

# ***Invading Sri Lanka!***

## ***An intrapolitical imagination***

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In the recent past, once again, the conceptual debate of an (direct) international intervention in the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka has emerged with some raciness. What began with the international campaign by AI<sup>1</sup> during the Cricket World Cup season has advanced to a translucent rationalization by advocates like Gareth Evans<sup>2</sup> and the last addition, a haunting episode around the interview of John Holmes the UN under secretary for human rights?<sup>3</sup> Disparate reactions have filled the political air. There are at least four manifestations.

1. The nationalists in the south have damned the thought as another 'jathyantha kumantranayak' while their northern counterparts have espoused it.
2. The GOSL, led by its flagrant defence secretary and the uncouth members of the cabinet have camouflaged the state with the 'sovereignty' uniform and named Holmes- a terrorist.
3. The Peace Industry responded with hybridized abstractions (depending on their proximities to the conflicting protagonists)
4. The civilians (of both sides of the divide), like in many other issues had the tiniest attention amidst their fight for survival.

This article is a brief reflection on the imagination of an (direct) international intervention in Sri Lanka.

### **Invading Sri Lanka?**

Overspill of a neighbouring or international ethnic conflict where economic, security and political consideration are interwoven, has been the single most motivation for international interventions.<sup>4</sup> Almost all interventions- mono or multi lateral falls into this genre. From the Indian involvement in Sri Lanka, EU and NATO response to Bosnia and the present day (non) intervention of a meaningful measure in Darfur endorses this thesis. In some cases, the international community was active with rapid deployment yet in others, like in Rwanda, it shunned away even amidst of an open genocide.

Beside the overspill, a domestic political need and ideological partnership also are strong drives for selective interventions. Germany, now fully involved in Afghanistan and Lebanon opposed the Bush' plans to invade Iraq. The motives for interventions also are heterogeneous. While the ex ante justification of intervention is to manage conflict, usher peace and democracy, it often translates in either helping the regime in power or to buttress

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International 'Play by the Rules' Campaign <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/lka-020407-petition-eng>

<sup>2</sup> Gareth Evans CEO International Crisis Group Neelan Thiruchelvam memorial lecture 29 July 2007 Colombo <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4967>

<sup>3</sup><http://uk.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUKCOL25696320070810>

<sup>4</sup>Stephen van Evera 'Hypotheses on Nationalism and War' *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring, 1994), pp. 5-39.

the rebellion challenging the centre. Cooper and Bedal<sup>5</sup>, argued that men and method of intervention also are important and bring varied results. But no intervention has been purely altruistic.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike during the cold war era the present cold peace era and its most flagrant securitization of International Relation (IR) projects in Iraq and Afghanistan have created a political revulsion amongst the superpower citizenries towards interventional ideologies. The present day political response of superpowers had preferred covert involvements of different size and shapes.

### **Internationalising internal intricacies**

Mervyn Frost pioneered the intellectual debate for normative considerations in International Relations (IR) including intervention.<sup>7</sup> Presenting his constitutive ethical theory, he challenged the security/economic paradigm that firmly dictate the field. He reasoned the need to centralize IR decisions on more normative values because (perceived) state relationships are largely about justice, political equality and fostering democracy. His contribution enriched the sub field dealing with state rights vs. state responsibilities. The concept of state sovereignty that epitomizes all external interventional considerations was challenged in the contexts where the state fails its citizens.<sup>8</sup> This further intricate where state mobilizes its troops against an ethnic minority (even as a response to an armed rebellion).

While a polemic exchange is acidly continuing in the academic arena, empirical evidence reflects a disarray of factors governing recent international interventions in ethnic conflicts and their consequences.

It is not an antiquated position to say that security and economic benefits of the super powers still are the most persuading factors for (almost) all international interventions. One does not have to be a fire breathing Trotskyite to assert that international interventions have largely served the hegemony of powers from pre-modern colonization to post modern globalization, at least anyone familiar with the recent works of Amartya Sen<sup>9</sup> or William Easterly<sup>10</sup> will not believe so. For this, there is no better contemporary example than the UN security council (in) decision (after an elongated deliberation) to deploy 26,000 troops in the African Auschwitz of Darfur<sup>11</sup> In the recent history of IR, there is a range of interventional actions adopted by the super powers and their proxy agencies by a dominant member (like US) or deliberated indecision (like in Darfur and Rwanda). These actions have displayed a bandwidth of soft diplomatic ascertains to direct robust deployment of superior armies. Each of these actions has their internal/external pre and post invasion multiplicities. They are also sequential or desultory. Consequentially, regarding international intervention, especially where ethnic conflict rages, there remain few fundamental questions challenging the positions of, the nationalist as well as the liberals.

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<sup>5</sup> Michèle Griffin 'Where Angels Fear To Tread: Trends in International Intervention' *Security Dialogue*, 2000, PRIO. SAGE Publications, Vol. 31(4): 421-435.

<sup>6</sup> Naidu, M. V. Security, sovereignty, and intervention: concepts and case studies *Peace Research*. Brandon: May 2002. Vol. 34, Iss. 1; p. 33

<sup>7</sup> Mervyn Frost *Ethics in International Relations, A constitutive theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1996

<sup>8</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, 'Failed states in a world of terror', *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2002, pp

<sup>9</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* Oxford University Press; New Ed edition, 2001

<sup>10</sup> William Easterly *The White Man's Burden*, Penguin, New York, 2006

<sup>11</sup> see *The Economist* 4-10<sup>th</sup> August 2007 pp

When and why international interventions occur? How to prevent or promote them? What are the consequences? What are the possibilities of durable peace in post intervention context?

However, are Sri Lanka and its protected ethnic conflict, 'ripen' enough for an international intervention?

### **An (UN) Attractive Destination?**

The manipulative trade off of the cost and benefit between the conflicting parties and the interventionist/s composes a complex condition where each protagonist will seek the maximum political profit. It is for this reason that the LTTE, while continuing to criticize the international community for their (apparent) irresolution and overt support for GOSL, beseeches recognition and direct support from the west for the establishing of Tamil Eelam. Similarly the GOSL verbosely and hopelessly (from Lakshman K. to Dayan Jayathilake) attempts to be recognized by the league of 'war on terror' while condemning the same for raising inquiries against its human rights records.

What are the attractions and benefits to the International Community in supporting and taking part in a direct intervention in Sri Lanka? And who will lead such a contrivance? How did that happen in the past?

The unconventional military success of the LTTE in 2000-2001 and the changes in the southern polity fermented the conditions for an unfurled intervention of the IC in the form of facilitation and monitoring, although in realpolitick terms it was an invited intervention. The events leading to the CFA and the following consultations in Washington DC (where the LTTE was not invited) and Tokyo (where the LTTE decided to boycott) were all symbols of the interest and eagerness of the IC to intervene in Sri Lanka. The post 9/11 context may have feared the IC the possibility of the NorthEast province becoming another de facto similar to Afghanistan under Taliban, should the LTTE gain total military victory.

The prefabricated contractual understanding between the IC, the ruling UNP and the LTTE for the CFA was never known. The manner in which the CFA was formulated and implemented, ignoring the primary constituencies such the southern civil society, the opposition and India political power corridors, are reasons to presume the bulldozing politics of the IC. What befell since the signing of the CFA is well known recent history. The (non) achievements of CFA and the surrounding issues are a clear signature to the two-toned approach of the Norwegian led 'peacemaking' intervention. Why has the CFA become an impotent bargain compared to contemporary peace deals (such as the MOU between GAM and government of Indonesia)<sup>12</sup>? What role the IC is plying at present to rejuvenate their near death peace baby? Why has the IC, with the deep-rooted values in human rights does not judge the failure their own peace architecture as a root for the present abysmal condition? Further, why did the EU and Canada impose bans on the LTTE, while providing tactical, military and financial support to the GOSL? These are few questions that demands urgent replies.

So, what new conditions and attractions the IC has for further intervention in Sri Lanka? This could be only answered by observing the conceptual paradigm of international interventions.

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<sup>12</sup> After the devastating Asian Tsunami, the Indonesian government and rebels from the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) signed a peace deal aimed at ending their nearly 30-year conflict which is working so well. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/15\\_08\\_05\\_aceh.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/15_08_05_aceh.pdf)

William Easterly the respected economist turned acclaimed author in his provocative book *The Whiteman's Burden* argues about three generations of international (largely the western) interventions. Accordingly, after centuries of direct colonization, the West found the ideology of the open economy as a means of intervention. The disastrous failure of the open economic mantra in many African and Latin American countries led the west to invent the 'good governance' slogan as a parasol for the next generation of interventions. After decades of preaching of good governance from the democratic bible, the western planners wrote a new pedagogy named 'post conflict reconstruction' and Humanitarian Interventions by which they justify the records from Bosnia to Darfur (while leave open issues such as the genocide of Rwanda or democracy in Myanmar). Each of these idealities while accomplishing some benefits stands as failed good intentions, or at worse, successful intrigues.<sup>13</sup> If there is any validity in Easterly's reasoning, how will they be applied into Sri Lanka's contemporary political-military conditions?

### **Distant and Devalued**

In many ways the SL conflict is still a distant issue to the interventional politics of the west. Sri Lanka is not a mineral rich African state. Neither is a white neighbourhood where another religious group is cleansing the Christians or Catholics. The number of IDPs in Sri Lanka has not reached the level where Christiane Amanpour will rush to compile an episode of war correspondence for the post dinner viewers of CNN.

Further, thanks to the post 9/11 securitization of the airport and aviation sector, where infants are finger printed, the wave of Tamil refugees and economic immigrants to G8 territories are a thing of the 1980s. Thus western welfare is not overused and their national police can assure the absence of 'terrorist' in the neighbourhood.

Sri Lanka is not threatening a strategically important Middle Eastern ally further, even with all his strength in terror Mr. Pirapaharan has failed to pose any meaningful threat to the western world or their regional interest. (Except to bar the Northeast market for Multinational toothpastes).

Additionally, the international vignettes of the bloody failures of the western armies in Iraq and Afghanistan have generated some serious afterthoughts amongst international interventionists. Consequently, they possibly will seek an opportunity for a cut and dry, quick and clean operation to reverse the recent records. In that context even to the wildest dreamer, Sri Lanka is not an easy cake walk because it is an island in the 'Indian' ocean.

To any considerate western observer, Sri Lanka is below the ever promising 'markets' of India. The interventional arithmetic cannot and will not ignore the emerging Indian socio-economies and the 450 million middleclass consumer market that promises a neo-liberal wonderland for FDI and MNC as none other.<sup>14</sup> India undoubtedly the South Asian super power with a wounded history in the affairs of peacebuilding in Sri Lanka has adopted the complex role of a silence influencer. But to ignore the Indian factor will be political hara-kiri for any interventionist. The growing Indian impact on the global polity even to the level of lobbying for permanent membership in an extended UN security council is a defined political footnote for any possible western exhilaration.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Economist*, ibid pp 270-290

<sup>14</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Allen Lane, UK, Sep 2007

## Dragons not Horses

It should not be an irony of geography that there is no direct flight from any G8 capital to Colombo by passing India, except from Tokyo (and Beijing). While the western white horses may not ready to march their cavalry to 'establish' peace in Sri Lanka, at this crossroad, the eastern dragons seems to have found formidable interpositions.

Japan, from the inception days of Colombo Plan in 1950, remains as one of the biggest donor and economic supporter of the state of Sri Lanka.<sup>15</sup> The Japanese interest is surely beyond the reconditioned car market. It has spread its influence in almost all facets of socio-political life in Sri Lanka. This resolute support to the state of Sri Lanka is beyond the friendship Japan apparently built after the famous 'Nahe Vere Verani' speech by then FM, JRJ at San Francisco peace conference.<sup>16</sup> Then the Chinese interest in the island of Sri Lanka is also beyond the B grade military arsenals given on long term soft loans. The historicization of Indo-Sino war and peace is assured to spread in the future global economic and military arena.

Thus for all known (and unknown) reasons, while the Good Samaritan western interventionists will tiptoe their politics towards Lanka, Japan and China remain the resolute supporters of GoSL irrespective the peace/war agenda of the ruling leadership.<sup>17</sup> This, Far Eastern interest of Sri Lanka, which is beyond the scope of this essay, is a crucial yet understudied area in the peacebuilding efforts of Sri Lanka.<sup>18</sup>

## Second tier Interventions

As the above context formulates a non-conducive environment for any major direct intervention, how will the interest of intervention advance? The answerer to this question is well written in the recent events surrounding from Evan Grath to John Holmes. The interventionist will rejuvenate their proxy agencies such as the bilateral and INGOs to be their mission agents. Consequently the plethora of these agencies and their local partners who makes an integral part of the peacebuilding mechanism in Sri Lanka will bring the good, bad and the ugly as they have done elsewhere which is already articulated by many indigenous and international commentators.<sup>19</sup>

The (few) success stories of INGO initiatives empowering and mobilizing the indigenous civil societies towards a negotiated settlement of ethnic conflicts is the glimpse of hope and the code of compromise, the western interventionist as well as the chief protagonist in Sri Lanka could now latch on . This, so called win-win situation could facilitate a forum for all (divided) sections from the nationalist to the liberals to bear ownership in the destiny of the peace process of the island. Along with this paradigm come the role, responsibility and the rationale of the current leading INGO/NGO in Sri Lanka. After 30 years of civil war neither the GOSL nor LTTE has found a clear political or military break though. It is the same pathetic situation with the civil society of Sri Lanka. It has not performed any better than the civil societies of Congo or Sudan in building peace. But the difference is there were only 17 post

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/cooperation/anniv50/seminar0411.txt>

<sup>16</sup> See Yasuhi Akashi's interview <http://www.southasiamonitor.org/2006/jul/news/26n3.shtml>

<sup>17</sup> Japan is the single largest donor to GoSL for many years. See also. Yasuhiro Takeda 'Japan's role in Cambodian Peace Process: Diplomacy, Manpower and Finance', *Asian Survey* Vol. 38 , No. 6 ( Jan 1998) pp 553-568

<sup>18</sup> See Nuwan Pieris , Geo-Political Dimensions of an Invasive Species, *Daily Mirror*, 30-31 August 2007

<sup>19</sup> See end for a list of analysis on INGO role in SL  
Becky Nesbit [http://www.indiana.edu/~workshop/seminars/papers/y673\\_spring\\_2003\\_nesbit.pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~workshop/seminars/papers/y673_spring_2003_nesbit.pdf)

graduates in Congo at the time of independence only 19 in Sudan<sup>20</sup> while Lanka's Cyril Ponnampereuma was analysing the moon stones for NASA in the same year<sup>21</sup>. The failure of the politics in Sri Lanka is also the failure of the civil society one of the most literate in Asia. Peacebuilding peace or waging wars is largely guided by the leadership and mobilization of the civil societies of Sri Lanka with or without positive support of the INGOs.

In the end day analysis of the sum total of this interventional mathematics points to one definite outcome: When you juxtapose the present SL political/military condition with the average contexts for invasion the nationalist can be rest assured there will be no invasion.

The possibility of any direct and robust international intervention in Sri Lanka is remote. This is further complicated by the apparent military victories of the GOSL in the East as unseen in many years. Till either of the chief protagonists regains their bargaining strength at military and political theatre and establish clear victories, the 'ripe' moment<sup>22</sup> for any direct intervention may not be visible on the western horizon.

Now then, comrade Wimal Weerawansa will have more time to sharpen his sword of words while Ven Medhananda searches for post modern *abidharma* to support a Dharma Yuddha. The collaborative cabinet colleagues of Rajapakse Corporation can search for new words to name the west. The peace industry can have many seminars to reflect on the rights of the girl child and post trauma cultural counselling. But the question that begs an urgent reply (even from this writer) is how will the common man and woman who thirst for peace and quality of life get out this ethnic panopticon political construct for survival and to find meaning of life with or without any intervention?

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<sup>20</sup> Esaterly, et. al pp 286-290

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.nasa.gov/centers/ames/news/releases/2004/moon/apollo\\_ames\\_atmos.html](http://www.nasa.gov/centers/ames/news/releases/2004/moon/apollo_ames_atmos.html)

<sup>22</sup> William I Zartman, 'The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments', *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* Vol. 1, no. 1, September 2001, 8-18