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## Inconvenient questions answered

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By Col R Hariharan In the last few weeks I have received a number of questions from readers for which there are no simple answers. I have tried to answer some of these inconvenient questions, although my answers may not satisfy all.

1. You have been writing only about the war situation, in utter disregard to the humanitarian crisis. And your analysis is also based upon Sri Lanka defence sources reports. Don't you think it would mislead the readers? There are three issues involved in my writing: • I am basically a military analyst. I am commenting upon the military performance of the two sides. And war is not a cricket match. It is basically an inhuman exercise. It is a fight by the two sides to eliminate each other and survive. And I have commented upon the inhuman nature of war and its humanitarian implications in many of my articles. But as I am not a human rights analyst &ndash; many experts in that field are doing excellent work &ndash; my comments on humanitarian issues are included in my analysis as relevant in forecasting the developing military trends. (Please see SAAG Sri Lanka Update No 167 dated March 8, where I had commented in detail on the humanitarian disaster waiting to happen.) But I also believe war can be still prosecuted more humanely; so I am against small arms proliferation brought about by insurgency and war as well the use of inhumane and dangerous weapons. I had devoted an entire article on the subject of small arms proliferation and insurgency. Similarly I had also condemned the reported use of cluster ammunition. • Sri Lanka security forces have been providing detailed and regular battlefield reports and most of the analysts have been using them with caution, particularly regarding the number of casualties. On the other hand the LTTE had been giving reports in bits and pieces with no logical coherence &ndash; perhaps due to problems of communication after the destruction of its infrastructure including TV broadcasting facility were destroyed during the war. And the LTTE has not regularly reported on the fall of its defences creating doubts about its selective reporting. In war, possession is three fourths of law and the security forces achievements are there for all, including the LTTE, to see. There is no point in not recognizing the reality that the security forces have performed better than LTTE. So the question of misleading the readers does not arise. • Lastly, as far as possible I am avoiding what other commentators are writing in their own expertise on political, sociological and economic issues related to war. So I have been confining largely to my area of specialisation &ndash; intelligence analysis and assessment. So there will be limitations in content on issues not directly related to the overall assessment. As this war is being commented upon with inadequate independent sources of battlefield information, commenting upon every incident is not possible.

2. From your writing you appear to be against a ceasefire that would provide relief to the trapped civilians. Even the UK and Canada have called for it. Please explain. Ceasefire in war is not a purely military issue. It is a political issue also; in the case of Sri Lanka there is a strong international element also. So, although ceasefire is not wholly in my domain let me attempt to answer the question from the point of view of a military man. I am not against a ceasefire. But to expect a ceasefire to come into force when one side is routed and the other side is winning in a hot war is not realistic. This applies to any war. I believe in writing on what is possible. And my writing on Sri Lanka is no exception. Even if theoretically, the Sri Lanka government agrees to a ceasefire it will not be able to survive the political upheaval that is likely to follow. Moreover, if a ceasefire comes into force, the LTTE would be the gainer, not the Sri Lanka government. LTTE would survive to carry on the fight as before another day. So for Sri Lanka to seriously consider ceasefire as an option instead of war, there has to be an incentive - say a LTTE promise to denounce armed conflict to gain Tamil Eelam. (I am not too sure the LTTE would agree to it). Protagonists of ceasefire call should take their own call seriously and work on how to achieve a ceasefire; mere sloganeering would not do. And they should work on both the warring sides to get results and not focus on Sri Lanka government only. Yes, the well-meaning souls in power in the UK and Canada have called for an immediate ceasefire. Although I don't doubt their humanitarian intentions, it sounds a little hollow as there is suspicion their eyes might be on the Tamil expatriate votes while making the call. So if they are to be taken seriously they can come with some concrete suggestions on how Sri Lanka can go about doing it without a loss of face. One suggestion is that they can offer a sanctuary to all the LTT militants on their soil to start with. And for a lasting ceasefire, the question "what after the ceasefire?" also needs to be examined in advance. That was one of the reasons for the failure of the ceasefire of 2002 to hold. Ceasefire has to be linked to a political process. I don't see any such move in the horizon in Sri Lanka or elsewhere.

3. "Prabhakaran is a clever military strategist. So even if the LTTE is defeated now, he would rise up once again and vanquish the Sinhala Army." Your comments please. There is no doubt that Prabhakaran has a natural talent for military strategy. But progressing a war is a dynamic process and one cannot be victorious at all times. In the present Eelam War IV, he has been outwitted, outgunned, and out-strategised. And that has hurt the LTTE grievously. It will take a long time for the LTTE to recoup from the war wounds. That process requires safe havens, funds, arms, and a lot of loyal supporters who would forgive LTTE's failure and be ready to sacrifice the lives of the next generation of Tamils. So even though he might still be capable, Prabhakaran has to run the gauntlet of issues I have raised to rebuild the LTTE literally from the ashes. At the age of 52 it will be an ordeal of fire for Prabhakaran to do so. But now his immediate priority is to survive the war that has not ended yet. In this context I am reminded of the life of Mustafa Barzani (1903-1979), the legendary political and military leader of Kurdish revolution. He fought both the Iraqi and Iranian governments to carve out an independent Kurdish nation all his adult life. Although a short-lived Kurdish Republic of Mahabad was created in Iran in 1945, it lasted only a year. He went into exile in Soviet Union after the Iranians overran the Republic. He did not give up; he revived the Kurdish struggle and negotiated peace with Iraq but ultimately all failed because Iran and Iraq bartered away Kurdish autonomy to suit their mutual rapprochement efforts. He died in exile in Washington. And an independent Kurdistan never came into being; it exists as a province in Iraq with a measure of autonomy thanks to the support of the US. (Col. R Hariharan, a retired Military Intelligence specialist on South Asia, served as the head of intelligence of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka 1987-90. He is associated with the South Asia Analysis Group and the Chennai Centre for China Studies.) Courtesy:

