Fighting the globalised Tiger

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by Dayan JayatillekaThese closing climactic weeks of the conventional war have been accompanied by tremendous external pressure on the Sri Lankan state. This has its upside because it illuminates. It reveals to us the world as it is and how it might be. It tells us who our friends are. It tells us also who our enemy’s friends are. It educates us as to what we must and must not do, including in the coming weeks and days.

Here is the rude reality. There is a three pronged campaign to save the Tiger. One is mounted from within the overseas Tamil community, the dominant pro-Tiger/pro-Tamil Eelam stream having developed into a global movement. The second prong is the West, with some functioning as the spear-point of that prong, while others are less committed. Some Western quarters are clearly protectors and potential patrons of the Tigers and the Tamil Eelam cause. The third prong is located in neighboring Tamil Nadu, with some parties now committing themselves to the cause of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. Luckily, this external pressure comes at a time when it cannot really affect our conduct on the ground; cannot deflect our military action. Such is the resolve of public opinion, the national leadership and the armed forces. 2009 is not 1987. For the moment we can absorb this pressure while spotting and noting where it comes from and extrapolating future trend lines from these pressures and agitations. What is the first and most basic lesson that the mounting wave of external pressure should teach us? It is this: we are seeing a number of sources, Western and sub-regional, which would easily afford patronage and succor to the surviving LTTE and the Tamil separatist project. Furthermore it cannot be ruled out that the strength of anti-Sri Lanka /pro-Tamil Eelam elements in Tamil Nadu would have a stronger position in a ruling coalition in Delhi by early June. Therefore, it is imperative that we act decisively within the narrowing window of opportunity open to us, to eliminate the LTTE as a military force, destroying its leadership and hard core cadres who have been trapped in the Zone, after which we must wheel around and hunt down the residual terrorists who may have escaped into the jungles. It is precisely because we are relatively weak and our enemy is relatively strong externally, while they are relatively weak and we are relatively strong domestically, that we must maximize that advantage. If we eliminate the LTTE as an army on Sri Lankan soil, we can minimize the effects upon us, of present and future patronage being offered by offshore sources. If on the other hand, we allow the Tigers to survive and escape, they will quickly regroup and be redeployed, with all the external spaces that they have access to. In short the Tigers must cease to function within Sri Lanka, and to cease to function they must cease to exist. The Tiger is a globalized creature but its head is still on Sri Lankan soil. That head must be cut off, now. Thus the mounting external pressures on Sri Lanka must not only NOT lead to an easing of the final military campaign, but must result in its exact opposite, the determination to inflict the most complete and decisive defeat and destruction possible on the Tigers, while taking maximum precautions to safeguard the civilians. The second lesson is that the Tamil Eelam movement is more globalized than ever; the struggle between Sri Lanka and the Tamil separatist project will continue in the global arena, on an international scale, and that the country’s future in the next stage will be greatly influenced if not decisively determined in the international theatre. This includes the preservation of the military gains on the ground. The third lesson is that there must be a shift of national emphasis and priority, to the international front. Just as the country and state matured to the point where it shifted to the correct policy stance on the war, overhauled its military machine and placed the right personnel in the right places, the same or a similar task will have to be undertaken in the domain of Sri Lanka’s external relations. The fourth lesson is that we must clearly identify and build up our "natural" international defense lines. These are the Non Aligned Movement and the countries of the global South. Within and outside the developing world, Sri Lanka’s most reliable strategic friendships will have to be with those, mainly but not only Eurasian, who place high value on strong states, state sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, and within this group of states, those which have no significant Tamil populations. The ties with such states must be upgraded and solidified into a structure or system. We should for example, apply for observer status with the Shanghai Organization for Security Cooperation, a structure which includes Russia and China, and focuses on counter-terrorism. The fifth lesson is no one, even among our friends, will countenance either an insensitive or slow alleviation of the problems of IDPs and related humanitarian questions or an absence of an immediately postwar political solution based on autonomy and equality, for the Tamil people. (We have until a new administration is sworn in, in New Delhi, to get our act together on both issues, simultaneously not sequentially). The sixth lesson is that the Sri Lankan state has to catch up, get with the new calendar and new times, and learn to speak a new language. "Bush-speak" has no acceptance outside the USA even during his administration and now it is rejected within the USA itself and has no resonance anywhere in the world. Sri Lanka’s dominant discourse has to change or it will lose the global struggle by simple default. Macho nationalism, religious majoritarianism, unilateralism and "anything goes in the struggle against terrorism" are out; the attempt to combine ethics and power, ("ethical realism") is in. The seventh lesson is that if we are to compete with and beat the globalized Tamil secessionist project with its western patrons — better exemplified by MIA making TIME’s 100, rather than by Velupillai Prabhakaran the least articulate and most corpulent guerrilla leader in the world — we have to rebuild our soft power and smart power, just as we did our hard power. This requires that we undergo a collective transformation, amounting to a revolution, in education, culture and mentality. If anyone wants to understand shifts in US policy towards Sri Lanka, they must factor in the 80-100 young US educated Tamils working on Capitol Hill as aides, researchers and staffers of Congressmen and Senators, and then contrast that with the output of our educational system as we have debased it. It is not that Sri Lanka had no MIAs. We had better MIAs than MIA, way before MIA. Remember Yolande Bawan at the Newport jazz festival? Right now we’ve got DeLon who I think has a far better singing voice than MIA, but who is backing him in the USA to make a breakthrough? When a collective mentality looks to the past rather than the future, it has lost the capacity to envision and produce future excellence or achievement. As Dr Martin Luther King said in 1967, minting a phrase picked up and popularized by Barack Obama, "we are now faced with the fact, my

friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now". Courtesy: Island.lk