Sri Lanka on the Verge on Non-Violence : Can Violence lead to a Stable Peace ?

Rumana Monzur, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

Résumé

Sri Lanka, vers la non-violence : la violence peut elle mener à une paix stable ?

Des années de carnage et de destruction ont terni la réputation touristique de l'île d'émeraude que fut le Sri Lanka. Cette contribution essaie de déterminer la structure des conflits et des crises au Sri Lanka. Elle analyse la construction de la paix, autant défis auxquels le pays devra faire face. L''une des conclusions est que la communauté internationale n'est pas monolithique et les acteurs variés qui ont joué différents rôles dans le conflit, ont des hypothèses et des priorités différentes. Le gouvernement doit adopter une approche humaine pour instaurer la confiance pour qu'un nouveau Prabhakaran ne survienne et les gens doivent apprendre à renforcer le mouvement en faveur de la paix en transformant la douleur et la rage en courage.

Abstract

Years of carnage and destruction turned Sri Lanka- the emerald isle of Tourists' literature blood red. While trying to determine the conflict structure where the Sri Lankan civil war fits and analyzing the peace building challenges the country will face, one of the useful findings is that the international community is not monolithic and different actors have different assumptions and priorities and have played different roles in the conflict. Now the government has to adopt a humane approach to implement different confidence building measures to that no future Prabhakaran is born and the people have to learn how to arm peace movement i.e. how grief and rage could be turned into courage.

It is ironic that one of the most unfortunate ethnic wars of recent times occurred in Sri Lanka, an island reputed to have had a peaceful transition from `model colony' to a stable Third World state achieving international praise for its excellent quality of life and democratic institutions. These were the factors that attracted aid donors and after 1977, increased private foreign investment in Sri Lanka. All these expectations were seriously eroded by years of carnage and destruction when the *emerald isle* of tourists' literature turned blood red. The civil war killed thousands of innocent people (Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim), brutalized civil society, gave rise to a climate of chauvinist hysteria and intolerance and paved the way for outside intervention. It is argued by many whether after this civil war peace keeping and peace building is possible in this multi-ethnic country. Again the problem lies in the term *multi-ethnic*. Among the 20 million inhabitants, the majority are Buddhists. There are also a significant number of Hindus, Christians and Muslims as well as smaller communities like the Burghers (descendents of European colonials) and the Veddas (aboriginals).[1]

Sri Lanka has long been mired in ethnic violence between the Sinhalese-dominated national army and the Tamil Tiger rebels who want a separate homeland in the north of the island nation. The armed conflict that had been on and off since 1983, has claimed approxi-

mately tens of thousands of lives and was considered one of the deadliest in the world. Now that the civil war is over with the defeat of the Tamil Tigers, with their leader dead and second-in-command captured from Thailand, the situation becomes interesting when we analyze the conflict dynamics and the prospects of stable peace in the island nation. The paper aims to do three things : *first*, to provide an analysis of the structures and dynamics of conflict and peace in Sri Lanka since 2000 ; *second*, to examine how international engagement has interacted with conflict and peace dynamics, with a particular focus on aid donors during this period and *third*, to identify how the strategies and approaches of international donors can best engage with and help strengthen domestic peace building efforts.

Tracing the origins of the Sri Lankan conflict (colonial period)

While trying to sketch the origin of the civil war, the important question that needs to be answered is who are the Tamils and what are the major causes of the rift between the Sinhalese and Tamils. The second one that follows is, if there was always a demand for a separate Tamil homeland and if not, when did the demand take root. Is LTTE the only armed Tamil group ? If not, what happened to the others ? How did it become the dominant group ? Let us begin with the first one.

Social and economic developments during the early colonial period under the Portuguese and then the Dutch, commercialization of agriculture, the registration of title to land, registration of births and deaths – contributed towards a freezing of ethnic boundaries. Added to this was economic development during the occupation of the island by the British. The divide and rule policy adopted by the British made the ethnic picture in Sri Lanka more complex. The coffee plantations established by the British in the 19th century brought to Sri Lanka, as plantation labor, a population of over one million Tamil workers from South India. They were at first seasonal migrants but with the development of tea plantations, the majority became permanently domiciled on the plantations. The question of their citizenship rights became an issue that subsequently soured relationships between India and Sri Lanka. Economic developments during this period were mainly in the central and western areas of the island. This left the Tamil community in a disadvantaged position. They sought to overcome this by moving in large numbers to employment in the state services, in the private sector and by entering the learned professions. This process was helped by the growth of educational facilities in English in the Tamil regions, particularly in the Jaffna peninsula. Thus Tamil students from missionary schools were better equipped for university admissions than those from Sinhalese schools. The consequences were that large numbers of Tamils migrated to the southern and central regions for purposes of employment and Tamil traders established themselves in these regions.

The ***affirmative actions*** taken by the Sri Lankan government were the much criticized 1954 Education Ordinance and the 1956 Official Language Act. These steps were aimed to bring an end to the Tamil entrenchment in the civil service and in the ranks of doctors and engineers. The legislation was later revoked, either under pressure or because its purpose was fulfilled of opening opportunities to the majority. But the seeds of violence were already sown.

The plantations transformed the economy of Sri Lanka and created opportunities for the indigenous entrepreneurs to make large fortunes; some of them converted to Christianity and sent their children to Britain for education. These filled the expanding needs of the state services as well as the need for doctors, engineers, lawyers etc. The local bourgeois thus created was multi-ethnic.

CONFLICT ANALYSIS

The history of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka can be said to be the history of emergence of consciousness among the majority community, the Sinhalese, which defined the Sri Lankan society as Sinhala-Buddhist, thus denying its multi-ethnic character. The Sinhala or Sinhalese

(74%) constitute the major ethnic group; the Sri Lankan Tamils, who inhabit the north and east form 12.6%, the group known as Indian Tamils (19th century migrants for work on plantations) 5.6% and Muslims constitute the third largest ethnic group (7.4%).[2] The interesting observation here is that each ethnic group has a distinct identity with strongly held myths of origin. The Sinhalese believe that they are Aryans from Bengal, the Tamils claim pure Dravidian origin, and the Muslims aspire to decent from Arabs. Among the other factors, Religion played a dominant ideological role in ethnic consolidation. All these contributed to the growth of a consciousness impinged on the minorities in Sri Lanka to the extent that internal resolution of the problems became impossible.

The Sinhala-Buddhist identity

Buddhism, introduced from India in the third century B.C., became the religion of the Sinhalese as well as the state religion. Hinduism remained the religion of the Tamils. Apart from the conversion of a section of both Sinhalese and Tamils to Christianity during the colonial period, the congruence between Sinhalese and Buddhist on the one hand and Tamil and Hindu on the other was total.

Sri Lanka at one point became the land of the Sinhalese and the land of **Dharma** – the Buddhist doctrine. The belief was that the survival of the Buddhist religion was dependent on the survival of the Sinhalese people and the people would survive as long as they espoused the doctrine and controlled the land consecrated to the religion.[3] Thus the religion, the people and the land were bound together in an indissoluble unity.

Such a revivalist ideology that attempted to establish a Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony of the island antagonistic to non-Sinhalese and non-Buddhist groups was responsible for the denial of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the Sri Lankan society and for the refusal to accept the collective rights of other minority groups. This consciousness was counterpoised by its ideologues against the British imperial state, which was seen as foreign and Christian ; the revival was thus more anti-Western than anti-imperialist, asserting a Sinhala-Buddhist identity against all foreigners and minorities.

Political reforms and the Tamils

When Sri Lanka was ruled as Ceylon by the British, most Sri Lankans regarded the Tamil minority as collaborators with imperial rule and resented the Tamil's perceived preferential treat-ment. But since Sri Lanka became independent in 1948, the Sinhalese majority has dominated the country. The Tamil ethnic group sought to counter this growing discrimination by demands at a political level. Before independence, the Tamil Congress unsuccessfully demanded balanced representation – 50% seats for the Sinhala and 50% for the combined minority ethnic groups. Later, in the face of continuing discrimination, a Federal Party emerged which asked for a federal political structure that would give Tamils a degree of autonomy in the areas inhabited by them, as well as adequate representation at the centre. But Sinhalese political hegemony was becoming institutionalized and the republican Constitution of 1972, while proclaiming Sinhalese as the official language, declared that Buddhism had the 'foremost place' in Sri Lanka, thus almost affirming a Sinhala-Buddhist state. It is precisely this history that persuaded the Tamils that co-existence with the Sinhalese in a single polity was no longer possible.

It was in this period of accelerated demands and rejection that the Tamil political leaders concluded in 1976 that only a separate state could ensure the security and welfare of the Tamil people, a state carved out of the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka to be called Tamil Eelam. The Tamils say that despite historical evidence to the contrary, the Sinhalese look upon them as interlopers. The Tamils say the Sinhalese have tried in a number of ways to :

- Disenfranchise them ;
- Alter the demographics of Tamil-dominated areas ;
- Remove them from government employment ;
- Reduce their access to higher education ;
- Isolate Tamils from any support they might get from their brethren in India ;
- Separate Sinhalese and Tamils ;
- Ethnically cleanse Sri Lanka of Tamils.

While discrimination against the Tamil-speaking people was growing in the period after independence in the fields of employment and education, there was another sphere in which the Tamil ethnic group felt itself imperiled, in the field of land colonization. The north central areas which had been served by an irrigation system had reverted back to jungle. The British initiated a program of repairing and restoring these irrigation reservoirs and settling people in the reclaimed areas. The peasants thus settled were mainly Sinhalese from densely populated south-western and central areas. This process was accelerated after 1930 and soon Sinhalese settlements began to appear in the predominantly Tamil eastern province as well.

Strategies of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)

Initially, the LTTE co-operated with the others in their attacks on Sri Lankan army and government targets. In April 1984, the LTTE joined other major armed groups – the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS), and the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) – to form the Eelam National Liberation Front.

However, in February 1986, the LTTE launched a military attack on the TELO, the largest of the other armed Tamil groups. Over the next few months, the entire TELO leadership and several hundred volunteers were hunted down, and the group ceased to be a potent force. A few months later, the LTTE attacked training camps of the EPRLF, forcing it to withdraw entirely from the Jaffna peninsula.

There are differing opinions about the reasons for the LTTE taking on other Tamil groups. Some analysts have suggested that the rift was caused by its unhappiness over the fact that most of the funding from Tamils overseas went to the TELO. The LTTE claimed that the rift was caused because of the close links the other groups had with India. However, all the Tamil groups, including the LTTE, had received varying degrees of support from India including help in setting up training camps.

From the very begining, the LTTE looked at India with suspicion, believing that in supporting the Tamil rebels it was only furthering its own agenda. It was particularly apprehensive that RAW, an Indian intelligence agency, had infiltrated TELO and EPRLF and was exploiting these groups.

The LTTE also believed that the struggle for a separate or independent homeland would only be effective if the other groups, who were much more willing to compromise, were not around.

After cowing down others, the LTTE consolidated its position as the main armed group fighting for the cause of Tamil Eelam. Factors that aided the LTTE in gaining pre-eminence were its tough leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran ; LTTE's strong ideological base, discipline and efficiency.

Muslim Politics

A bipolar model of conflict resolution marginalized the Muslims. These contributed to growing tension, and sometimes open violence, between the Muslim and Tamil communities in

the East. It also exposed divisions within the Muslim polity, hardening fault lines between Muslims in the southeast (who form a relative majority), the North-East (who form a fragile minority) and areas less affected by the war (central hill country, south coast, Colombo). A further set of tensions has grown between the political leadership and an increasingly radicalized constituency of societal leaders and Muslim youth in the southeast. There is a striking parallel between the growth of Tamil nationalism in the 1970s and present day Muslim radicalization

Government policies at Home & Abroad

The process of state-aided colonization can be seen not only as a threat to the political status of Tamils in the affected areas, but also as a threat to existence of the Tamils as a community with its own linguistic and cultural identity. Therefore, at the begining, the main political parties were not totally insensitive to the Tamil demands. S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike, Prime Minister and leader of the SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party) arrived at an understanding with the leader of the Federal Party (the Bandaranaike – Chelvanayakam Pact of 1958) that gave Tamils a degree of regional autonomy, including control of the land settlement in their areas. However, Bandaranaike had to abandon the pact in the face of opposition from the United National Party (UNP) and was killed by a monk in 1959. Likewise, when the UNP was again in power, Dudley Senanayake, the Prime Minister, worked out a somewhat similar understanding in 1967 ; this too was scuttled in the face of opposition, this time mainly from the SLFP. The demands of the Tamil people had by this time become a major factor in Sinhalese Politics.

From 1956 to 1977, Sri Lanka had followed an economic policy that was characterized by state regulation of both local and foreign investment ; emphasis was given on the public sector as the favored means of growth and fiscal policies directed towards an egalitarian distribution of wealth, welfare policies that sought to ensure to all citizens basic needs of food, health and education. The foreign policy was one of non-alignment, with a tilt to the ' socialist ' bloc in terms of assistance for public sector industry. Sri Lanka was a strong member of the non-aligned, anti-imperialist Third World. During this period, Sri Lanka's foreign policy was totally congruent with that of India. There seemed to be hardly any divergence between India's and Sri Lanka's interests, and the last areas of disagreement (the question of an island, Katchativu in the Palk Straits, and the citizenship of plantation workers) had been solved.

However, these economic and social policies were accompanied by very slow economic growth rates. Unemployment soared and scarcities began to appear as foreign exchange became difficult to obtain. Dissatisfaction mounted and in 1977, the people defeated Sirima Bandaranaike and voted in the government of J.R. Jayawardene which was committed to a different set of policies. The changes in the economic sphere were drastic. Most regulations were scrapped; foreign investment was encouraged and Free Trade Zones established. Most subsides were removed and the market place became the determining factor in investment. In contrast to earlier policies, private investment and entrepreneurship were encouraged and some parts of the public sector were privatized. Moreover power, irrigation, transport and communication facilities serving the interests of private capital were strengthened. Although the earlier welfare measures were retained, the new emphasis was on growth, not distribution. This economic policy had important foreign relation implications.

Foreign investment had to be sought from abroad and massive infrastructure needs of the public sector had to be obtained as grants and loans – mainly from the western countries. This whole process also required close collaboration with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In short, the Sri Lankan economy became firmly bonded with the capitalist world market. This swing away from an inward-looking regulated economy to an open, export-oriented economy had a determining influence on the country's foreign policy.

Professedly, Sri Lanka continued to follow a policy of non-alignment, but the imperatives of the economic strategies she had adopted pushed her in the direction of the Western camp. The principal aid donors became the industrialized countries of the West and Japan and their foreign policy needs came to the fore. To give an example, Sri Lanka was one of the very few Third World countries to vote with the UK on the Falklands issue, influenced no doubt by the fact that Britain is a major donor to the government's irrigation and hydro-power program.

These tendencies away from a non-aligned stance were strengthened after 1983 by the course of the ethnic conflict. The Tamil militants were based in India ; their presence was tolerated by the state and central governments. Though officially denied, it was obvious that the training and staging grounds of the militants were in India. During the latter days of the conflict, the patronage given by the Tamilnadu government to the militants was demonstrated by open financial gifts. In this situation, the government looked to non-Indian sources for weapons, equipment and training. Thus links grew with Pakistan that became the main center for the training of the security forces. Weapons and ammunition were obtained from Pakistan, Israel, South Africa and various commercial organizations. The services of Israel were obtained for improving and expanding the government's intelligence apparatus and Israel was allowed to open Special Interests section in the US Embassy in Colombo. Thus the Government began to build up links with many governments and organizations seen as hostile to India-links that many suspect may have matured into strategic relationships.

Contemporary home politics took a massive turn when in November 2005 national elections, candidate Ranil Wickremasinghe of the governing United National Party (UNP) lost narrowly to anti-LTTE hard-liner Mahinda Rajapaksa. Rajapaksa allied his Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) with two staunchly anti-LTTE political parties : the radical Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, People's Liberation Front) and the nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU, National Heritage Party) controlled by Buddhist monks. Muslim parliamentarians have also sided with this alliance against the militants. It was inevitable that the present government would attack LTTE strongholds in the north and east and in 2006 a military campaign to root out the LTTE was launched. The governing coalition forged a partnership with the pro-government splinter of the LTTE, Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), and installed the leader of that party as chief minister of the newly created Eastern Provincial Council after May 2008 elections. However, rights groups allege the TMVP commits human rights abuses with impunity because of support from the central government. Now it would be a challenge for the government to maintain their coalition as the common enemy is defeated and the major objective is achieved with the death of the leader of the Tamil Tigers.

Conflict structures

While trying to determine the conflict structure where the Sri Lankan civil war fits, one of the useful findings was that the international community is not monolithic and different actors have different assumptions and priorities and have played different roles in the conflict. As we already know the fact that support for democratization, conflict resolution and peace building have become important components of international development assistance programs in countries affected by civil conflict – Sri Lanka is no exception where nearly a quarter century of civil war has taken a high toll in terms of lives and economic opportunities particularly among the poorest and most disadvantaged. Sri Lanka's economy has managed to grow at a respectable rate despite years of civil war but this resilience merely underscores the much higher growth potential the country has, if peace is restored. This would significantly reduce poverty and propel Sri Lanka into the upper ranks of middle income countries within a generation. From the above realization, we see that there have been many ceasefire agreements between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE but all of them collapsed for one reason or the other.

The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord

The first major agreement was signed on July 29, 1987 by Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, Junius Jayawardane, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. According to this pact, the Sri Lankan government agreed to create a separate administrative unit for the northern and eastern Tamil-dominated areas.

This Tamil province was to have its own governor and elect its own provincial council with a chief minister and cabinet of ministers. The Sri Lankan Government also agreed to declare a general amnesty and lift the state of emergency. In return, the armed Tamil groups were to surrender their weapons and return to the political fold. The Indian government in turn agreed not to give any further aid to Tamil fighters and to deploy a peacekeeping force (the IPKF) to supervise the disarming of Tamil groups. The accord collapsed almost immediately after its signing and the IPKF quickly became embroiled in the civil war instead of merely acting as peacekeepers. It pulled out of Sri Lanka in 1990 after three years of conflict.

India's intervention in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka began as a genuinely mediatory role. The conflict had become significant factor in the politics of Tamilnadu and it was necessary that its influence on the inflammatory Tamil separatist tendencies be minimized. However, the course of developments during the escalation of the conflict was instrumental in pushing Indian security concerns to the fore. These were the growing military relationship between Sri Lanka and Pakistan, Israel and certain Western countries, the growing influence of such countries on Sri Lankan security forces, the linkages seen to be developing between Sri Lanka, Pakistan and China. Taken together these indicated s security threat on India's southern flank, an area which had previously appeared secure. Thus the resolution of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka became bound up with the safeguarding of India's security interests.

It is the contention of many that India's security interests played a larger role in the accord than the actual resolution of the ethnic conflict. There have been equally vehement attacks on the Agreement from the Sinhalese side. The Jayawardena government has been accused of accommodating Indian security concerns to the extent of seriously compromising Sri Lanka's sovereignty and independence. The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (**SAARC**) excludes from consideration purely bilateral issues. Sri Lanka, however, has on many occasions attempted to override this and bring up the ethnic issue for discussion. These efforts have generally been supported by other members like Pakistan, who have also argued that the SAARC forum should be open to the consideration of bilateral issues. India has always opposed this view, maintaining that issues between any two countries of the region could best be settled on a bilateral basis and not be allowed to cloud issues of regional co-operation.

Another area of concern on which the Agreement may have some impact is the project to keep the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, free from naval deployments by the superpowers.

The Norway Mediation

The ceasefire agreement that lasted the longest was the pact between the LTTE and the government, signed on February 22, 2002 through Norwegian mediation. Under this agreement, Norway and the other Nordic countries agreed to jointly monitor the ceasefire through the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. Despite scores of violations by both sides, the ceasefire lasted for almost five years but finally collapsed on December 3, 2006 when Norway refused to be an intermediary.

Tensions continued to rise until the December 2004 earthquake and tsunami, which killed more than 30,000 people in Sri Lanka[4] and brought relative peace between the rebels and the government. But the August 2005 assassination of Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar disrupted the peace and once again put the LTTE at odds with the Sri Lankan government.

By July 2006, fighting had reached its worst levels since the period before the 2002 ceasefire. Hundreds have been killed in the most recent wave of violence, and the United Nations reports tens of thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes. The Sri Lankan government unilaterally pulled out of the 2002 cease-fire agreement in January 2008 and Nordic cease-fire monitors withdrew from the country. The government increased military operations against the Tigers and by February 2009 it had driven the rebels out of the country's east and had pushed the militants out of the last of their strongholds in the north.

Analysis of the Conflict & Peace Structures in Sri Lanka

The entire architecture of the peace process in Sri Lanka had been built around international engagement. Norway could play the mediator role as it was seen as an acceptable, neutral and non-threatening facilitator by the main protagonists. Some of the observations in this peace process are as follows :

> **First**, the constellation of factors that contributed to the outbreak and sustenance of violent conflict – including the nature of the state, its political culture and the institutional framework of policy, uneven development patterns and competing nationalisms – remains largely unaffected by the peace process. In many respects the **peace** that followed the signing of the CFA (Cease Fire Agreements) has had the effect of freezing the structural impediments to conflict resolution.

> **Second**, negotiations were based on a bilateral model of the conflict and sought to forge an elite pact between the main protagonists. Arguably, the exclusion of key stakeholders provoked spoiler behavior.

> **Third**, there was a constant tension between the imperatives of conflict management and human rights concerns. The perception that the international community was prepared to soft pedal on human rights issues, particularly in relation to the LTTE, played a role in undermining the credibility of the government in the eyes of India and the southern electorate.
> **Fourth**, there was a growing perception that the peace process changed from being internationally supported to internationally driven, shaped by the priorities and timeframes of external rather than domestic actors. International actors, devoid of local and regional knowledge cannot simply engineer peace; rather make the socio-political realities more complex.

> **Fifth**, a critical challenge appears to be one of building a more robust architecture for peace building that will strengthen confidence building measures.

> **Sixth**, there has been a significant change in the external context at both the regional and international levels. The global **war on terror**, growing international engagement in post-conflict contexts and Sri Lanka's integration into a dynamic and increasingly assertive wider Asian region have together created new (and sometimes competing) incentives for domestic actors. Though these changes in the external context may have helped create the preconditions for peace talks, they have not yet led to a radical reordering of political forces inside the country. However, there is always hope that the international peace movements will have a **spill-over** effect on the national level.

Finally, viewing through feminine eyes, peace could look very different than it does from the masculine perspective that has determined general perceptions and policies of the conflicting parties.

With the changing form of global interdependence, to undermine the power of the non-state, people have to learn how to arm peace movement i.e. how grief and rage could be turned into courage.

Conflict and Peace Dynamics

According to conflict theorists, conflicts contribute positively to the functioning of society. The question then arises, if conditions of peace ensures human security, how we justify the occurrence of conflicts in a society. It is argued by theoreticians like Lewis A. Coser that conflicts as well as the violent actions stem from not being accepted in society[5] that ultimately leads to loss of dignity, denial of political access and power. The consequence is insecurity. This is what had happened in Sri lanka - the response to Sinhalese chauvinism was the emergence of Tamil chauvinism and extreme forms of nationalist mythmaking.

The internationalization of peace building has changed the political landscape by introducing two trends. First, there has been a more robust and multi-faceted international response to conflict and peace dynamics that has included security guarantees, ceasefire monitoring, facilitation of peace negotiations and humanitarian/development aid provision. Second, there have been changes in the division of roles between various policy instruments and actors. Reflecting contemporary trends in liberal peace building, there has been a blurring of the traditional distinction between conflict resolution and the economic aspects of peace building.

By 2001, the conflict had reached a hurting stalemate but various peace talks went in vein as it failed to deliver a lasting or even interim settlement. Various reasons are responsible for this.

First, the CFA froze rather than transformed security dynamics. Both parties continued to re-arm and strengthen their military capabilities. Although no-war, no-peace has meant an end to large-scale militarized conflict, there have been high levels of political violence, including over 3,000 ceasefire violations. Insecurity has grown in the East since the emergence of the Karuna break-away faction of the LTTE.

Second, although there was a peace dividend, it has been unevenly distributed and its impacts attenuated. Reconstruction funding was caught up in the politics of the peace process, thus limiting the peace dividend in the North-East. In the South, macro economic reforms introduced by the government undermined the economic dividend and led to the perception that the government was unconcerned with the plight of the poor.

Third, the step-by-step approach was based on the assumption that a limited peace could ultimately lead to a transformative peace. With hindsight, however, there could never be complete « normalization » until the core political issues were addressed. It proved impossible to circumnavigate or deal indirectly with the pivotal core of the conflict, this being the question of power sharing and LTTE hegemony in the North East. Without a clear road map for peace talks, the nature of the end goal was always unclear, which created anxieties among external and internal stakeholders. The peace process acted as a lightening rod for wider political and societal tensions, exposing the multi-polar and multi-dimensional nature of conflict in Sri Lanka.

Finally, according to Radhika Coomaraswamy, there is a myth that the Tamils are pure Dravidian by race, that they are heirs to the Mohenjadaro and Harappa civilizations of India, that they are the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka, that the Tamil language in its purest forms is spoken only in Sri Lanka and that the Saiva Siddhanta form of Hinduism has a special homeland in Sri Lanka [Coomaraswamy 1987 : 79]. Many of the Tamil militant groups have also been sustained by such ideologies and expressions like Dravidian Drive and Chola Charisma have been used in their literature to mobilize support for armed struggle.

Tsunami & National Crisis Management

The tsunami accentuated rather than ameliorated the conflict dynamics described above. In spite of initial hopes that the tsunami response would provide a space to re-energize peace negotiations, it had the opposite effect, deepening political fault lines. Protracted negotiations about the institutional arrangements for delivering tsunami assistance to the North-East mirrored earlier peace talks and exposed the deep underlying problems of flawed governance, entrenched positions and patronage politics. Collaborative crisis management further undermined trust between the two sides.

Humanitarian Disaster and the IDPs

As the Government ended the decades-long military battle, analysts say how it deals with the displaced and long-standing Tamil grievances, may determine whether or not the conflict shifts to urban terrorism. Vinayagamoorthi Muralitharan, a former rebel commander who was known as Colonel Karuna, told the BBC he hoped the Tamil people would be involved in the future political process.

More than 70,000 people have been killed in the conflict and thousands displaced.[6] There is still widespread international concern about civilians who may have been caught up in the fighting. Traumatized children, half-starved families and injured civilians are now escaping Sri Lanka's former conflict zone, seeking relative security of newly assembled refugee camps. Several aid groups are working to avert a humanitarian crisis.

Aside from food and water, the displaced people need medical attention. Many are injured and have not had access to treatment for some time. It's also important to get children into a safe place where they can start recovering from their trauma. After the Sri Lankan government declared victory over the weekend against the LTTE following a 26-year conflict, Save the Children called for increased humanitarian efforts to urgently supply aid to the wounded and displaced and *permanent humanitarian access* to the estimated 40 government-controlled camps. As refugee camps become inundated with new people, particular attention needs to be paid to children who often arrive severely traumatized, injured, or malnourished. Many are orphaned as well, or have been separated from loved ones.

Refugee camps in the region are already stretched to capacity. Many are being housed in already overstretched camps struggling to provide access to decent water, sanitation and sufficient food. Overcrowding is raising concerns about aid distribution and disease control. The end of the fighting has led to a massive influx of new people and we are worried that the camps will not be able to cope. The majority of the IDPs are now in more than 40 temporary transit centres/welfare villages – primarily in Vavuniya and they are currently completely dependent upon humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs.

Can violence lead to Peace ?

It is natural to meet violence with violence, as an attempt to give the apathetic, self-deprecating individual a chance to feel that he is something, is someone to whom the oppo-

nent must pay attention. It is probably this that Frantz Fanon has in mind when he emphasizes the liberating effect of violence upon the oppressed and underprivileged. He says :

At the level of individuals violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.[7] The methods of non-violence are rightly associated with the name of Mahatma Gandhi. His originality in this field is unique, although some of his methods have been rediscovered independently of him. His experiment consisted in systematically developing and consistently following the voice of conscience- following it completely and relentlessly, and using no other guideline, religious or otherwise.

The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments.[8]

It is true that truth leads to conflict but it does not confuse. A crucial point, however, is the question of how the battle between groups is to be carried out, when both sides are relentlessly pursuing the voice of conscience. Many will conclude that the use of violence is the only effective and the only right course of action after an honest and profound appraisal of themselves and the situation. But it is also true that violence is an evil, whether it is one's own or that of another, and must be fought. Therefore, one must seek the root of the conflict, must go to where violence is beginning or has begun. Gandhi distinguishes between condemnation of an act and condemnation of the person who has carried out the act. Acts of violence are always wrong and evil. But this does not justify us in immediately condemning the person who acts violently. If we want to talk about stable peace in Sri lanka, I think this approach needs to be adopted by the hardliners as there is no alternative to peace.

Mastery of one's own destiny is only to be achieved by positive measures based on inner strength. Therefore, requirements of self-respect and human dignity cannot be satisfied through violent means. At that point, retreat from the political to the more fundamental ethical and humanitarian level is necessary. It is against this backdrop, peace building in Sri Lanka should be considered with a humane approach and with fierce love for humanity.

Furthermore, for a lasting peace, experts say the government will need to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils that has plagued the country and a political settlement requires state reform and thus constitutional change. The conflict in Sri Lanka not only changed the regional security concerns and dimensions but also brought to the fore various challenges of peace restoration. The issue has become very politicized but the future of the island nation will depend on how the Government now treats the Tamils.

In a victory speech May 19, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa called for political compromise to unify the country after the defeat of the Tamil Tigers. To heal the wounds created by terrorism, the government is required to work toward building a democratic and economi- cally viable nation that is tolerant and united and works for social justice for all its citizens.

The future of peace

Has Sri Lanka achieved stable peace ? To find an answer to this question is on the one hand challenging and on the other pre-mature.

The public mood in Sri Lanka is more divided than in many years, like an old scratch that has festered into a gaping wound. Therefore, there is a need to rethink the current consensus on harmonization. De-Westernizing the international peace building concept is another major task. Sri Lanka is an exception with regards to geography, demographic features, tradition and culture. Therefore, it would be unwise and a failed attempt if peace building methods are applied without considering its uniqueness.

There is also scope to think more creatively about the interfaces between diplomatic, development, humanitarian, and human rights actors, so that the distinctive approaches of each reinforce and complement (rather than undercut) one another. Will the moderate Tamils pluck

up courage, claim (probably correctly) to speak for the war-weary majority and accept a form of devolution that guarantees provincial councils a range of powers over education, language, religion and taxing powers ? The answers can be found only in time. One fact is certain : Sri Lanka faces an exceptional opportunity to end this appalling conflict and the government should expend as much energy and communication skills on the Tamil Diaspora, to persuade those in Toronto, London and elsewhere that it is sincerely intent on a peace fair to all.

A key lesson from Sri Lanka is that peace conditionality may have limited traction when the broader framework of aid conditionality remains unchanged – especially when some of these conditions may be inimical to peace building. The larger donors in particular can have a significant impact upon the structural dimensions of conflict by working in a conflict sensitive way on areas like governance, economic reform, and poverty. This however may mean (depending on the donor) a significant reorientation of current strategies and approaches. Becoming more conflict sensitive necessarily means becoming more political, in the sense of being more attuned to the political context and governance structures within Sri Lanka. Some of the implications of this are outlined below :

• *Governance*

Conflict in Sri Lanka is conceptualized as a crisis of the state. In seeking to address this crisis, internationally supported « good governance » programs have often hindered rather than helped. There is a need to develop more conflict sensitive governance programs based upon a careful analysis of actually existing politics and the key drivers of change within the country. There is scope to work on governance issues more imaginatively. For example, exploring Asian models of developmental states that may be more applicable to Sri Lanka than Western models ; engaging more proactively with political parties in a range of areas including policy dialogue and institutional development; initiating dialogue with a more diverse group of actors – including the JVP – on different options and models of governance; focusing more on governance at the provincial and local levels in order to improve delivery and accountability at the community level.

• *Civil society*

To some extent, donors have engaged with civil society as an antidote or alternative to the state. In practice this has meant avoiding the core governance and peace building challenge of how civil society can engage with and hold the state accountable. Some donors have begun to realize this, but more could still be done to support the political, as well as the service delivery role of civil society actors.

• *Economic reform*

The Sri Lankan case does raise serious questions about the scope, sequencing, mix, and speed of reform programs in fragile transition contexts. If peace building is an overriding priority, then there may be a need to rethink models based purely on a calculation of optimum economic efficiency. More thought could have been given to the political impacts and the distributional effects of economic reforms. There is also scope to draw upon and learn from comparative regional experiences in the area of macro economic reform.

• *Poverty*

Poverty eradication is a declared priority of the Sri Lankan government and donors alike. But the growth of relative poverty and the expansion of pockets of exclusion in the North-East and South have had the effect of undermining faith in the government, the development project, and the peace process. Re-energizing efforts to address poverty and social exclusion would have a wider pay off in relation to the peace process.

Concluding remarks

In a country where years of conflict have established a deeply rooted ethnic divide, an attitudinal and behavioral change in the lives of the people is crucial. This is an attempt to encourage peace building and emphasize harmonious cross-cultural connections in the midst of the current conflict.

The Sri Lankan history of bloody ethnic conflicts has kept on repeating itself with tragic consequences for the whole population and successive Sri Lankan governments failed to perceive the danger that the ethnic issue, if aggravated, could undermine the whole democratic process. Sometimes it appears to me that we, the south Asians have forgotten our glorious and peaceful past where people of this region shared a regional identity. Now the politically constructed modern states have lost their will to support and nurture the material aspirations of their people. It is time for the majority of people and the policy-makers to rethink concepts, like conflict, peace and development and to find ways to ensure a living condition for all the citizens.

Many, too many analysts and writers have opted for the simplistic bipolar description of the Sri Lankan conflict – at one pole the Sri Lankan government, dominated by Sinhalese ministers and heavily influenced by Buddhist priests and at the other the minority Tamil population, who have suffered discrimination culturally and economically since independence in 1948.

It really wasn't a difficult task to demolish this bipolar model. Hardly any conflict situation is that simple. In the case of Sri Lanka, what we needed was only to mention the third ethnic group, the Moors of Muslim faith. In the recent war, as the military pushed harder into the north, attacks on civilian targets in the capital have been more frequent. One of the most chilling came in early February, when a suicide bomber blew her up at a crowded Colombo railway station, killing 16 people, including members of a high school baseball team.

The attacks sowed fear and sent a powerful message : the insurgents had people and explosives ready in the heart of the heavily fortified capital, despite its many checkpoints. All over Colombo are posters calling for public vigilance. They show a map of the island nation, with an eye wide open in the middle.

" Are you alert ? " it asks. " If you are, your village and your country are safe. "

Endnotes

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