

# The grid map of Sri Lankan political opinion

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How do we classify Sri Lankan opinions and the opinions about Sri Lanka? One broad categorization would be between those who think that the Tigers are the problem and those who think the Tigers are the solution. Most Sinhalese belong to the first category and many Tamils, especially in the Diaspora, to the latter.

There is a more subtle version of this classification. There are those who think the Tigers are part of the problem and those who think they are part of the solution. Most Sinhalese and some Tamils fall into the first category and most Tamils into the latter. Then there is a quadripartite way to slice it. (a) Those who think that the Tigers (and their supporters/sympathizers) are the sole problem, (b) those who think that the Tigers are the main problem or a major problem, (c) those who think the Tigers are the sole solution and (d) those who think the Tigers are the - or an imperative part of - the solution. Here in category (b) too, one could distinguish two subcategories: (i) those who think the Tigers are the main problem (&ldquo;the primary contradiction&rdquo;), the resolution of which is the prerequisite for the resolution &ndash; though not the addressing -- of all others, (ii) those (like the UTHR-J, the SLDF and much of the human rights community) who think that they are a major problem but not the main one, and are co-equal with or increasingly secondary to the Government, the military or &lsquo;Sinhala chauvinism&rsquo;. For the first grouping (a), those who think that Tiger terrorism (and its allies, local and foreign) constitutes the only problem, the solution is simple: eliminate the Tigers. For the third and fourth groupings (c) & (d) too, the solution is very simple: talk to the Tigers. For the second grouping, (b) i.e. for those who consider the Tigers as the main or the most crucial problem but not the only one; for those who think that there is another question, that of building a Sri Lankan nation which accommodates and reconciles Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim identities, matters are less simple. In terms of policy practice, this category (b) subdivides between (I) those who think that the Tigers should be negotiated with and (II) those who feel that this suggestion confuses issue with agency; confuses the need to address the Tamil issue with the need to talk to the Tamil Tigers. Thus (b) (I) unfortunately lends itself to conflation with or being perceived as on a continuum with (c). Those belonging to grouping (II) above, i.e. (b) (II), the pro-State Sinhala Realists and anti-Tiger Tamils, argue that there is an issue of identity and political space that needs to be negotiated but that the Tigers are the major, though not the sole, obstacle to designing and implementing a viable solution. They disagree that there is nothing to talk about which cannot be resolved by pure economic development and simple (re)integration. They also disagree that the talks should encompass the Tigers, not least because the history of talks and ceasefires has been disastrous. As for solutions, if the issue is one state or two, the basic division is between those are for a separatist two state solution, perhaps leading to confederation (Tigers, pro-Tiger Diaspora, pro-Tiger Tamil Nadu elements, some Southern peace NGO elements) and those who are for a one state solution (the vast majority of Sri Lankans and the international state system). Those for a single state solution divide up between those for: A centralized unitary state with zero or minimum devolution A federal system and A unitary system with maximum devolution (13th amendment full implementation/13 Plus One/13 Plus). If the issue is the war, or war/peace, or war/negotiations then apart from the obvious division into &lsquo;pro-war&rsquo; and &lsquo;anti-war&rsquo; camps, there are further subdivisions observable. Pro-war, pro-Tiger (hardcore Tigers, pro-Tiger elements in Diaspora) Pro-war, anti-Tiger (UPFA, EPDP, TMVP, Karuna) Anti war, pro-Tiger (Tiger sympathizers in Tamil Nadu and Diaspora, who want to prevent a military defeat; pro-CFA &lsquo;peace NGO&rsquo; lobby, NLF Trotskyists) Anti-war, anti-Tiger (India&rsquo;s CPI-M, UTHR, SLDF, elements of LSSP) To put the same matter differently, adding on devolution, the Sri Lankan politico-ideological pie slices up as follows, into six positions, three pro-Tiger and three anti-Tiger: (1) Pro-Tiger and anti-devolution, because they are pro-Tamil Eelam/confederation; (2) Pro-Tiger and pro-federalism (eg.TNA); (3) Pro-Tiger/soft on Tigers, pro-devolution (UNP, ex-CBK peaceniks, some Leftists). (4) Anti-Tiger, pro-federalism/Indian quasi-federalism (e.g. TULF, EPRLF, UTHR-type); (5) Anti-Tiger, anti-devolution (eg. JHU, NFF except Nandana Goonetilleke); (6) Anti-Tiger, pro-devolution (EPDP, Karuna, TMVP, SLFP, CPSL, LSSP, PLOT) If the issues of pro and anti Govt, which means in reality, pro and anti-President Rajapaksa, are added on, together with the issue of devolution, the situation is as follows: (A) Pro-Tiger, anti-war, anti-MR/Govt, pro-devolution/federalism (UNP leadership, &lsquo;peace&rsquo; NGOs, INGOs) (B) Anti-Tiger, anti-war, anti-Govt/MR, pro devolution/federalism (UTHR-type, CBK sympathizers) (C) Anti-Tiger, pro-war, anti-Govt/MR, pro-devolution/federalism (UNP base, TULF) (D) Anti-Tiger, pro-war, anti-Govt/MR, anti-devolution (JVP) (E) Anti-Tiger, pro-war, pro-Govt/MR, pro-devolution (SLFP, CPSL, EPDP, Karuna) (F) Anti-Tiger, pro-war, pro-Govt/MR, anti-devolution (JHU, NFF) Given the character of the Lankan crisis, chiefly a crisis of armed secessionism, Sri Lanka is best served by those who take an anti-Tiger, pro-military position. Given the character and proven track record of the Tigers, the anti-Tiger cause is best served by a pro-war, pro-military position. Given the nature of the UNP leadership, that anti-Tiger, pro-war, pro-military position is sustainable only through a stand that is pro-Govt and pro-President Rajapaksa. Thus the interests of the country are best served by the anti-Tiger, pro-war, pro-military, pro-Mahinda Rajapakse, pro-Govt position and camp. Given that sustainable security and peace require the support of India; that sustainable prosperity requires the support of the world community; that no element of the world community from the Global North or South, East or West, supports an anti-devolution position and all of them urge reasonable devolution upon Sri Lanka, the future of the country is best served by the pro-devolution stand, to the extent that it is the sole viable stand. Given that (going by voting patterns and opinion polls) the overwhelming majority of the country&rsquo;s citizenry are anti-Tiger, pro-war, pro-military, pro-President Rajapaksa, the pro-devolution cause cannot be served from outside that camp. It cannot be productively served from within the anti-state, anti-military camp or the federalist camp. Given the domestic realities, the cause of the Tamil people is most viably served by an anti-Tiger, pro-war, pro-Govt/MR, pro-devolution (non-federal) position. Given both the domestic and international realities, Sri Lanka is best served by the positions and forces at the saddle point, the point of intersection, namely the anti-Tiger, pro-military, pro-war, pro-Govt, pro-devolution position and political elements. This

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then is the stand that must be taken, the ground that must be converged on, the position that must be strengthened and these, the political forces that must be supported. (These are the strictly personal views of the author)Courtesy: Dailymirror.lk, Continue