

# BUILDING BRIDGES OF FRIENDSHIP

by  
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Foreign policy often is a reflection of the country's own domestic interests. Protecting your independence territorial integrity and sovereignty is naturally of paramount importance. Then you have the interests which are connected to your own economic well being and growth. Keeping alive the democratic tradition and the values that a society has preserved and to be able to reflect those to the world is also necessary. That is also connected with concerns like stability, and security — particularly stability because it is considered very important in foreign relations.

What is the external world that one is faced with in the 90's. This is a bit of crystal ball gazing — looking at the future in that way based on trends which one observed in the 80's. We could look at this in terms of the political economic and social re-ordering that is taking place in the world today.

If you look at the political changes you see the ending of the cold war and the epic struggle between superpowers. This will have repercussions on arms build-up and increased collaboration and trade between the superpowers. It could have an implication also for the whole nature of the relations between the North and the South. As a result in the 90's we might see a greater tendency to look at North. — North matters and not be so concerned about the South. With the rapprochement between the two superpowers which is coming on now, the whole of Eastern Europe might go out of the Warsaw Pact and become non-aligned themselves. May be there will be a new bloc of Europe of Western and Eastern Europe. These profound changes will result in a multi-polar situation where you will have a Western hemisphere, with a strong Europe. Then with

the emergence of the Pacific rim concept you might see the two Koreas, Japan, Taiwan, China Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and the Asean countries all coming together.

So how does Sri Lanka look at all this and what kind of Foreign Policy strategy will it devise to support its primary objectives as a nation in an environment like this? This is a crucial question as we enter the 90's. These changes will have implications for the aid relationships between North and South. Now that the communist threat doesn't make any sense, the whole rationale for supporting developing countries which might fall prey to this 'threat' is not there any more. So these countries will have to think of other ways of getting aid and investment from the North. The Western World might need to look more at their own communities (especially with the emergence of ethnic problems or the increase of poverty). The signs of these are already visible. This might lessen the ability to help poor countries.

In this new international environment I think we should look more and more at the newly emerging multi-polar centres and our strategy of obtaining

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aid and investment as well as markets should be aimed at these countries more than the traditional centres.

I think in this new decade we should start paying attention to Sri Lankan expatriates in various parts of the world and also Sri Lankan emigrant workers specially in the Middle East. We should make them the carriers of the image that Sri Lanka wants to project. How do we reach them? How do we give them the wherewithal to carry this message? They should act as contact groups to other vocal groups and media people in their respective countries. Therefore one of the aims in the 90's should be to get them to work for us, and work with us rather than against us.

In this background what should be our strategy, our foreign policy? Now here we can identify several broad areas. One would be trying to get as much investment, trade and aid as possible — for this we should try to be friends with everybody. In the past this meant being non-aligned in a world divided between the two superpowers. But what role should we play today when non-alignment is in a sense irrelevant? Also we should decide on the stand, we should take on international issues; how are we going to use

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our vote in international councils. Here we should strive to have less of a dependence on aid, to move away from the aid relationship. The aid relationships can constrict your freedom of movement, fine examples being what happened during the invasion of Panama and Grenada. Therefore we should strive to have less of a dependence on aid and more of a dependence on trade.

### Rapprochement

Another aspect of the rapprochement between the big powers is that you won't be able to play one against the other, and also it won't be possible to hope that in the case of a small country being invaded by a big power somebody else will intervene because of a special relationship. This is clear from what happened in Panama. This means that we will have to be very adroit in the manner in which we work in the future. It will also make the game more exciting in a way. There is no easy way. Nobody will help you so you have to order your activities in such a way that you don't have to cry for help. You will also have to build up a lot of regional friends who will support you. I think we will be moving in that direction in the 90's. We will specially build up close relationships with Pakistan, and China in the hope that they will be some kind of safeguard against any particular action by India.

What about the role of the Non-aligned movement in this new situation? In the earlier context Non-alignment meant not been aligned with either of the major blocs. Now that those divisions are being eroded, what

should Non-alignment mean? I am sure the Non-aligned movement is grappling with this problem.

The primary objective of the foreign policy of any country is the preservation of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of that country. Particularly if you are a small country and you don't have a big army you have to be careful of how you adjust your relationships with your friends and neighbours. Therefore, our 'Indian Policy' is going to become really important in the 90's. How are we going to avoid the Indo-Lanka Accord which is regarded as an unequal arrangement and sign a friendship treaty? If we are going to have a friendship treaty with India what will our relations be with the other major power - Pakistan? These are some problems we call have to grapple with in the 90's.

India has a vast potential of providing us particularly with markets etc. So I think it's very important to get that relationship right so that we can work towards the realisation of that potential through trade, through joint ventures etc.

For Sri Lanka the 90's will be a decade of restructuring and this applies to our foreign policy as well. Our strategy in this area will be geared to promoting the social, economic and political interests of Sri Lanka internationally. We will also be adopting new methods in this arena like people to people diplomacy. Another way should be to create an awareness of international events among our younger generation. This will all form a part of our effort of restructuring.