

SRI LANKA: FROM NEGOTIATIONS TO WAR?

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INTRODUCTION

The recently held talks in Geneva between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE embody some of the major difficulties embedded in Sri Lanka's much maligned peace process. The delegations from the government and the LTTE went to Geneva amidst increasing international pressure to desist from war and resume political engagement. The Norwegian facilitators could not produce an agenda for the meeting because the two sides had different expectations from Geneva talks. On the first day of negotiations, leaders of the two delegations made lengthy opening statements, indicating that they had come to Geneva committed to engage in positional bargaining. They were also expecting unilateral political gains. They were not in Geneva for problem-solving and conflict resolution talks. When the talks ended inconclusively, the international facilitators pleaded with the two sides not to act in haste, because there was a real risk of imminent war escalation. In fact, the Geneva talks appeared like conducting the war by other means.

'War by other means' is a phrase that dramatically captures how Sri Lanka's peace process of 2002-2003 has gradually decayed towards war and violence. Sri Lanka's relapsing to war should not surprise anyone, because the 2002-2003 negotiations failed to produce a *peace* agreement, even though there has been a *cease-fire* agreement in force. But, the CFA or the presence of international truce monitors has not deterred the two main parties and their hidden allies from waging an undeclared war.

The current phase of Sri Lanka's war has a few crucial and defining characteristics. First, neither the government nor the LTTE has formally withdrawn from the CFA. No side has formally declared war either. The war is being conducted at low and middle-intensity levels with occasional outbursts of high intensity escalation. The war so far has taken a high toll of civilian victims, yet both sides seem to accept the civilian casualty dimensions as a necessary component in this particular phase of the war. And finally, in the counter-state and counter-insurgency war, that runs parallel to the visible war, civilians are being deliberately targeted. Everyday, there are reports of Tamil civilians being kidnapped, extra-judicially executed or just assassinated. These reports emanate from Jaffna, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mannar, Vavuniya and of course, Colombo.

ESCALATION

Looking back at events during the past several weeks in Sri Lanka's conflict, one can see a process of build up to a new phase of war escalation. The logic of this escalation has been the commitment of each side to gain unilateral military advantage, whether negotiations took place or not.

The chemistry of the relationship between the present Sri Lankan government, that came to power late last year, and the LTTE has never been conducive for mutual accommodation through constructive political engagement. Even in the limited talks the two sides held early this year in Geneva, they returned as antagonists committed to further intensifying their enmities.

Neither side showed willingness to pursue political engagement as a necessary and serious option. Actually, they seemed to explore war as the preferred first option. The only deterrent to war exploration both Colombo and Mulaithivu encountered was the international factor, the pressure from the Co-Chairs and India.

Clearly, then, there has been and continues to be a distinct logic, or dynamic, specific to the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE that has pushed them to the option of war. Since this is a point that many observers on Sri Lanka seem to miss, let me briefly describe this logic of war exploration.

The Rajapakse administration was formed in November last year in a context of extreme disenchantment among Sinhalese nationalist political forces with the CFA of 2002 and the UNP-LTTE negotiations. By that time, powerful spoiler forces had successfully and irreparably undermined the political legitimacy of both the CFA and negotiations. Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe's laissez faire attitude to the political complexities of negotiations, coupled with the LTTE's repeated violations of the CFA and insistence on a maximalist interim solution, contributed in no small measure to this Sinhalese nationalist backlash. In that background, the argument for a military solution to the ethnic conflict re-emerged. The United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), that won the parliamentary election in April 2004 and the Presidential election in November 2005, was essentially a coalition against the LTTE, built to defeat the UNP.

The UPFA coalition under both President Kumaratunga and President Rajapakse created a new ideological front, led by the Sinhalese nationalist *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP) and *Jathika Hela Uumaya* (JHU). The new alliance sought to re-design the engagement with the LTTE in military terms as well. Thus, in 2003-2005, three arguments concerning how to engage with the LTTE emerged within the UPFA coalition, with adherents in the military as well as the media. The first was that the war against the LTTE could be won if the professionals, meaning the Generals, were given a free hand, without interference by political leaders, to conduct the war. The past military failures by the state were attributed to the 'wrong' approach of politicians conducting the war. The second argument was that the war against the LTTE could be won if the armed forces were given the correct ideological leadership. In the emerging political configuration, the JVP and the JHU were seen as the new ideological leadership in the war for national unification. The third argument was for the Sri Lankan government to establish military alliances with the U. S., India, China or Russia in order to link the war against the LTTE with the global war against terrorism. In this new thinking, negotiations with the LTTE were seen primarily as a tactical component of a larger war strategy.

Interestingly, the LTTE had also reached similar conclusions through a different path of reasoning. The LTTE seems to have concluded that the 2002-2003 peace process did not produce any favourable outcome. On the contrary, it had weakened the LTTE militarily and politically in the Eastern province, and entangled the movement in an international web of pressures for a political settlement of somebody else's – international community, in this case -- choice. The LTTE seems to have interpreted the failure to establish an administrative mechanism for cooperation for post-tsunami reconstruction as the final confirmation that the Sinhalese political class was not willing for even a minimalist compromise. Thus, bringing to an end the political engagement with the Sri Lankan state that began in 2002 became a short-term strategic objective of the LTTE as well.

There seems to be another significant reason for the LTTE to opt for escalation of violence and war – the need for re-sharpening the contradictions between the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil polity. One crucial criticism that emerged among LTTE ranks concerning the 2002 CFA and

negotiations was that they not only failed to produce a favourable political outcome, but also led to lessening the contradictions embedded in the ethnic conflict. 'Re-sharpening of contradictions' seems to be a strategic path that the LTTE entered in the latter part of 2004. This perhaps explains why the LTTE imposed in the North a boycott on the day of Presidential election in November last year, thereby paving the way for Rajapakse, in alliance with the JVP and JHU, to win.

POLICY DILEMMA

In power, however, President Rajapakse faced a huge policy dilemma. Implementing the hard-line, pre-election agenda was not feasible. But his government's parliamentary majority depended on the support of the JVP and JHU. In the early months in office, President Rajapakse seems to have designed a strategy that appealed to his hard-line coalition partners as well as the international community. The main feature of that approach is to negotiate with the LTTE, but from a position of military strength. It also kept open the military victory outcome as well. It is a strategy that maintained on parallel tracks both the military and negotiation options while at the same time accommodating contradictory pressures coming from different sources, domestic as well as international.

The government's strategy of negotiations from a position of military strength and the LTTE's strategy of re-sharpening the contradictions between the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil polity worked quite well in producing the present level of escalation. President Rajapakse on his part seems to have delegated the function of conducting the war to the Generals and the Ministry of Defence. The pattern of military offensives launched by the government during the past two months indicate that a key component of that strategy has been to defeat the LTTE in the Eastern province with the assistance of the breakaway Karuna group. In Sampur and Muttur battles a few weeks ago, the LTTE indeed demonstrated its military vulnerability in the Eastern province.

In the aftermath of the failed Geneva talks, the Co-Chairs of Sri Lanka's peace process – the EU, the USA, Japan and Norway – have been having extensive consultations with the government as well as the LTTE trying to prevent further escalation. This role of the international community is significant in a context where there are no effective domestic constituencies to exert pressure on the main protagonists to refrain from war. The civil society and human rights groups who advocate and campaign for peace and negotiated settlement are a small minority. Their influence in the political process at present is quite limited. The public opinion in general is largely influenced by the new rise of militarism in both the Sinhalese and Tamil societies. Therefore, the international community is the only effective forces that can have even limited influence on the behaviour of the government as well as the LTTE concerning war or peace.

CONFLICT PROTRACTION AND WAR

Observers of Sri Lanka's peace process are often baffled by the repeated unwillingness of parties to the conflict to work out a mutually acceptable peace settlement through negotiations. The international facilitators and backers of Sri Lanka's failed peace process of 2002 have often

expressed frustration about their own inability to understand why the leaders of Sri Lanka governments as well as the LTTE have refused to sign a peace agreement in a very favourable international context. A greater puzzle is that even the massive humanitarian disaster caused by the tsunami of December 2004 failed to provide adequate moral or material incentives for the protagonists to end the conflict. Instead, Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has found a new life and vitality towards re-militarization after four years of a cease-fire agreement, one year of peace negotiations and an unprecedented humanitarian disaster that struck Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities in an almost equal measure. Peace negotiations in Sri Lanka have indeed constituted an "integral part of the long-drawn life cycle" of the ethnic war (Sahadevan, 2006:239).

I argue that at least a part of the explanation of the puzzle lays in the fact that Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict and its possible termination is embedded in the vital question of state power. This is not to deny the importance of "underlying causes" (Burton: 1990) or "structural" factors (Galtung, 1969) in generating Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. Group discrimination, limited access to public resources and cultural marginalization were indeed the key components of the minority experience that eventually produced the ethnic conflict. But, the protracted war has transformed the core dynamic of the conflict by replacing the discourse of grievance with a discourse of state power.

This shift has been paralleled with a tendency in which the consequences of the war and violence, rather than the original 'root causes', have acquired a greater capacity to propel the conflict forward. I further argue that the war that has characterised the conflict for over two decades has pushed the 'underlying causes' and 'structural factors' to the background and brought the question of state power to the centre of the conflict as well as the agenda for peace. The protagonists to the ethnic conflict have been locked in this intractable problem of state power. They have made issues of economic development, humanitarian assistance, and social re-construction secondary to how these issues would impinge on the existing or emerging dynamics of state power.

To explore Sri Lanka's conflict and peace puzzle, it is useful to identify some dynamics of the conflict as revealed in the attempts to resolve it through negotiations, mediation and cessation of hostilities. These 'dynamics' are the conditions and dimensions that have contributed to the protraction and sustainability of war and violence through a logic of conflict re-escalation and re-production. Sri Lanka's conflict is an 'intractable' conflict in a double sense. In the first, it has been characterised by "high, ongoing levels of intergroup violence that has not been amenable to reduction through negotiation" (Maney et al, 2006: 186). In the second, attempts at conflict termination have reproduced the conflict with greater intensity and capacity to last long.

Sri Lanka's conflict tells us that failed and inconclusive attempts at resolving the conflict have not led to conflict mitigation. Rather, they have re-constituted the conflict, re-defining its parameters, trajectories and the possible paths to peace. In fact, the negotiations have also been occasions for the governments of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to discover new differences, explore new enmities and reinforce existing antagonisms. Meanwhile, there is a continuing gap between the desirable peace and possible peace. On both desirable and possible peace too, there have been contending and conflicting perspectives propelling the conflict forward. Contestations for peace have been re-energizing the drive for war and violence.

COMPETING STATE FORMATION PROJECTS

Even a cursory examination of Sri Lanka's past as well as recent peace negotiations reveals the extent to which the main protagonists have been preoccupied with the issue of state power. The capacity of governments to address minority demands for political power sharing has been severely restricted by the consequences of any power sharing arrangement on the way in which the state power is currently organized. Moving away from the unitary and centralized state form has been proved exceedingly difficult.

Similarly, the LTTE, which is supposed to represent the grievances of the Tamil community, seems to be preoccupied primarily with the priorities of state building in what they see as the Tamil 'homeland.' It has become somewhat clear in this backdrop that the ethnic war, as opposed to the ethnic conflict, in Sri Lanka is not about addressing issues of discrimination, everyday identity needs, or even structural issues of poverty and inequality. For the LTTE, war-making has been fundamentally a process of state-making. On the other hand, for the Sri Lankan state, war has been the key instrument to maintain the existing unitary state with or without reforms. Thus, peace negotiations have been a continuation of the war for state formation conducted by other means.

Holsti makes the assertion that wars of the late twentieth century have not been about foreign policy, security, honour or status. Rather, they are about "statehood, governance and the role and status of nations and communities within states" (Holsti, 1996:21). In this backdrop, one way to explore the dynamics of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is to view the conflict as a contestation between two, or even three, ethnically driven state formation projects. We may describe them, for want of a better conceptual terminology, majoritarian and minoritarian.

The contest between Sinhalese and Tamil state formation projects has given rise to claims of regional autonomy in Sri Lanka's Muslim society as well. The Tamil armed struggle for a separate state, encompassing the Northern and Eastern provinces, has generated a profound insecurity among the Muslims who constitute nearly one-third of the population in the Eastern province. I discuss the specificity of the Muslim 'question' elsewhere in this paper. Suffice it to say here that the Muslim claim to regional autonomy in the Eastern province is a direct reaction to the processes of regional as well as separate state formation politics among the Tamils. The Muslims do not support the campaign for a separate Tamil state. But they accept regional autonomy for Tamils on the condition that in the Northern and Eastern provinces there should be special arrangements for the security and rights of the Muslim communities. They argue that in the Eastern province, the Muslim majority areas should be made into a non-contiguous unit of autonomy. The LTTE, which has been negotiating with the Sri Lankan government for a peace deal, has found the Muslim autonomy claim quite problematic. In the LTTE's thinking, accommodating Muslim autonomy demands before a final agreement is reached will weaken the bargaining capacity of Tamils. However, the Muslim political claims cannot be ignored in negotiations for a settlement. They have become integral to the new processes of state formation engendered by the Sinhalese-Tamil ethno-political conflict. The Muslims too seek state power in a shared framework of autonomy.

A compromise among these three state formation projects is the key to a credible peace settlement in Sri Lanka. The conflict as well as peace is about re-distribution of political power as claimed by Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim ethnic communities. This point has repeatedly surfaced in the conflict as well as in all failed attempts at a negotiated settlement. Amidst intense competition for political power among these three ethnic communities, it has now become self-evident that a peace initiative to be credible as well as viable, it has to accompany a political formula for tripartite power sharing. In Sri Lanka's on-going debate on political alternatives to war, federalism is seen as a suitable framework for such a power sharing

mechanism. But, federalism is still a theoretical possibility in Sri Lanka. As a reform vision, it does not enjoy popular support. As a reform project, it has only a narrow support base among political forces. Federalism has a greater support base among the external actors than among Sri Lanka's domestic constituencies.

Meanwhile, the counter-state formation process in Sri Lanka's Tamil society is subjected to a major handicap. It has become a war-driven process, with no space for democracy until the conflict is fully demilitarized. The dominant agency for state formation in Tamil society is the LTTE which is both militaristic and authoritarian. The LTTE is also an agency for "subnational authoritarianism." This represents a key anomaly in the post-colonial state formation process in Sri Lanka. It highlights "unevenness of the territorial distribution of the practices and institutions of democracy" (Gibson, 2005:104) within a nation-state in civil war. A key question that arises in this backdrop is whether an authoritarian military-political entity can be an agency at all for securing self-determination rights of the Tamil people. A politically un-transformed LTTE might secure regional autonomy for the Tamils, but conceivably not political democracy and pluralism.

IMPACT OF NEGOTIATIONS

Have the negotiations between Sri Lankan governments and the LTTE contributed to creating any common ground between these competing state formation projects? It is difficult to provide a clear answer to this question because negotiations have mostly produced limited political outcomes. Yet, at two occasions, in August 1985 and December 2002, some progress was made in terms of defining the broad parameters of a possible political common ground. In the first occasion, that is, at Thimpu talks held in August 1985, the Tamil parties outlined the framework of a compromise, based on four principles. These 'Thimpu Principles,' enunciated the doctrine of Sri Lankan Tamils constituting a distinct 'nationality' with an 'inalienable right to self-determination.' The Thimpu principles also asserted territorial autonomy for the 'Tamil homeland,' encompassing the Northern and Eastern provinces (Loganathan, 1996:104-105). But at Thimpu, the Sri Lankan delegation refused to acknowledge these principles which the Tamil parties viewed as constituting a framework for an acceptable common ground.

Although engaged in a war for separation, the Tamil side saw the compromise to be one of creating a regional ethnic state within the larger nation-state of Sri Lanka. Obviously, this position was not acceptable to the Sri Lankan government which viewed the ethnic question essentially as a law-and-order problem that did not require a political solution as such. The furthest that the Sri Lankan government could go at that time in terms of a political solution is district-based administrative decentralization.

Most of the subsequent negotiations held between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE avoided the issue of a political settlement. But in 2002, the issue figured prominently in the talks between the UNF government and the LTTE. Interestingly, during the 2002 talks, the LTTE brought back to the debate the notion of 'internal self-determination' that had appeared abandoned since the Thimpu talks. A notable feature of the 2002 Talks was the commitment by the two sides, as outlined in the Oslo Communiqué, to explore "a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka" (Oslo Communiqué, cited in Uyangoda and Perera, 2003: 280). This formulation is significant in the sense that it, unlike the Thimpu principles, represented a negotiated common ground between the two parties to the talks. It articulated a vision of the state that moved decisively away from the maximalist position of the LTTE –separation -- and minimalist position of the Sinhalese political class – devolution.

Soon it became quite clear that the two sides could not sustain this common ground for far too long. After the UNF-LTTE negotiations came to be suspended due to the LTTE's withdrawal from the talks, the promised exploration of a federal solution never materialized. In the subsequent months, the idea of exploring federalism gave way to returning to new agendas of minimalist devolution and maximalist regional autonomy. Eventually, a new phase of re-sharpening the contradictions between the two main state formation projects came into being, the dimension of which we will discuss in the next section.

STATE REFORM: NECESSITY VS. LIMITED CAPACITY FOR REFORM

The dilemma noted at the end of the previous section warrants further exploration. It raises the question whether the post-colonial Sri Lankan state is amenable to structural reforms at all. The government leaders, who belong to the Sinhalese political elite, have often expressed dismay over the intensity of the separate state formation drive in the Tamil polity. However, their efforts to provide alternatives have not been effective enough to de-escalate the conflict. The recent attempts at 'political solutions' and their failure reveal the inadequacy of the alternatives envisioned in Sinhalese society to grapple with the core issue of the ethnic conflict, namely the sharing of state power.

One can identify four phases of Sri Lanka's 'state reform' trajectory in the context of the ethnic conflict. The first is the period of reform refusal. It extends from the country's political independence of 1948 to the mid 1980s. In this phase, there were no political or institutional reforms to address minority demands, simply because the dominant Sinhalese political class did not acknowledge that there were minority grievances as such. The second is the external imposition of state reform. This covers the mid-1980s in which in the context of the beginning of the civil war, India attempted to resolve the conflict by imposing a settlement on an unwilling Sri Lankan government and Tamil nationalist groups. Using both diplomacy and coercion, India managed to introduce a system of devolution as a structure of power sharing. This was one crucial outcome of the Indo-Lanka Accord of July 1987. However, the new system of devolution generated fierce resistance within Sinhalese society, leading to an anti-state insurgency in 1987-1989. Those who opposed devolution argued for the continuity of the unitarist and centralized state with Sinhalese majoritarian control of state power. This crystallization of reform resistance in the late 1980s to late 1990s constitutes the third phase. This is also the period in which the government made half-hearted efforts towards state reform amidst much resistance to such reforms. The fourth phase at present is characterised by a paradox. This is a period of reform negation in which a strong counter-reformist thrust emerged against a backdrop of, and in reaction to, a push for state reforms. The counter reformist forces are in power, controlling state institutions.

This trend of reform negation has found greater strength in the context of regime formation after the Presidential election in November, 2005. The UPFA government with the JVP and JHU as key coalition partners is ideologically committed to restoring the unitary character of the Sri Lankan state. The new regime's political reform vision is limited. Its agenda for reform is captured in the formula 'maximum of devolution within a unitary state.' This agenda has taken Sri Lanka's debate on power-sharing several decades back. The new government and its constituencies give priority to a military solution to the ethnic conflict over a negotiated political settlement. Thus, reform negation seems to be an entrenched process in the Sri Lankan polity at present. Some key institutions of the state -- the executive, the legislature, the judiciary and the bureaucracy -- have emerged in recent years as guardians of the unitary and centralised

state. A reform negating polity amidst an ethno-political civil war is what Sri Lanka today is actually about.

QUESTION OF AGENCY AND THE FUTURE OF THE CONFLICT

I conclude the discussion in this paper by highlighting an issue that has emerged quite forcefully in all the recent attempts at peace in Sri Lanka. It refers to the question of agency for political reform and peace. As this paper demonstrates, a peace process between the government and the LTTE can hardly succeed without a credible state reform agenda. The unilateral and half-hearted reform agenda initiated by the government has not promoted a successful peace process either. It has in fact produced a counter-reformist backlash. A negotiated peace settlement also entails the enormously challenging task of bringing back to the fold of the Sri Lankan state the LTTE, which is a militarily unvanquished secessionist movement. It appears that the only distant possibility for the LTTE to return to the Sri Lankan state is when the state is re-structured in a framework of confederation. The LTTE would also want to define their own terms and conditions of re-union. This presupposes a very radical political agenda for any Sri Lankan government seeking negotiated peace.

Meanwhile, no government is likely to pursue a settlement process unless it allows the government to define the outcome of the settlement. As much as the LTTE does, governments of Sri Lanka seek veto power in defining the terms of a peace agreement. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan state, unlike the LTTE, enjoys international legitimacy. Government failures in sustaining the peace process have not diminished the state legitimacy in the global politics. In dealing with the LTTE, the Sri Lankan state has the backing by the global state system. This indeed forecloses any possibility for the LTTE to enforce a settlement on the government in their terms.

Even assuming that a future government and a future LTTE would have agreed to a settlement framework that provides a substantial measure of regional autonomy to the Tamils and Muslims, building political consensus among political forces in Sinhalese society for such a 'solution' would also be crucial. The politics of 'ethnic outbidding' has been so strongly embedded in the democratic and electoral politics in Sri Lanka (DeVotta: 2006) that consensus between the two main parliamentary political formations – the PA and UNP – is an essential pre-condition for constitutionalizing a peace agreement. A credible peace settlement will also necessitate on the part of the government to make some historic and unprecedented compromises such as recognition of the 'minority' right to internal self-determination, constitutionalizing a substantial measure of regional autonomy untrammelled by the central government, and altering the unitary clause of the Constitution. No single political party or regime can on its own undertake such a historic task. This is where the limitations of agency for peace in Sri Lanka has posed itself in a rather disquieting frequency.

In this respect, the Sinhalese political class has a greater agential responsibility in settling the conflict through negotiation and political reform. In a belated recognition of this political challenge, Sri Lanka's ruling SLFP and the Opposition UNP have recently reached an agreement to work together in resolving the ethnic conflict. They signed a Memorandum of Understanding to this effect in October, 2006. But this development has occurred in a backdrop that has made a negotiated peace a difficult goal to achieve in the immediate future.

Two aspects of this background need to be noted. The first is the growing political power of extreme Sinhalese nationalist forces that have acquired considerable capacity to mobilize public

opinion against a negotiated peace settlement. The JVP and JHU, with nearly 50 parliamentary seats between them, are influential partners in the present UFPA coalition regime. Both these parties have been campaigning for an agenda of war against the LTTE on the argument that 'separatist terrorism' should be militarily defeated. Their influence within the state institutions, the military and the state media has also reinforced illiberally Sinhalese nationalist character of the Sri Lankan state. This nationalist-right wing shift of the state marks a clear retreat from even the limited pluralistic possibilities that existed in the past decade.

The second aspect is the LTTE's recent shift towards greater inflexibility in the engagement with the Sri Lankan state. The LTTE's assessment of the 2002 peace process seems to be that it, while not producing any significant outcome, had favoured the Sri Lankan state. The LTTE also seems to believe that a negotiated political settlement to the conflict is not possible until a new balance of power is established through a combination of war and negotiations. In brief, Sri Lanka today has greater ethnic polarization in which extreme ethno-nationalism, militarism and political authoritarianism have acquired a greater capacity than in the recent years in shaping the future path of the conflict. This makes peace, political reform and agential task doubly difficult.

Finally, what is likely to happen to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, when its story has been one of protraction, reproduction and renewal? It may be the case that this conflict has passed the stage of ending through a negotiated settlement. The way in which the conflict has been reconstituted through the failure of 2002-2003 peace process and after suggests that the dynamics of conflict sharpening have effectively replaced the possibilities for conflict mitigation and compromise. The conflict has reached a stage of 'scissors crisis' in which the two main protagonists – the Sinhalese political class in the South and the LTTE in the North – have crossed each other's paths and now travelling in two separate directions.

The task ahead, from the perspective of conflict resolution, is to ensure that the two paths intersect again. That will require a long process of political transformation of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Such a protracted process of conflict transformation will invariably be interspersed with outbreaks and escalation of war and violence. Only the external actors presently engaged in Sri Lanka's peace process appear to have some capacity to manage this recurring crisis by preventing the state and the LTTE from returning to a decisive phase of war.

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