations are main three functions of UN Human Rights Council in order to achieve its afore mentioned mandates.

UPR system is a peer review mechanism which assesses the human rights records of all UN member states with a sharing of best human rights practices around the world, giving every State the opportunity to report routinely on the steps such state has taken to improve the status of human rights in their nations. Besides that, it is to address obstacles in exercising those rights and to get suggestions from UN Member States for ongoing development, based on pre-session reports and feedback from several stakeholders.

Being mainly a library-based secondary data review, this study embarks on a meticulous examination how the UN system has been designed to provide solutions on these human rights violations, its scope and unique characteristics of UPR. Further, this study will critically assess the effectiveness and key challenges of UPR in addressing the human rights violations including in Sri Lanka and criticisms of UPR reports by NGOs or shadow reports.

In conclusion, this study identifies the efficacy of the UPR system as well as key challenges while exposing the truth about human rights abuses, providing justice to victims by addressing the abuses, suggesting methods to help these victims get back on their feet by fortifying the national legal system and improving the situation on the ground by attracting and concentrating international attention on human rights. Hence, it is recommended that a transparent, inclusive, and evidence-based procedure under UPR and submission reliable national reports to the UPR is essential to reveal the truth about human rights violations of a country to the whole world.

**Key Words:** Charter- based mechanism, Universal Periodic Review, Human Rights Violations, National reports

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## Global AI Governance: The UN's Central Role and Impacts of US-China Rivalry

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The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence technologies from 2022 to 2024 has outpaced global governance, raising crucial ethical issues. Autonomous weapons, deepfakes, and biased algorithms pose threats to human rights and security through their potential for uncontrolled escalation, erosion of trust in digital media, and systemic discrimination. The United Nations faces challenges as United States - China tech competition complicates consensus on AI ethics within multilateral forums. While the U.S. promotes innovation and partnerships through initiatives like the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence, China supports state-driven governance emphasizing national sovereignty, and the EU seeks stricter regulations via its landmark AI Act. Concurrently, Global South nations aim for equitable access and resist neo-colonial data extraction demanding technology transfer and fair participation in AI value chains.

The research problem addressed in this study is: What is the UN's capacity to mediate AI governance amidst the U.S.-China rivalry from 2022 to 2024? Moreover, the UN's role in maintaining peace and security under its charter mandate as technological competition risks fragmenting global AI governance into competing regulatory blocs. Despite the UN's efforts to promote ethical standards through bodies like its AI Advisory Body and UNESCO'S Recommendation, geopolitical competition hampers consensus on binding international frameworks.

The main objectives of the study are to investigate UN-hosted AI governance initiatives including norm-setting processes, advisory mechanisms, and capacity-building programs, to explore geopolitical barriers specifically stemming from U.S.-China strategic rivalry to ethical consensus formation at the UN and to propose pathways for alignment between divergent national approaches through feasible UN-mediated mechanisms. Theoretically, it combines realism, focusing on state power competition and national interest maximization, with liberal institutionalism, emphasising multilateral cooperation and the role of international institutions in facilitating agreements.

Methodologically, it employs qualitative research, analysing secondary data from Core UN policy documents like (reports, resolutions, statements), national AI strategies (like the US AI Bill of Rights and China's AI Plan/regulations), and regional frameworks such as the European Union, AI Act. Thematic analysis is used to examine these documents and debate records from key UN forums from 2022 to 2024, identifying patterns related to geopolitical barriers such as, blocking consensus, promoting competing visions and cooperation mechanisms which are areas of tentative agreement and joint statements.

The study argues that the UN's ability to govern global AI is hindered by US-China rivalries manifesting in distinct governance preferences. The U.S. protects Silicon Valley interests and technological leadership by opposing binding rules, while China avoids oversight of its surveillance AI applications domestically and internationally to prevent foreign interference and maintain control. To navigate this, the UN should use soft law tool (guidelines, principles) and regional coalitions, like partnerships with Association of Southeast Asian Nations /African Union to build broader support bases and promote initiatives such as a Global AI Ethics Observatory and a ban on lethal autonomous weapons.

**Keywords:** AI Governance, Tech Rivalry, AI Ethics.

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## **An Ethical and Standards Framework for AI Weaponry and Artillery: A Blueprint of a UN AI Agency**

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Driven by an era that focuses on nuclear capabilities as a deterred mechanism of state power, the past centuries have been focusing on treaties and alliances to set control over the proliferation of nuclear testing and weaponry. However, with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence as a strategy on 2017, it has come a long way taking control over warfare and technology ever since. Revolutionized from a Nuclear oriented combat mechanism, the gradual transformation and infusion of AI has raised considerable issues in state and human security.

While the consequences of nuclear weaponry seem to be visible, the amount to which extent AI can effect has seen to be covert and invisible on the surface. Regardless, there seem to be less considerations on how states should be supervised and limited of their use of AI based weaponry and artillery. Considering the ethics and professionalism of warfare and artillery in the universal standards, the same expectations need to be enforced to AI generated warfare and artillery. Hence, it questions how the requirement of a globally accepted platform needs to be addressed to ensure every state stands on the same page in AI and technology experiments in warfare.

This research includes secondary data in a qualitative methodology with an exploratory design. The research is grounded with a comprehensive literature review done with the use of articles, reports and official statements. This study aims to justify the reasons for a dire need of a platform that monitors the use and experiments of AI to enforce universal treaties and regulations of ethical and professional AI based Warfare and artillery.

As many globally concerning issues has been addressed with different agencies of United Nations it could be suggested that as a supernationalist Organization, United Nations could initiate an agency to counter the risks of AI in warfare and artillery to balance dual-use problems, to ensure tech gaps and manage power imbalances.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, United Nations, Weaponry and Artillery

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## TRADE WARS & THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

## **Cryptocurrency and Economic Security: Impacts on National Security in Sri Lanka**

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This research investigates the association of Cryptocurrency with National Security in Sri Lanka. The specific focus on how digital currencies impact economic security a critical pillar of national resilience. In the Sri Lankan context, Digital currency like cryptocurrency is prevented in Sri Lanka by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka in light of Direction No 03 of 2021 under the Foreign Exchange Act, No. 12 of 2017, Electronic Fund Transfer cards are not permitted to be used for payment related to cryptocurrency transactions. Therefore, most investors use illegal ways to adopt more income for their portfolios. This trend often driven by distrust in traditional financial system following the 2022 economic crisis, raises questions about the implications of such technologies for financial stability, regulatory integrity, and national economic resilience. As a result of that, this study attempts to find both the risks and opportunities posed by digital currencies, particularly cryptocurrencies and considers the potential benefits of Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) for promoting financial inclusion and safeguarding economic security. A qualitative research approach was employed using a semi-structured interview method and thematic analysis via Delve Qualitative Data Analysis Software. Four key resource persons were selected using purposive sampling: two senior officials from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, a visiting fellow from the United Kingdom, and a state university lecturer.

The findings indicate that unregulated cryptocurrency results in outflows and foreign currency losses, weakening national economic control. According to experts, cybersecurity is a prerequisite for safely integrating digital currencies into the national economy. Furthermore, formalisation through CBDCs could help reduce transactional friction, support transparency in public welfare transfers, and extend banking access to marginalised groups. However, they emphasise that the success of the digital currency initiative would depend heavily on improving digital literacy and public trust, which remain major gaps in the Sri Lankan financial system. Further, Experts acknowledged that, if formally introduced, a state-backed CBDC could enhance financial inclusion, reduce informal currency use, and improve resilience during economic shocks.

The research contributes to policy discourse by proposing three key recommendations: (1) strengthening digital and financial literacy, especially in rural areas (2) establishing a clear and enforceable regulatory framework for digital currencies, including crypto-assets and CBDCs; and (3) reinforcing cybersecurity protocols and consumer protection mechanisms. Through this analysis, the study reveals that cryptocurrency poses real threats to economic and national security in its current unregulated form, while highlighting its potential when guided by appropriate policy and infrastructure for the future digital currency environment. Finally, this research underlines the urgency of future researchers to provides critical insight for policymakers to aiming balance between innovation, financial stability and national sovereignty.

**Keywords:** *Central Bank, Cryptocurrency, Digital Currency, Economic Security*

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## **The Future of International Trade in a Fragmented World: Governance, Power Shifts, and Political Economy**

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Major international trade parties play a pivotal role in shaping the global political economy, driving economic growth, influencing diplomatic relations, and determining the strategies of both state and non-state actors. These key players, including powerful nations, multinational corporations, and international organizations, act as catalysts for economic integration and cooperation across borders. In recent years, unprecedented geopolitical shifts, rapid technological advancements, and the lingering aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic have introduced new complexities and challenges to global trade dynamics. As supply chains evolve and economic priorities shift, the future of international relations stands at a critical juncture, where adaptability and strategic collaboration will be crucial for sustainable development and global stability. This study intends to analyze the evolving role of major powers in shaping international trade policies and global governance. Additionally, the research examines how the interplay between political rivalry and economic interdependence influences future trends in international trade and diplomacy.

In order to attain the foretold objectives of the study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches has been adopted by collecting data through secondary data sources such as trade statistics, policy documents, international agreements, academic journals, reports of foreign investment flows, and fiscal data to identify global trade patterns, as well as political speeches. This combination enables a comprehensive analysis that captures both measurable trends in global trade and the political narratives that shape international economic strategies. This combination enables a comprehensive analysis that captures both measurable trends in global trade and the political narratives that shape international economic strategies.

The findings of the study reveal that the growing economic globalization is contributing to fragmented trade policies, with national economic strategies increasingly dominating global trade. This is further exacerbated by rising protectionism, the formation of regional trade blocs, and efforts to establish new global trade standards. The research findings conclude that understanding the future of international trade and major political economies requires a comprehensive reassessment of global governance frameworks. To navigate the evolving landscape, international institutions must adapt to the new realities of national self-interest, digital trade, and regionalism. This finding has profound implications for policymakers, global corporations, and scholars seeking to understand the changing contours of international relations in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** – Economic Nationalism, International trade, Geopolitical Shifts, Political Economy, Trade Policy

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## Strategic Repercussions of the US-China Trade War on Sri Lanka's Economic Relations, Foreign Policy, and Regional Autonomy

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The trade war between the United States (US) and China is intensifying, marking one of the most significant developments in recent global politics and economics. It is more important to identify the potential geopolitical challenges for a small nation like Sri Lanka by analyzing the antagonisms between the two countries. Strategically located in the Indian Ocean and heavily dependent on international trade and foreign investment, Sri Lanka finds itself navigating a complex international environment shaped by the competition between two giants.

This study investigates the impacts of the US-China trade war on Sri Lanka, focusing how it shapes the nation's economic relations, foreign policy, and regional sovereignty. The objectives of this research are to examine how the US-China trade war has affected Sri Lanka's trade and foreign investment flows, understand Sri Lanka's foreign policy adjustments in response to changing power dynamics, and explore the implications of the rivalry for the country's national security and regional sovereignty. A qualitative research approach, adopted by content analysis of trade data, policy documents, and secondary literature for this study. Semi-structured expert interviews were also conducted with policy analysts and trade experts, which provided a deeper understanding of current trends and strategic decisions. The theoretical foundation is drawn from international political economy and small state diplomatic frameworks, which help contextualize Sri Lanka's behavior within broader global patterns.

This research reveals, the US-China trade war has opened up few short-term opportunities for trade diversification for Sri Lanka while increasing economic uncertainty. Because China expands its influence through infrastructure projects foreign investment patterns have changed, and western investment has shown caution. When it comes to foreign policy, Sri Lanka appears to be pursuing a more cautious and balanced approach which known as non-align movement, seeking to maintain strong relations with both the United States and China without openly aligning itself. However, this balancing act is becoming increasingly difficult as both powers demand clearer commitments. In security and sovereignty, the study identified that there is growing concern among Sri Lankan policymakers about the country's strategic independence, significantly given its involvement in projects under China's Belt and Road Initiative, which the United States criticize.

This research reveals that the US-China trade war has created both short-term opportunities and long-term strategic challenges for Sri Lanka. These findings are validated in small state theory and international political economy, which frame Sri Lanka as a vulnerable but strategically significant actor navigating great power competition. The study contributes to the discipline of International Relations by offering a subtle analysis of how small states like Sri Lanka exercise agency through hedging and adaptive diplomacy amidst systemic power rivalries. It also provides a context-specific addition to the small state literature by examining the interaction between economic dependencies and foreign policy adjustments under trade war conditions. The paper concludes by recommending that Sri Lanka adopt a diversified economic policy and a dynamic, non-aligned foreign policy that preserves its strategic autonomy while engaging constructively with both China and the US.

**Keywords:** US-China Trade War, Sri Lankan Economy, Foreign policy, Sovereignty

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## **Reciprocal Tariffs and the Rise of Trade Wars: Analyzing the Impact of Trump's Administration on the Global Economic Sector**

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The Trump administration's implementation of reciprocal tariffs during his first presidential term (2017–2020) and their resurgence under the current 2025 administration mark pivotal moments in the evolution of contemporary global trade dynamics. This represented a sharp departure from decades of U.S. commitment to liberalized trade and disrupted international trade relations and economic interdependence.

This research analyzes the political and financial implications of the United States' tariff escalation from 2018 to 2025, emphasizing its impact on global trade flows and the multilateral trade governance among nations. This study narrows its scope to the trade policy impacts under the two Trump administrations—2017 to 2020 and 2025 onwards—thereby focusing on a defined time frame and avoiding the dilution of analytical depth. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates quantitative trade data and sector-specific economic indicators with qualitative case analysis focused primarily on China and Canada, two of the most affected economies.

The findings reveal a contraction in bilateral trade volumes, particularly between the U.S. and China. Retaliatory tariffs have triggered considerable agricultural, manufacturing, and technology disruptions. These reciprocal tariff strategies and policy volatility have led to the fragmentation of supply chains and declining investment confidence.

The paper further situates this trade conflict within the larger theoretical framework of economic nationalism and the weakening of trade multilateralism, raising critical questions about the relevance and efficacy of institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). The role of the WTO is increasingly being challenged in this context, forcing a reconsideration of its capacity to mediate complex and unilateral trade disputes.

Ultimately, this paper argues that while reciprocal tariffs may serve short-term political and strategic objectives, they impose long-term structural costs on the global economic system. These challenges include reduced trade predictability, heightened sectoral vulnerabilities, and declining multilateral cooperation. To address these issues, the study recommends that policymakers adopt a balanced strategy that protects national interests while reinforcing commitments to rules-based trade, enhancing bilateral mechanisms, and restoring transparency and trust in international economic governance.

**Keywords:** Reciprocal Tariffs, Trade War, U.S.-China Trade Relations, WTO, Economic Nationalism, Global Trade Governance

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# Adapting Norway's Maritime Cluster Strategies to Enhance Sri Lanka's Blue Economy

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Sri Lanka holds a strategic geographic position ideal for developing its maritime industry into a global trading and transporting hub. However, the country has not fully capitalized on this advantage due to weak strategic planning, limited awareness of clustering-based development concepts, and inadequate government policies. As a result, Sri Lanka has missed opportunities to build a strong maritime industrial cluster and fully engage in global economies. In this scenario, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the current competitiveness of the maritime industry, and it is essential to pinpoint the factors influencing competitiveness within this sector. Bridging this gap between the country's inherent locational advantage and its limited integration into the global maritime economy forms the central focus of this research.

Therefore, the study intends to analyse the world leading Global Centre of Expertise Blue Maritime Cluster (GCEBMC) in Norway, to identify the key factors that impact competitiveness in the maritime industry. The study employs the modified Porter's Diamond Model, incorporating six key conditions namely Factor condition, Demand condition, Related and Supported Industry, Firms, strategy, structure, Rivalry, Government, and Chance under the Purposive sampling technique in both countries. To achieve the first objective, the study utilizes the Exploratory Factor Analysis to identify the most associated factors for the developed maritime cluster. The second objective focuses on understanding the external and internal environment through strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in Sri Lanka for the maritime industry. The third objective focused on adapting the strategic alternative evaluation process to fit the Sri Lankan context.

This study explores the key factors driving the competitiveness of Norway's leading maritime cluster, GCEBMC, through an in-depth real-world situation. Through SWOT analysis, it identifies the potential for applying the clustering concept in the Sri Lankan Blue Economy. The study demonstrates how Norway's experience in maritime cluster development can inform the adoption of clustering strategies in Sri Lanka particularly when integrated with Porter's Diamond Model. Key findings reveal that effective collaboration among stakeholders, innovation driven strategies, and supportive policy framework are critical for enhancing cluster competitiveness. Based on these insights, the study provides practical recommendations for fostering a sustainable and competitive maritime cluster in Sri Lanka.

Acting upon the study's recommendations can enhance International Economic trade development by employing the industrial cluster development approach. This strategic method is especially beneficial for economists and policymakers, providing a structure to encourage collaboration and synergy among industries, institutions, and government bodies. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can collectively contribute to establishing an environment conducive to ongoing economic growth and innovation.

**Key words:** Cluster Competitiveness, Porter's Diamond Model, Maritime Industry, GCE Blue Maritime industry, Colombo Dockyard PLC.

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## DIPLOMACY & IR IN THE DIGITAL AGE

## Rethinking International Relations in the Digital Age

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The rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and algorithmic systems is transforming the traditional functioning of international relations (IR). From diplomacy to trade to national security, digital technologies are no longer peripheral tools, rather they are shaping the very rules of engagement. States are increasingly reliant on AI not only for economic growth and defense but also for managing diplomatic strategies, cybersecurity protocols, and cross-border information flows. This paper aims to answer this question “*In what specific ways are AI and digital entities influencing and altering the core assumptions of IR?*”

The primary objectives of this paper are to (i) identify how Google, Tencent, and Microsoft utilize AI and other digital technologies to influence international policymaking; and (ii) understand how these uses of AI and digital technologies impact and challenge existing theories and assumptions in international relations. To explore this, the paper draws on Critical International Political Economy (CIPE) to examine the intersection of corporate power and global institutions, and Technological Sovereignty theory to understand how control over data and AI infrastructure affects national autonomy and decision-making. This research will rely on secondary data such as academic journals, policy documents, and reports. Through document analysis and policy reviews, it will examine how these companies shape international norms and influence regulatory frameworks. For the comparative case study, three specific examples will be examined: (i) Google’s response to the EU’s GDPR and its impact on data governance norms; (ii) Tencent’s role in China’s Digital Silk Road initiative and its geopolitical implications; and (iii) Microsoft’s engagement in international AI ethics frameworks.

These companies were selected because of their global reach and influence across distinct political and regulatory environments, providing a comparative perspective on how AI and digital infrastructure shape international relations. Using document analysis, policy reviews, and secondary data, the study will highlight how these companies are shape international norms, influence regulatory frameworks, and shift the balance of global power.

To reiterate, traditional state-centered IR theories fall short in explaining today’s tech-driven global dynamics. As AI and digital platforms shape international rules and norms, digital sovereignty and algorithmic accountability must be treated as core concerns. The paper will suggest a more inclusive and balanced digital governance model that holds both states and tech corporations accountable.

**Keywords:** International Relations, Artificial Intelligence, Tech Corporations, Global Governance

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## Examining the Integration of Interactive Learning Tools in Expanding International Relations Education in Sri Lanka.

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International Relations (IR) much like other subject areas has followed the traditional lecture-based theoretical learning and teaching methods in Sri Lanka. This research paper explores the possibility of integrating Interactive Learning Tools, with emphasis on simulation games and techniques of role-playing in the education of IR, both physical and digital, taking drawing from Western learning methods, emphasizing the deepening of students' knowledge and practical experience on international concepts such as conflict resolution, international negotiations and policy formulation. This research intends to explore how such tools can transform Sri Lankan IR education in the classroom setting, from a primarily knowledge-based model to an experience-based model.

This study has been guided with the following research questions: Firstly, how Interactive Learning Tools strengthen student learning in the Sri Lankan IR classroom, secondly, the research analyses the outcomes between traditional learning and simulation-based learning, and thirdly, identifies the challenges that arise in introducing such new learning methods in Sri Lanka.

Key objectives of this research are to highlight how interactive learning methods, such as simulation-games and role-playing, can create a more immersive educational experience, in contrast to general practices such as assignments, enabling students to grasp complex international dynamics, historical knowledge on IR and decision-making processes. A qualitative methodology will be utilised, which will involve semi-structured interviews with four lecturers and eight undergraduate students from two public universities in Sri Lanka, that offer IR Programs, selected through purposive sampling, along with the testing of a board-game simulation inside a classroom to gain feedback. The theoretical framework for this research has been derived with the experiential learning theory proposed by David Kolb in 1984 and also the constructivist learning theory, where both theories emphasize learning through experience and application in real-world contexts.

Specifically in this age of Artificial Intelligence, enhancing student engagement and the ease of learning complex IR concepts is to be expected. However, this research primarily focuses on physical board-game simulations inside IR classrooms due to resource constraints, but the study aims to set the foundation to expand to hybrid models of study in the future. Therefore, a balance of rigid academics and immersive learning could be suggested in this study.

Considering this study to be exploratory, and being based on a small-scale pilot implementation, findings from this research aim to support gradual integration of Interactive Learning Tools in the development of IR Curriculum in Sri Lanka and invites more research in the future for further validation. This research supports the phased adoption of interactive learning methods as supplements to existing curricula, aligned with evolving global IR education standards.

**Keywords:** Simulation-Games, Role-Playing, Experiential Learning

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# **The Future of Digital Trade: A Comparative Analysis of Quantum Computing and AI Policy in Trade Competitiveness of the United States and China**

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The rapid evolution of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed global trade, giving rise to new dimensions of competition, especially between major economic powers such as the United States and China. Among these technologies, Quantum computing super-fast computers. Artificial Intelligence (AI) smart machines that learn and think, are poised to redefine trade competitiveness and digital economic dominance. As nations increasingly embed these technologies into their trade and innovation strategies, this study looks at how U.S. and Chinese policies on quantum computing and AI shape global digital trade. It's especially important now, with rising political tensions, more protectionism, and growing demand for countries to control their own technology. The study argues that winning in quantum and AI isn't just about new inventions anymore, it's about gaining an edge in trade, cybersecurity, and control of digital systems. Comparing the two countries helps us understand how future trade rules, supply chains, and partnerships may change based on who leads in these key technologies.

This research offers a comparative policy analysis of AI and quantum computing strategies in the United States and China, examining their impact on digital trade competitiveness and regulatory influence in an increasingly fractured global economy. The study is guided by the theoretical frameworks of techno-nationalism which views technological advancement as a key instrument of national power and strategic trade theory, which explains how states shape competitive advantage through targeted industrial policy. These theories are not just referenced but actively inform the analysis of how governments mobilize emerging technologies to gain leverage in global trade, data governance, and cybersecurity rulemaking. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study combines qualitative content analysis of national policy frameworks with comparative political economy methods. Data sources include official strategy documents, expert interviews with policymakers and industry leaders, and trade performance indicators related to AI and quantum integration. The research operationalizes key variables such as government investment levels, R&D intensity, institutional design, public-private partnerships, IP protection regimes, and international standard-setting activities.

Case studies of the U.S. National Quantum Initiative and China's New Generation AI Development Plan serve as focal points to evaluate how national innovation strategies are embedded in broader trade and foreign policy goals. The analysis reveals two distinct governance models: the U.S. adopts a decentralized, innovation-driven approach, emphasizing ethics, market incentives, and cross-sector partnerships. In contrast, China relies on centralized, state-led planning to embed AI and quantum technologies into critical industries such as logistics, manufacturing, and telecommunications. These divergent models lead to competing visions of global digital trade architecture. The U.S. model prioritizes open data flows and ethical AI frameworks, while China promotes techno-sovereignty and regional digital spheres of influence. This technological rivalry plays out in institutions shaping global norms around cross-border data governance, algorithmic accountability, and cybersecurity key arenas that define digital trade competitiveness.

The study concludes that technological capacity alone is insufficient; rather, a nation's ability to convert innovation into coherent policy, institutional strength, and normative influence will define future digital trade leadership.

**Keywords:** Digital trade, Quantum computing, Artificial intelligence

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## Digital Diplomacy and its Influence on the US Foreign Policy in the Last Decade (2015-2025)

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Diplomacy has been the focus of international life since ancient times. Nevertheless, in the age of globalization and the spreading trend of individualism trends fuelled by the continually changing development of new technologies, diplomacy itself has been vastly reshaped. Contemporary diplomacy is not confined to traditional state-to-state diplomacy or behind-the-scenes politics. Instead, diplomacy is increasingly involving public involvement and responding to public sentiments and palates. Governments across the world, including that of the United States, have openly used social media outlets, digital communication technologies, and real-time news updates to learn about public opinion and engage in foreign relations.

Despite the wide growth in digital diplomacy in the United States during the last decade, especially by the presidencies of Donald Trump and Joe Biden, its impact on foreign policy-making and international relationships is still not thoroughly researched. Recent literature has tended to write about digital diplomacy and evolving foreign policy as two discrete topics, with little focus on how digital diplomacy has altered the character of U.S. foreign relations between these administrations. This is true even in the age of AI and when social media infuses almost every conceivable parameter of life.

This research tries to bridge this gap by examining digital diplomatic instruments employed by the U.S. government, examining their influence on foreign policy, and comparing their application under Trump's and Biden's presidencies. The research hopes to ascertain what works best in terms of digital diplomacy for use in the future.

Methodologically, the research is mixed methods. Interactions on official social media platforms will be addressed through qualitative analysis, while quantitative analysis will examine digital diplomatic events across three presidential regimes. The theoretical underpinning of the research is Joseph Nye's soft power, which provides a lens through which to examine mechanisms of public diplomacy and its digital avatar.

The focal point of this research question is to explore to what extent digital diplomacy in the United States impacts agenda-setting, storytelling, crisis management, alliance building, and managing misinformation. The argument here is that U.S. digital diplomacy has re-shaped these foreign policy functions in real-time and targeted messaging with global publics.

Finally, this research provides policymakers and diplomats with actionable recommendations on how to enhance digital diplomacy. Specifically, it highlights the need for increased analytics tracking foreign public opinion, integrated messaging strategies, and the development of standards that integrate digital outreach into core foreign policy frameworks. These integrations are necessary to transform online influence into sustained global cooperation and confidence.

**Keywords:** Digital Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Social Media

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## Sri Lanka's Digital Identity at a Crossroads: Navigating Development, Dependence, and Data Sovereignty in Sri Lanka

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A digital national identity card system is being developed in Sri Lanka with assistance from the Indian Government. This initiative is part of a broader trend in which international institutions finance and support the digital transformation in developing countries. While these projects are promoted as essential for enhancing digital connectivity, fostering economic growth, and strengthening governance, they raise significant concerns about data security and national sovereignty. When external entities manage critical data, information, and infrastructure, a conflict arises between the potential benefits of digital advancement and the risks of digital dependence.

This study critically examines the relationship between Sri Lanka's foreign-funded digital identity system and national data governance. Its goal is to assess the extent of external influence on the development and implementation of the Unique Identification (UID) system and to investigate how this influence affects citizen privacy and data protection. The research also aims to identify innovative policy approaches that promote a locally driven and rights-based perspective on digital growth. Utilizing dependence theory and the concept of digital colonialism, it situates the UID initiative within the broader framework of global power relations that shaped technology adoption in the Global South.

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology, incorporating insights from the analysis of policy documents and a review of media discourse. A comparative analysis of India's Aadhaar system is conducted to provide regional context for developments in digital identity management. The research is grounded in dependence theory and the concept of digital colonialism, which are used to examine the structural relationships between international assistance and national autonomy. A limitation of the study was the restricted availability of primary information, stemming from the lack of transparency and public documentation surrounding Sri Lanka's UID project.

Initial indications suggest that although Sri Lanka's digital identity system is framed as a developmental project, the lack of local control over infrastructure, data management, and regulatory requirements may lead to increased digital dependency. The study indicates that such systems could pose risks to national security if not supported by robust legislative protection, effective governance processes, and enhanced public oversight.

Consequently, the study recommends strengthening institutional capacity and developing new frameworks for digital governance, as well as enacting stricter data protection laws. It emphasizes the importance of strong public and civil society contributions to decision-making processes. Furthermore, the paper calls for a regional debate in South Asia to co-create standardized approaches for ethical and independent digital growth. These findings have significant implications for how developing countries can balance technological modernization with autonomy in an increasingly globalized world.

**Keywords:** Digital Identity, UID System, Global South, Data Governance.

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# Rethinking Power Politics in Digital Battlegrounds: China's Use of Digital Infrastructure as a Geopolitical Tool in Latin America

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With the rapidly evolving landscape of International Relations, Information technology is involved directly in influencing and spreading power rather than traditional direct military confrontation leaving the world to rethink in dealing with power politics. Within such context, China's strategic deployment of technology through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Latin America shows the shift in power dynamics by exporting digital infrastructure and surveillance tools, China expands its geopolitical influence while deliberately creating a platform for transnational crime. For example, China's role in building Venezuela's surveillance infrastructure that allows a range of cyber-enabled crimes, including illegal surveillance, extortion, and political repression, illustrating China's indirect involvement in transnational cybercrime in Latin America. This research examines how technology is transforming the landscape of IR, using China's expansion as a case study in Venezuela and Mexico to explore its role in facilitating or influencing International Relations through cyber space.

This research aims to understand the ways in which China is influencing transnational crime in Latin America, particularly through its investments in technology, digital infrastructure, and other critical industries. By examining China's involvement in building telecommunications networks, surveillance systems, and smart logistics hubs under the banner of initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), this research explores how technology has become a key instrument in shaping power dynamics in the region intensifying the geopolitical rivalry between China and the United States. In this evolving landscape, Latin America is increasingly emerging as a strategic proxy, where influence is contested not through traditional military or ideological means, but through control over digital ecosystems, information networks, and critical infrastructure. Finally, this research suggests that how China's digital infrastructure expansion in Latin America under the Belt and Road Initiative influencing power dynamics and facilitating transnational crime, and what are the implications that could for US geopolitical interests in the region.

The research uses offensive realism to explain the geopolitical competition between China and the United States, with Latin America emerging as a strategic theatre. It argues that states maximize their relative power to achieve dominance within their regional or global system. China's BRI has challenged the US's strategic sphere of influence, introducing digital finance and cyber-capable logistics systems. This theory suggests how states, particularly China, pursue their relative interests by leveraging digital finance tools such as cryptocurrency and alternative payment systems that bypass traditional banking to shift regional power dynamics and expand strategic influence, reflecting a redefined approach to achieving dominance in international politics.

This research is conducted through secondary data such as books, academic journals, Human rights reports, government reports, news articles, investigative journalism and publications.

Global power politics is evolving due to the convergence of technology, intelligence, and geopolitical rivalry. This research reveals that while statecraft instruments have evolved, power competition remains consistent with realist theory, particularly its offensive strand. China's strategic expansion in Latin America reflects a deliberate effort to alter the global balance of power, blurring lines between soft and hard power, development and dominance, partnership and penetration, and transnational cybercrime.

**Keywords:** China, Digital Finance, USA, Information Technology, Power Politics, Venezuela, Mexico

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## SRI LANKAN FOREIGN POLICY & DIPLOMACY

## **The Balancing Act: Sri Lanka's Diplomatic Relations with Japan and China in the Context of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)**

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Sri Lanka, an island nation, is strategically located in the Asia-Pacific region, and the Indian Ocean region has attracted the attention of many geopolitical powers. As a traditional non-aligned state, Sri Lanka is known to be a key player in geopolitical power plays. The two geopolitical players in the region in which Sri Lanka has caught the eye are China, India and Japan. China and Japan's approach towards Sri Lanka has been significantly based on historical relations, as well as cultural relations.

However, both states have utilised their economic cooperation capabilities to build and develop strong ties with Sri Lanka. As a result, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has utilised its economic diplomacy and cooperation to influence Sri Lanka, and Japan, in collaboration with India and other partners has utilised the Free Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative to consolidate its influence in Sri Lanka. Therefore, Sri Lanka is pushed on the road of diplomatic balance with the two states, as Sri Lanka seeks to maximize economic benefits while maintaining strategic autonomy.

This study explores how Sri Lanka balances the influence of both nations in its diplomatic relations and delves into how Sri Lanka seeks to maintain good relations with both countries while strategically leveraging their development assistance programs to achieve its own economic goals. This study employs a multifaceted strategy that incorporates secondary data from various sources, including journal articles, media documentaries, news reports, and carefully selected case studies, to provide a detailed and holistic understanding while abiding by a qualitative methodology. This research conducts a comparative analysis of the economic and security cooperation between two leading nations. It explores the impact of their economic diplomacy tactics, assesses their infrastructure development strategies, and investigates their defence cooperation. The theoretical framework for this research is based on the neoclassical-realism framework. Utilising the hedging theory and small state theory, since it is used to identify small state behaviour in global politics, where Sri Lanka falls into the category of small states in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as to identify great power balancing tactics. In a qualitative approach, themes will be explored using secondary data.

This study uncovers a fascinating account of Sri Lanka's foreign policy and underlines the significance of the Indian Ocean region (IOR) and its maritime security, which are of paramount importance to all three countries. Although both countries have made remarkable progress in advancing their cooperative frameworks, their methods have differed significantly. China focuses on promoting economic development without interventionism and creating a global initiative, while Japan's objective is to foster free and thriving economic activity throughout the Indo-Pacific region and achieve the prosperity of the entire area, reflecting the intricate nature of its geopolitical setting.

This research examines how Sri Lanka utilises competing economic interests, defence corporations, and potential geopolitical pressure from both sides, while highlighting its non-aligned foreign policy and diplomacy.

**Keywords:** Sri Lanka, China, Japan, BRI, FOIP, diplomacy, foreign policy, geopolitical

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## **Sri Lanka's Position in Contemporary International Relations: Navigating Geopolitical Tension and Economic Diplomacy.**

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This research examines Sri Lanka's position on Sri Lanka's position in contemporary international relations, focusing on its intricate navigation of geopolitical tensions and strategic use of economic diplomacy. As a strategically located island nation at the nexus of the Indian ocean's sea lanes, Sri Lanka is positioned at the crossroads of regional and global power dynamics. This unique location forces it to balance complex relationships with major powers, including China, India, and the United States. This study explores how Sri Lanka manages its foreign policy amid shifting geopolitical rivalries, specifically focusing on its debt-trap diplomacy concerns with China and infrastructure development partnerships with India, alongside its reliance on international financial institutions for economic stability. It also investigates the impact of domestic political instability and ethnic reconciliation efforts on its foreign relations and international reputation.

The primary objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of how Sri Lanka's geopolitical strategy and economic diplomacy collectively influence its standing in the international arena. Several secondary objectives are also pursued by the research including the analysis of the specific dynamics of Sri Lanka's foreign policy balancing act between China and India, the evaluation of the role of international financial institutions in shaping the country's foreign policy decisions and economic trajectory, and the investigation of the interplay between domestic political challenges and the nation's capacity for effective foreign relations. Employing a rigorous qualitative research methodology, this study relies on a triangulation of secondary data sources. The research design involves a critical examination of official government documents, policy reports, and statements from major international, supplemented by an extensive review of academic literature and scholarly articles on small state foreign policy and Indian Ocean geopolitics. Additionally, the study incorporates analysis from reputable media articles and think tank reports to capture the evolving public and expert discourse on these issues. The theoretical foundations of this research are rooted in small state theory, which posits that a nation's foreign policy is often a strategic response to the constraints and opportunities presented by the international system, with a strong emphasis on economic and security vulnerabilities.

The paper argues that economic diplomacy has emerged as the most critical pillar of Sri Lanka's foreign policy, serving not only to secure vital foreign investments but also to address significant national challenges such as public debt and persistent inflation. Through an in-depth analysis, this research highlights how Sri Lanka's economic dependencies create a complex diplomatic environment where short-term economic needs often dictate long-term strategic alignments. This study contributes significantly to the academic discourse on Sri Lanka's evolving role in global and regional geopolitics by providing a nuanced and critical analysis of its balancing act between major powers. It moves beyond a simple descriptive account to offer a detailed examination of how specific economic dependencies and internal governance challenges constrain and shape its diplomatic choices. By doing so, the paper offers new theoretical perspectives on how a small island nation endeavors to balance national sovereignty with urgent economic and diplomatic imperatives in an increasingly competitive and complex international environment. This research serves as a valuable case study for understanding the challenges faced by other small nations in the Indian Ocean and the broader developing world as they navigate the competing interests of great powers.

**Keywords:** Sri Lanka, Economic Diplomacy, Geopolitical Tension

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# **Bridging the Digitalization Gap in Sri Lankan Diplomacy: Designing a Strategic Framework Based on Lessons from Rwanda's Digital Transformation**

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With the vast integration of Information Technology and digitalization, the effectiveness of a state's diplomacy is also measured significantly by the extent to which it has been digitalized. A states' prompt actions in digitalizing the key indicators of their foreign policies and their forms of diplomacy and international relations further prove the strategic importance of digital presence in global governance. Foreign affairs by a state through diplomacy requires major attention in digitalization. Although past studies constantly emphasize the lack of digital elements in Sri Lankan diplomacy as far as international relations are concerned, the need for a measurable framework comprising practical key performance indicators (KPIs) is not sufficiently addressed. Hence, the key research problem focuses on the lack of a pragmatic performance framework that can be utilized to implement digitalization and modernization of contemporary diplomatic practices in Sri Lanka through learning from the Rwandan experience and its best practices.

The research pursues three main objectives: first, is to propose all key performance indicators (KPIs). second, to design a framework for Sri Lanka's digital diplomacy in international affairs and finally to establish a digital presence in diplomatic affairs. This paper employs a mixed method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative elements. The primary focus is on qualitative analysis, particularly through secondary document review of Sri Lanka's policy documents and existing digital diplomacy strategies, along with expert interviews with former Sri Lankan diplomats. While quantitative data such as digital engagement metrics is limited and not consistently available across platforms, the study integrates available figures where possible to support comparative analysis. The limited nature of quantitative data is acknowledged as a constraint, yet its inclusion enhances the study's depth and cross-case insights, particularly when comparing Sri Lanka with Rwanda's more structured digital diplomacy model.

While Sri Lanka has initiated basic digital diplomacy efforts, such as the "Contact Sri Lanka" portal during the COVID-19 pandemic and official social media accounts under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, these initiatives remain fragmented, ineffective, and unmeasured. In contrast, Rwanda, a similarly developing post-conflict nation, has systematically leveraged digital tools to reconstruct its international image, promote economic diplomacy, and connect with its diaspora through structured, measurable strategies. This study argues that Sri Lanka's digital diplomacy efforts lack an integrated framework that defines performance indicators, monitors impact or aligns digital actions with broader foreign policy goals. Through a comparative lens, the discussion highlights Rwanda's success in embedding digital diplomacy within its national rebuilding agenda, suggesting that Sri Lanka must similarly move beyond isolated initiatives toward a performance-based digital diplomacy model that is pragmatic, strategic, and adaptable

Highlighting the lack of a centralized measurement model this research proposes a set of pragmatic KPIs customised in relation to digital diplomacy, along with a performance model that can lead future digital initiatives. Recommendations include enhancing inter-agency (tourism, culture) coordination, investing in digital training for diplomats, and integrating media analytics into diplomatic campaign planning. These findings aim to transform Sri Lankan diplomacy into a measurable and a globally representative practice, strengthening Sri Lanka's soft power in the digital age.

**Keywords:** Digital Diplomacy, Comparative Study, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Digital Transformation<sup>1</sup>

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## **Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy Decision-Making Challenges: Balancing Regional Power Rivalries in the Context of the Colombo Port**

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The shift from unipolarity to multipolarity has intensified power rivalries in the world to become a world hegemonic power. As a small state in proximity to India, Sri Lanka's geostrategic location in the Indian Ocean region is a blessing, as an island being the world's busiest sea lines of communication and trade routes, connecting East and West, the Colombo Port become a 'playground' for regional and global power dynamics.

This article explores Sri Lanka's strategic importance within the framework of the power dynamics between India and China in the Indian Ocean. Considering the case study approach, this paper focuses on Colombo Port as the key case study, it aims to highlight the challenges that Sri Lanka faces in its foreign policy decision-making, particularly as a small state navigating relationships with larger regional powers while being a potential hub in the region. The theoretical examination is based on Alfred Thayer Mahan's Sea power theory and neoclassical realism, which supports the paper's focus.

In 2008, under the expansion of Colombo Port, three new terminals were built. Under the thirty-five-year Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) agreement with the Sri Lanka Ports Authority, the China International Container Terminal (CICT) has embarked on its operations as part of a broader Chinese initiative. Traditionally, India has been recognized as a continental power in the Indian Ocean. However, over the past decade, India has viewed this growing influence in Sri Lanka. Interestingly, India was also equally sensitive to the Colombo port to counter the growing Chinese presence in Sri Lanka. Particularly considering increasing Chinese engagement in Sri Lanka's ports. This situation has underscored the complexities and challenges arising from the competitive dynamics between India and China. The East Container Terminal (ECT) case of the Colombo Port illustrates the complexities of managing power rivalries and vulnerability of foreign policy decision-making in Sri Lanka.

The conclusion of the paper inquires into two potential scenarios for the future of Sri Lanka, one is where Sri Lanka becomes a strategic playground in multipolar dynamics, and the other is the complexities of Sri Lanka's foreign policy decision-making as a small littoral state in the Indian Ocean.

**Keywords:** Colombo Port, Foreign Policy, Playground, China, India

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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & CYBER SECURITY

# **The Cyber Footprint of Women: A Global Challenge for Privacy, Security, and Digital Governance in International Relations**

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Women's increasing growth in Sri Lanka's digital and technology sectors has increased their visibility online but has also led to them being exposed to gendered cyber threats such as identity theft, cyberstalking, unauthorized sharing of private images, and targeted harassment. Despite many legal measures like the Computer Crimes Act (2007) and the Online Safety Act (No. 9 of 2024), the main research problem identified in this study is the lack of gender-sensitive cybersecurity policies and effective enforcement mechanisms, leaving women inadequately protected in the online sphere. This research critically evaluates how well existing laws address online gender-based violence, compares Sri Lanka's legal protections with international frameworks such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the cybersecurity laws of peer developing countries, and suggests improvements to fix the ongoing issues.

The research uses mixed methods; it applies a qualitative legal content analysis of Sri Lankan statutes and policy documents with a quantitative survey of 126 people mainly aged 18–24 active in Sri Lanka's digital space. The survey gathered data on digital literacy, legal awareness, experiences with online harassment, and confidence in privacy and security practices. The analysis is supported by case studies, including incidents of images being sent around without consent and targeted online abuse of females in the employment sector, to illustrate enforcement weaknesses and the lived consequences of limited protection. The comparative legal analysis consists of three major themes: enforcement mechanisms, gender sensitivity in legal frameworks, and international collaboration in cybercrimes.

The evidence shows that while Sri Lanka has made progress in fighting against cybercrime, significant implementation gaps remain. Only 27% of survey respondents were aware of the present safety laws online, and only 18% had thought these laws protected women's specific needs. Over 73% reported experiencing or knowing someone who had faced online harassment, yet more than one-third of victims chose not to report due to fear of being judged, not trusting the law, or not having knowledge of how to report. Respondents had asked for stronger legal protections for women (74 mentions), faster police action (63 mentions), and improved education on digital rights (61 mentions). Weak enforcement, inadequate gender provisions, and limited cross-border cooperation worsen these issues, resulting in Sri Lanka being behind global best practices.

Comparisons internationally highlight potential ways to improve, such as incorporating elements from India's IT Act Section 66E (punishing privacy violations) and South Africa's Cybercrimes Act. The GDPR's emphasis on user consent and international cooperation offers a stronger, gender-aware digital governance. The study recommends targeted changes in the law, specialized training for law enforcement, culturally sensitive digital literacy programs for vulnerable communities, and platform accountability measures, such as the ability to report anonymously and proactive content moderation.

Ultimately, this research mentions how safeguarding women online is important to uphold digital human rights and achieve inclusive global cybersecurity governance. Without gender-sensitive reforms and stronger enforcement, Sri Lanka risks perpetuating offline inequalities in the digital realm, undermining both individual security and national progress toward equitable, safe, and participatory online spaces.

**Keywords:** Cybersecurity, Gender-based Digital Violence, Digital Governance

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# Spyware and the Future of Statecraft: Rethinking Sovereignty, Diplomacy, and Power in the Age of Commercial Surveillance

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The global emergence of Pegasus spyware was a milestone in discussions about cybersecurity. This exposes not only an instance of abuse of surveillance power but also the emergence of a transnational industry of commercial spyware that has now become part of the machinery of international relations. As spyware becomes normalized as an informal tool of state power to stifle dissent, conduct covert diplomacy, and support assertions of digital sovereignty, instead of being seen as a coercive tool. Also, it sheds light on the fragility of contemporary cyber governance structures. This study addresses how the normalization of commercial spyware erodes sovereignty, weakens legal norms, and diminishes trust in global governance.

This study aims to investigate the processes driving its normalization, identify the legal and governance gaps enabling its proliferation, assess its impacts on Global South states, and propose inclusive, accountable reforms for global cyber governance. Using a qualitative, comparative case study design, the study examines six national contexts: Israel (state-regulated export model), Greece and Egypt (deployment despite legal ambiguity), the United Arab Emirates (institutionalized surveillance using national security doctrine), and South Africa and Sudan (regional diffusion with private intermediaries). Case selection exhibited variation in regime type, geopolitical alignment, and capacity for cyber governance. Data triangulation was performed via a range of digital forensic reports (Citizen Lab, Amnesty Tech), parliamentary records, export control documents, and peer-reviewed academic literature. Process tracing and qualitative content analysis informed details of strategic behaviour and normative change within each study site, supported by the theoretical lenses of realism and constructivism. Very careful ethical boundaries were adhered to since all data used in this study were publicly available data only.

The results indicate a paradigm shift in cyber statecraft in which spyware is fully integrated into various state supplies of surveillance technology, not simply as a security or exceptional tool but rather more as a strategic and deniable tool of diplomacy. Authoritarian regimes and civil regimes are institutionalizing their use to maintain control over their societies; hybrid democracies exemplify gaps in regulatory regimes; and states in the Global South are firmly entrenched in systemic risk owing to transnational spyware market forces that operate on limited accountability. To respond to this paradigm shift, this research put forth three urgent recommendations: (1) establishing a multilateral export transparency regime for the regulation of spyware sales/transfers, (2) developing norms of inclusion that allow for greater participation of under-represented areas of the world within global cyber governance, and (3) supporting the establishment of mechanisms to support accountability including independent oversight bodies and avenues for public interest litigation to promote ethical compliance and democratic resilience.

Unimpeded growth of spyware gives way to a potential system of shadow diplomacy, one that ignores international law, undermines digital rights, and threatens trust in global governance. With no unified reforms underway, surveillance technology will continue to undermine international law and regulation. Eventually, the gouge gaps into the international system's role in safeguarding sovereignty, human rights, and normative legitimacy in an increasingly digital world. The findings of this study offer a foundation for rethinking surveillance diplomacy in a way that safeguards democratic values, respects sovereignty, and restores integrity to the global digital order.

**Keywords:** Cyber diplomacy, Digital sovereignty, Global surveillance

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## Comparative Approaches to Cybersecurity as National Security: Strategies of Russia and the European Union in Countering Digital Warfare

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Cyber threats such as cyber espionage, cyber terrorism, and cyber warfare have increased over this time-period despite many states adding various levels of cybersecurity to their national defense resulting in an issue over the international coordination, legal standards and ethnic boundaries. Higher frequency of cyber-attacks on government systems, economic framework and essential infrastructure reflect the need for cyber security polices. Included among these is managing the geopolitics of a State to maintain digital sovereignty while balancing civil freedoms and international partnerships against trans-national cyber threats. The research problem addresses the strategic differences between Russia's centralized internet control mechanisms and the European Union's (EU) distributed cyber security resilience framework as approaches to digital warfare defense. The study examines how states defend against cyber-attacks through modifying laws, advancing technology, and managing security strategies in digital governance by exploring cyber security as a component of national security.

This research aims to investigate the link between cyber security and national security by examining how Russia and the EU develop and apply defense mechanisms to protect against digital warfare. One objective of this research is to analyze and compare the strategic differences between Russia and the cyber security framework as competing approaches to digital warfare defense. Another objective is to apply realist international relations theory to understand how these different cyber security strategies reflect distinct responses to security challenges in an anarchic cyber environment. To address the key research objectives qualitative methods and secondary sources are used. The methods such as published articles, reports, government documents and frameworks provide a clear understanding about the current situation of the study area.

Russia and the EU represent two fundamentally opposing cyber security philosophies - sovereignty through control versus security through resilience. Russia's approach prioritizes state autonomy and digital isolation as defensive mechanisms showing realist principles in cyberspace's anarchic environment. EU's strategy demonstrates realism through multilateral collaboration, placing an emphasis on distributed governance and collective resilience. Both strategies create security dilemmas. Russia's isolation appears threatening to others, while EU's information-sharing raises surveillance concerns. These competing models offer different outlines for global cyber security governance. Russia favoring unilateral control and the EU promoting cooperative frameworks. This comparison reveals how political systems shape cyber strategy.

This comparison shows that Russia's centralised control systems and the EU's dispersed resilience framework are two very different ways to deal with cyber security problems in an anarchic digital world. Russia's digital sovereignty policy puts state autonomy first by isolating technology, while the EU puts collective security first by working together with other countries. Both methods are built on core realism ideas, although they look different depending on the political system and security needs. These models offer distinct plans for national cyber security, with significant implications for global cyber governance, international cooperation and future evolution of digital warfare defense strategies.

**Keywords:** Cyber security, National security, National security strategies, States

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## **Weaponizing the Unknown: Zero-Day Exploits as Tools of Cyberwarfare and their Impact on Global Security**

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In the 21<sup>st</sup>-century digitalized world, battlefields have expanded beyond physical borders into cyberspace, and state-sponsored actors use cyberweapons to attack critical infrastructure and conduct mass surveillance programs on their adversaries and citizens. These actors often use zero-day vulnerabilities and exploits, which are undisclosed and unknown to the public, as crucial cyberweapons in their arsenal because they enable stealthy and effective attacks before defenses can adapt. These exploits have proven particularly destructive in attacks such as Stuxnet, WannaCry ransomware, and Pegasus, which used zero-day vulnerabilities in mobile devices to spy on high-profile targets.

This research explores the strategic use of zero-day exploits in cyberwarfare, revealing an imbalance between offensive capabilities and weak defensive governance, and highlights the lack of international norms, raising urgent concerns for global cybersecurity and future digital conflicts. This research aims to understand how state-sponsored actors strategically deploy zero-day exploits in cyberwarfare and to evaluate the resulting implications for global security and international cyber stability. The methodology of this research employs a qualitative comparative case study approach, selecting high-impact zero-day incidents based on severity, geopolitical context, and clarity of attribution. Documents are analyzed using thematic coding to identify trends in state behavior and implications for global security. As the primary method of data collection, this study relies on publicly available sources such as academic papers, technical reports, intelligence reports and governmental publications. Media articles, leaked documents such as Vault 7 and Snowden disclosures were used as additional materials. These materials were critically analyzed to examine the use of zero-days in modern cyberwarfare and their impact on global security.

The research shows that zero-days have become preferred tools for state-sponsored cyber operations and how they alter the balance of global security. Well-resourced nations can stockpile the zero-days and can gain advantages in offensive capabilities and on the other hand, smaller states and ordinary citizens remain vulnerable, and the growing market for the zero-days worsens the problem. The discussion highlights that the defensive measures lag behind the offensive capabilities of the zero-days, which result in severe damage to the critical systems and global security.

This study demonstrates how the zero-day exploits play the role as a cyberweapon in state-sponsored cyberwarfare and their ability to destabilize the critical infrastructure and challenge the national security of the nations and global security. The research highlights the need for improved defense and responsible vulnerability disclosure to reduce the time that a zero-day is unpatched and reduce the risk of the exploitation of the relevant vulnerabilities.

**Keywords:** cyberwarfare, cyberweapons, zero-day exploits

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## **Redefining Power in the Digital Age: The Role of Formal Cybersecurity Alliances in Global Geopolitics**

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The global geopolitical landscape is increasingly shaped by digital technologies, with cybersecurity emerging as a central domain in international relations. As states and non-state actors confront an evolving digital threat landscape, traditional geopolitical alliances are being redefined. The growing reliance on cyber infrastructure has heightened national vulnerabilities to cyberattacks, data breaches, and digital espionage, prompting the formation of new strategic alliances and digital power blocs. While this shift underscores the rising significance of cybersecurity in global politics, existing scholarship tends to emphasize threat mitigation and technical capabilities, offering limited analysis of the institutional dynamics and geopolitical implications of cybersecurity alliances. Despite increasing policy and academic attention, the strategic formation, behaviour, and global impact of such alliances, particularly formal coalitions, remain unexamined. This study seeks to address this critical gap by examining the emergence of cybersecurity alliances, analyzing their operational dynamics across varying geopolitical contexts, and evaluating their implications for the reconfiguration of global power structures in the digital era.

This study analyzes the political and economic drivers of formal cybersecurity alliances, focusing on the European Union (EU) due to its robust cyber governance, regulatory leadership, and supranational coordination. Adopting a qualitative methodology, it uses a comparative case study approach and thematic analysis of legal instruments such as EU cybersecurity directives, treaties, and national cyber laws. Supplementary data includes scholarly literature, policy papers, and government reports. Case selection prioritizes alliances formed post-2015 among high-capacity cyber states. Grounded in realism and liberalism, the study integrates cybersecurity and digital diplomacy theories while addressing the opacity and evolving nature of cyber alliances as key limitations.

This study argues that the emergence of formal cybersecurity alliances reflects a significant shift in the structure of international cooperation, driven by rising digital interdependence and shared vulnerabilities. Focusing on the European Union, the research highlights how such alliances are shaped by political cohesion, regulatory harmonization, and supranational institutional capacity. The EU's cybersecurity governance, including directives and joint frameworks, offers a model of coordinated digital defense and norm-setting.

In conclusion, this study finds that formal cybersecurity alliances, exemplified by the European Union, serve as strategic instruments for enhancing collective resilience and shaping global digital norms. These alliances emerge not solely from security imperatives but also from shared political and economic interests, facilitated by institutional coordination and regulatory convergence. The findings suggest that robust legal frameworks, supranational governance structures, and policy harmonization are critical to effective alliance formation. As cybersecurity threats evolve, international bodies should promote interoperable legal standards and deeper multilateral cooperation. Future research should explore the replicability of the EU model in diverse geopolitical contexts and among emerging cyber powers.

**Keywords:** Cybersecurity, Geopolitics, Cyber diplomacy, EU.

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