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Revisiting Sri Lanka's Fifth Peace Process and Norway's Role as Mediator / 'Facilitator'

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Why revisit now in 2010 a peace process that failed in 2004 in Sri Lanka, and one year after the military termination of the protracted civil war?

- Sri Lanka is in a post-war situation and the government claims that it has actually achieved peace in the country after three decades of war.
- A '**Sri Lankan model**' of crushing 'terrorism' ! & some countries with civil wars considering adopting the 'model' to end their wars.
- More recently, Sri Lanka has offered to assist India to militarily defeat the Naxalites. India assisted SL to defeat the Tamil Tigers & now SL reciprocates.
- Some Sri Lankan politicians, military officials and writers say that the war could have been won long ago if not for the futile attempts by previous governments to find negotiated solutions.
- In such a situation, what's the point in revisiting a failed peace process in Sri Lanka and the role of Norway in that exercise?

I believe that there are good reasons to revisit the failed peace process, reflect on it with the benefit of hindsight and learn lessons for peace movements & activists.

- **Negotiated political settlement of civil war is a better option than a military solution – even though some defend the Wagner Hypothesis on the basis of available evidence.**
- **Military victory in a civil war does not necessarily lead to a just political solution. Victor's justice may not be justice at all.**
- **Post-war does not necessarily mean post-conflict. This is most likely when the state emerges as the victor in an internal war.**
- **Knowing the reasons for the failure of one or more peace processes in a country and for the military option to be chosen can be instructive in promoting and handling negotiations in other cases.**
- **Was it the mediator or was it the internal political dynamics of the militarised conflict the cause of failure/ or both? What about geo-political & global factors?**

Five Failed Peace processes in Sri Lanka

- Thimpu Talks 1985
- Indo-Lanka Accord 1987
- President Premadasa-LTTE talks 1989-90
- President Kumaratunge-LTTE talks 1994-95
- ❖ GOSL-LTTE talks: Peace process December 2001-April 2004, with Norway as 'facilitator'
- ❖ (Norway invited in 1998 by President Kumaratunge. Several reasons for choosing Norway: (explain)....

Note:

- India not happy about Norway being given a role
- Japan was keen to be the broker – but India more against Japan than Norway

The conflict: An intra-state conflict, Civil war

- **An Identity Conflict with political economic roots in ethnicised conflicts over distribution of resources, social & economic opportunities, and political power in a multi-ethnic country (Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims & others) – formally a parliamentary democracy.**
- **Sinhala majoritarian ethno-nationalism V Tamil ethno-nationalism (minority)**
- **Ethnocratic centralist state V LTTE – Tamil nationalist but militarist & sectarian**
- **An asymmetric conflict: the asymmetry increased during & after the peace process**
- **Multiplicity of political actors and conflicting interests at different levels. (But Norway dealt with two: GOSL's PM & LTTE leadership.)**

Contextualising the Fifth Peace Process (December 2001- April 2004):

- **Focus: Internal & International/Global**
- **While addressing the international/global and the internal (national) contexts, I would like to raise some questions about Norway's role, questions to which I may not have complete, definitive answers but questions that need to be asked and gone into in-depth if one wants to assess Norway's role and learn the lessons .**
- **In my view, the key challenges to the peace process were internal. The internal has always been decisive.**

Let me state the questions first:

- How well informed was Norway of the history, asymmetries & complexity of the Sri Lankan conflict to play the role of a mediator/ 'facilitator' ? What was Norway's understanding of the larger context and the highly fluid political conjuncture/s of 2001-2004? Was there strong professional backstopping?
- How did Norway view and assess the political rivalry/ irreconcilability & the resultant problem of cohabitation between the Executive (the all powerful President) and the legislature (the less powerful Prime Minister and his party)?
- How well placed was Norway as an international actor in terms of political clout/ influence and diplomacy to play its role at the national (Lankan parties: GOSL, LTTE & others), global and geopolitical levels? (**Geopolitics: India in particular**)

- **What was the role of the International Community (IC)? How helpful were the key players (USA, EU, India, Japan) to Norway's endeavour to facilitate a negotiated settlement? More specifically the Role of the co-chairs (US, EU, Japan, Norway)? **How important was Sri Lanka to the US and its allies, (compared to Sudan for example)?****
- **Was Norway able to anticipate the rise of strong anti-Norwegian feelings and campaigns among the Sinhalese people ? How did Norway handle this situation?**
- ❖ **Was the Lankan armed conflict too intractable for a negotiated settlement and hence the war could only be terminated by military means?**

• The International/ Global Context:

- Rise of post-cold war (neo)liberal peace thesis & agenda
- Peace conditionality (late 1990s)
- Conflict resolution-Development aid link (Development-Security nexus)
- **Post 9/11: War on terror – Liberal war & Liberal peace: – Negative effects**
- Bans on ‘terrorist organisations’ (LTTE included) by Western countries:- Had implications for the peace process & for Norway’s role
- US & its allies had their geopolitical priorities for interventions – i.e. some conflicts more important than others
- Intervene in the Sudanese & Sri Lankan peace processes at the same time; Note: IFIs & bilateral donors have been actively engaged in SL for decades , more actively since 1977

The Internal Context – Shifting conjunctures:

- **2001:**
 - Militarily - a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS)
 - Economy records negative growth rate
 - Pro-peace political conjuncture,
 - Elections – UNP wins on a ‘peace & economy first’ platform & forms government; President-Prime Minister (+cabinet) tensions begin
- **2002**
 - February: CFA signed between LTTE leader & Prime Minister facilitated by Norway; LTTE recognised as the only negotiating partner. President condemns the CFA. **Criticisms against Norway as a ‘biased’ broker emerge.** India cold.
 - September: GOSL deproscribes LTTE. Talks begin (in Thailand): Immediate humanitarian & rehabilitation issues first & establish an interim mechanism while exploring a political solution; October-November: Second round in Thailand – establish SIHRN

• 2002:

- IFIs, UN, bilateral donors engage in needs assessment, rehabilitation
- Executive-Legislature tensions – Cohabitation problem
- Muslims complain; Point at LTTE's past anti-Muslim actions
- Pro-peace process forces continuously challenged, branded unpatriotic, foreign-funded; Weak civil society
- Anti-peace process forces intensify campaign: Norway targeted – attacked as 'Pro LTTE'; 'international conspiracy' claims by Sinhala nationalists.
- December 2002: Peace talks in Oslo – **agree to explore a federal solution**; The Oslo Declaration
- December 2002: Anti-peace process forces gaining upper hand in the south. Protests & burning of Norwegian flag in front of Norwegian embassy - controversy over communication equipment imported by LTTE.

• 2003

- **The next three rounds of talks fail to produce agreement on an interim mechanism; Standoff on HSZs issue; SL military's tough posture**
- **Resettlement & rehabilitation problems; Humanitarian crisis in NE**
- **Violations of CFA increase (SLMM); Mutual accusations**
- **Anti-peace process campaigns intensify (SLFP, JHU, JVP, NMAT)**
- **LTTE excluded from donor conference in Washington because it was banned in the US . Norway unable to change the situation.**
- **April 2003: LTTE withdraws from negotiations, rejects government's proposals for interim administration & refuses to attend the major donor conference in June in Tokyo: **The peace process stalls****
- **Another big protest against CFA in front of the Norwegian embassy**

- **October 2003 : LTTE presents its Interim Self-governing Authority (ISGA) proposal**
- **President accuses PM & his party of conceding too much to the LTTE, which she believed was intransigent, maximalist & unreliable (a view shared by many others)**
- **Sinhala nationalists mount protests against the peace process & Norway. Anti-Norway demos and burning of Norwegian flag in Colombo.**
- **February 2004: President dissolves parliament. Abrupt end of the peace process. CFA continues amid violations**

WHAT WENT WRONG?

"Even if Jesus Christ or Buddha came, they will not be able to do this easily," Solheim told reporters soon after meeting the Tigers' political head S. P. Tamilselvan at the rebels' Peace Secretariat in Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka. (September 25, 2004)

NOW BACK TO MY QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

