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ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA: OBSTACLES TO THE PEACE PROCESS

Sisira Kumara Edirippulige

Abstract

The complexity and magnitude of the Sri Lankan conflict have grown over the last five decades, making it one of the most protracted and devastating conflicts in the world today. With the prolongation of conflict, the chances for establishing peace have become distant, the gap between the two communities has widened, and new elements have been introduced to the conflict.

The impediments to the establishment of lasting peace on the island encompass both domestic and external factors. Among the large variety of such factors, this study has focused on but a few. The analysis of the domestic factors dwells on the nature of the existing political structure, the characteristics of devolution, and the sources of violence. The examination of the external factors addresses the significance of geopolitics, the role of the Sri Lankan diaspora and the role of the international community.

The exploration of the failure of the peace process in the island points to a combination of internal and external factors that impede the establishment of a liberal democratic political structure. Despite its reputation as a Third World democracy, the Sri Lankan polity has, since independence, increasingly developed into an illiberal democracy. Although possessing nominal features of a democracy, the Sri Lankan political system is saturated with highly undemocratic elements. Amongst these elements, the ethnocisation of the society, confrontational politics and violence are specifically addressed by this study. Moreover, this study contends that the deepening ethnic crisis is a direct result of the failure of outside actors to promote democracy in the island. Having been a victim of the Cold War neglect, Sri Lanka’s continued isolation in the post Cold War era is largely due to its geopolitical position. Finally, the study identifies the contemporary role of diaspora communities as a severe hindrance to a lasting peace in the country. Apart from material contributions, the divided diaspora communities are a major source of illiberality, and this reflects upon the peace process in various ways.

Thus the analysis concludes that lasting peace in the island is possible only through the promotion of genuine liberal democracy, both within and from the outside. Now more than ever before, the new realities of the post-Cold War era provide an atmosphere conducive to such a process.
Acknowledgments

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Also my sincere thanks must go to the Peace and Disarmament Education Trust (PACDET). Without their generous assistance this study would not have been possible. In particular, my gratitude is directed to the Public Advisory Committee on Disarmament and Arms Control (PACDAC) for awarding me a scholarship and thus enabling me to take up the challenge of this project.

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Auckland, September 2000
To Evachka and Vladinka
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACFOA</td>
<td>Australian Council for Overseas Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTC</td>
<td>All Ceylon Tamil Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIADMK</td>
<td>All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>All Party Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>Bharatiya Janatha Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNC</td>
<td>Ceylon National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPSL</td>
<td>Communist Party of Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTL</td>
<td>Ceylon Tamil League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWC</td>
<td>Ceylon Workers Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDC</td>
<td>District Development Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMK</td>
<td>Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPA</td>
<td>District Political Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUNF</td>
<td>Democratic United National Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENDLF</td>
<td>Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPRLF</td>
<td>Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EROS</td>
<td>Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETA</td>
<td>Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Separatist Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBI</td>
<td>Federal Bureau of Investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Federal Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPSL</td>
<td>Friends for Peace in Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPKF</td>
<td>Indian Peace Keeping Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JVP</td>
<td>Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (Peoples Liberation Front)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>Jathika Sevaka Samgamaya (National Workers Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLA</td>
<td>Kosovo Liberation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTTE</td>
<td>Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSSP</td>
<td>Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Lanka Socialist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEP</td>
<td>Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (Peoples United Front)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAM</td>
<td>Non-Aligned Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLSSP</td>
<td>Nava Lanka Sama Samaja Party (New Lanka Socialist Party)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NGO  Non Governmental Organisation
NMAT  National Movement Against Terrorism
OSCE  Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PA  People’s Alliance
PDFLP  Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP  Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO  Palestinian Liberation Organisation
PLOTE  Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
RAW  Research and Analysis Wing
SAARC  South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SLA  Sri Lanka Army
SLCP  Sri Lankan Communist Party
SLFP  Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLMC  Sri Lankan Muslim Congress
SLPP  Sri Lanka Peace Project
SPUR  Society for Peace Unity and Human Rights
TELO  Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
TTH  Tamil Traditional Homelands
TUF  Tamil United Front
TULF  Tamil United Liberation Front
UF  United Front
ULF  United Left Front
UNDP  United Nations Development Program
UNHRC  United Nations Human Rights Commission
UNP  United National Party
USLA  United Sri Lanka Association (New Zealand)
UTHR  University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)