
WINNING LOCALLY, WINNING GLOBALLY

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by Dayan Jayatilaka "The political moment is always connected with changes to borders” - Jacques Ranciere (2006) The Sinhalese and Tamils are in a Mexican standoff. Locally, the Sri Lankan armed forces have surrounded the Tigers who have embedded themselves among the civilians (some of whom are the Tigers’ extended families and trained "Makkal Padai” militia, as well as those who chose to follow the Tigers as they evacuated Jaffna in 1995, all constituting the LTTE’s social support base or the Tiger tribe). Meanwhile, globally, from the US Senate to the UN Security Council, from Ottawa to London, from Brussels to Pretoria, from Delhi to Dili, Sri Lanka is under pressure and scrutiny as never before. Are we being encircled globally just as we have encircled the Tigers locally? The Sinhalese are the majority on the island and the Tamils the minority, but the Tamils are the majority off the island and the Sinhalese are the minority. These realities of demography reinforce each community’s sense of entitlement based on the dualism of simultaneous victimhood and superiority. They also make for the growing grand strategic deadlock where the "external” and the "internal” countervail each other. The Tigers have no exit from military defeat, but do the State and society have an exit from the crisis? A ceasefire is not an option. The first ceasefire in 1985 resulted in Sri Lankan army camps in Jaffna being ringed by landmines (by Kittu), another in April 1987 saw the Habarana and Pettah massacres, and the last 48 hour "pause” allowed the Tigers to mount an (abortive) offensive spearheaded by three suicide trucks, to retake Mullaitivu, on Feb 1st this year. The global mobilization of the Tamil Diaspora, the displays of fanaticism from self immolation in Geneva to Chennai, the hatred on the websites and emails, the lobbying in all the capitals of the world, the psychological and physical pressure against Sri Lankan associations and student events in London, all of these add up to a scenario of a globalized Tamil tribalism mobilized against Sri Lanka, with hints and portents of a worldwide racial or civic conflict; the globalization of the Sri Lankan conflict, which could have a local blowback masquerading as payback. This Escape from New York/Mad Max scenario is due primarily to the double standards and tolerance of pro or proto-Tiger fanaticism in the West. If the open fanaticism of these Diaspora organizations were displayed within an Islamic community in any Western country they would be branded "radical Islamist”, "Islamofascist” or "jihadist” and subject to intense policing and suppression. Not so the Tamil Diaspora. This apocalyptic scenario is secondarily due to the weakness of the democrats within the Tamil Diaspora in generating a non-fanatical alternative. If these were the Palestinians the West would be decrying the weakness of a moderate alternative as peace partner, but in the case of the Tamil Diaspora there is no such critique. Our military has valiantly and cleverly fought and just about won a war for the reunification of our territory. The historic import of this achievement is not to be underestimated, and is utterly central, as the quote I have used from French philosopher Jacques Ranciere ("Hatred of Democracy”, Verso 2006, p.84) indicates. While a unified nation could have prevented territorial division, there can be no united nation without and prior to territorial unification. Before the victory over secessionism in the US Civil war, it used to be said "the United States are”, but after the Civil war and the triumph over secession, the usage changed to "the United States is”. Having won the war for territory, fought with Third Generation War strategy and tactics, Sri Lanka now faces a new security and strategic challenge. From offshore (Tamil Nadu) and transnational (Diaspora-funded) terrorism to internet driven insurgency, Sri Lanka is facing the potential threat of Fourth Generation Warfare (a concept of William S. Lind) waged by an international terrorist network in a globalized battle-space. How do we prevent it or prevail in it? There are two possible responses. One is that of tribalism, of circling the wagons, mirroring the pro-Tiger Tamil behavior. The other is to break out of the LTTE’s attempted encirclement of Sri Lanka by getting our message across to the international community, both states and societies. Some may think that Sri Lanka can do without world opinion but if any country could have survived without world opinion it is the USA, except that the Americans are smart enough to know that it is necessary even for the sole superpower, not to go it alone; it is necessary to build broad coalitions, to take many others - not just one or two "tough” friends– along with you; to win over world opinion, to be liked and respected not just feared. To do that, the US realized it is necessary to talk differently, to speak a different language than that which had been spoken so far, during the preceding 8 years. It is in this spirit that President Obama said, and was quoted by both Vice President Biden and Secretary of State Clinton, that US-Russian relations need a pressing of "the re-set button”. The successful deployment of hard power (military power) is inextricably linked with and depends upon the successful exercise of politics, diplomacy, culture, information and above all ideas (soft power). The combination of "hard” and "soft” powers is what the Obama administration’s policy intellectuals and top practitioners, most notably Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, call "smart power”. If the "global Tigers” are to be beaten in the Fourth Generation War, or better still, if such a 4GW is to be prevented, Sri Lanka too has to press the re-set button and get the world on board. This requires the accumulation of soft power and deployment of "smart power”. Related to this, we have to get the Sri Lankan intellectual, scientific and literary elite, especially the youth, on the island and overseas - such as the Ruwanthi Seneviratne Freemans and DeLons-on board. Can all this be done, and done in a manner that does not jeopardize our hard won military achievement but actually safeguards it? Yes, it can. A recent report by AFP’s Amal Jayasinghe furnishes evidence as to why the Sri Lankan armed forces have prevailed over the LTTE under this administration and no other. It also demonstrates that there is a clear and correct perspective with regard to the next phases of military operations. "Rajapakse, a retired army colonel and main figure spearheading the campaign, said the first stage of military operations would end after all rebel territory was seized. "I would not say we have defeated the Tigers completely until we have completed all three phases of our operation,” he said, adding the next would be to mop up remaining resistance and seize all guerrilla weaponry. The final phase would be to ensure stability. "We’re not going to leave any room for them to come

back," he said."The main reason for the success is from day one, we maintained a clear mission," the defense secretary said. "We maintained it without ambiguity: that is to finish off the LTTE." (Civilians slowing Sri Lanka advance: Defense chief; Wednesday, February 25) We must develop similar clarity in other realms. The military factor can be the leading factor during a period of conventional or quasi conventional war, and we have been fortunate that Sri Lanka has enjoyed under this present administration, a clear military perspective. When the conflict shifts back into the low intensity phase, the political and other aspects come to the fore. In point of fact the success of phase two and three of the military effort as outlined by the Secretary of Defense depends increasingly upon these non-military factors. We must develop the political corollary that facilitates and permits the achievement of the security objectives set out. More concretely, we must identify the political accompaniment or "superstructure" of each of the three phases. Interestingly enough, I find the necessary political accompaniment of the three phase military program, in the recent speech at the Foundation of Coexistence by Robert Blake, the US Ambassador in Sri Lanka. The speech also contains the formula for restoring Sri Lanka's soft power, and preempting (or prevailing in) any Fourth Generation War. "I think there are three particularly important steps. First it is critical to hold free and fair provincial council elections as soon as possible to restore democracy to the North for the first time in more than two decades; Second, the government should actively support the implementation of the 13th Amendment by overcoming the obstacles that have prevented implementation for 20 years; Finally, an important third step is a successful completion of the All Parties Representative Committee (APRC) process and implementation of its recommendations;" This three step program can quite easily be superimposed on the three stage devolution roadmap of Douglas Devananda, the senior-most Tamil Cabinet Minister. Senator Bob Casey, a Democrat and Chairman of the important Senate Subcommittee on Near Eastern, South and Central Asian affairs, does not urge a ceasefire, talks with the Tigers, federalism or even the Indian model, but his remarks at the powerful US Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Hearings sum up the Sri Lankan conundrum as he and most liberal minded Americans probably see it. His remarks identified, not entirely accurately, the problem that both the Sinhalese and Tamils have to address: "So far, there are few indications that a political deal is imminent. Sri Lanka will not negotiate directly with the LTTE. But it does not appear as though the government has much interest in finding alternative Tamil interlocutors nor have the Tamils presented a credible alternative to the LTTE." So the problem for the liberal democratic Western mind is not that Sri Lanka does not wish to negotiate with the Tigers, but rather that there appears to be a political and policy vacuum in that the alternative to talks with the Tigers - a "political deal" with "alternative Tamil interlocutors" - does not seem in sight either. This is compounded by the perception that the Tamils for their part have not presented a credible alternative to the Tigers. Is it true that the Sinhalese and the state are unwilling to do a deal with the moderate Tamils? I do not think so, but that is irrelevant. We must convince not ourselves but world opinion and decision making circles worldwide. What are the contours of the political deal with alternative, anti-Tiger/non-Tiger Tamil interlocutors and what is the timeline for its implementation? Are the Tamils capable of throwing up and sustaining a credible alternative to the Tigers or do they wish to continue to support the LTTE and Tiger proxies or sympathizers who will continue to find Sinhala public opinion hostile and the doors of the Sri Lankan political system shut to them? The way out and forward has also been indicated by Vinayagamorthy Muralidaran, the erstwhile Colonel Karuna, who is transforming himself rapidly into a savvy, bilingual, mainstream political personality (not to mention a sharp-ish dresser). Addressing the 20th Business for Peace Forum of the Business for Peace Initiative of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka (FCCISL) held at Hotel Ceylon Continental, (Feb 19th) he said that "it would be desirable to implement the 13th Amendment to penetrate the present impasse to settle the conflict in the North and East." (Asian Tribune) Courtesy: groundviews.org