May 19 should be V-day, 2009 the Year of Victory

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by Dayan Jayatilleka The warning about the risk of triumphalism came days before the 65th anniversary celebration of D Day, by the leaders of the US, UK and France. In the USA there are annual re-enactments of the battles of the American Revolution – the War of Independence against Britain—and of the Civil War against the Secessionist Confederacy. While the risk of triumphalism does indeed exist and must be cautioned against, I think there is yet another risk, an opposite one, which we must avoid. The USSR which triumphed over the bulk of the Nazi fascist army, collapsed without a shot being fired, and that collapse was preceded by an ideological surrender in which everything positive in its history was turned upside down and held up for derision. In the recovery of its self-respect under President Putin, one of the first steps was to restore pride in the wartime achievements of the Red Army.

Sri Lanka must learn this lesson. We have nothing to be ashamed of in our martial feats throughout our long history, whether successful (Dutugemunu) or valiant failures against stupendous odds (Puran Appu). All we have to be ashamed of are periods of division, appeasement, surrender and occupation such as the Kandyan Convention of 1815, 450 years of colonialism in parts of the island, a century without armed resistance after the uprising of 1848, or the period of the CFA during which Prabhakaran built up a state within a state with the support or tacit approval of our elected government. My own view is that we should not only declare 2009 The Year of Victory and have celebrations at a provincial level, since every province (including Jaffna) contributed to the victory and benefited from the liberation from fascist terror and tyranny, but that we should also declare May 19th as Victory Day, to be commemorated by future generations down the ages. External, extra-regional pressure, channeled through the international system and its multilateral institutions, is focusing on two issues: "full, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access" to the IDPs, accountability and an independent/impartial international inquiry and a UN role ("a central role" in the words of some dignitaries) domestic political reconciliation between the communities. The agenda is clear: while access is desirable, unimpeded, i.e. unregulated access would allow a swarm of international personnel who would encyst the IDP camps and turn into a semi-colonial antibody within Sri Lankan territory, reporting to their international headquarters which themselves are penetrated by covert metropolitan agencies of one sort or another. It is not paranoid to speculate that some would entice the IDPs with promises of refugee status in the West in exchange for false testimony of so-called war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan military, many of whom lie dead or disabled because we deliberately and rightly desisted from using airpower extensively in the final offensive against an deadly enemy entrenched among civilians. Having eliminated one separatist political entity that was not under the control of the Sri Lankan state, we would be permitting yet another space which is not subject to Sri Lanka’s sovereignty. This does not mean that the IDPs must not be treated as decently, humanely, equitably and generously as possible and processed out as fast as possible. Even from a counter-terrorism perspective, it is unwise to have large numbers concentrated in any one place under difficult circumstances. Under the US military’s new counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine designed mainly by warrior-scholar Gen David Petraeus, PhD, the policy of "clear, hold and build" eschews long term internment or resettlement in fortified villages of large numbers, in favor of early re-settlement in their original domains. Our IDPs must be relocated in their own homes or villages, and the joint communiqué of Governments of Sri Lanka and India as well as that of the Govt of Sri Lanka and the UN Secy Gen commits us to so resettling the bulk of the IDPs within 180 days. But this must be by primarily local efforts, involving the state, the local government authorities, the private sector, the civic associations and NGOs. Ours is not a stalemated war with a negotiated outcome, still less an internationally mediated outcome – which is the endgame that was sought by some Western sources as the war drew to a close. We warded off such attempts at abortion. Ours was an outright victory for the democratic forces against the tyrannical and totalitarian; the forces of national re-unification against the forces of secessionism and dismemberment. Whether and when accountability and transitional justice issues will be addressed, and how, with what combination of local and foreign expertise, must and can only be a sovereign decision. While we are on the subject of independent impartial international inquiries, why not appoint one into the activities of the Tamil Tigers, which includes how they succeeded in building a state within a state, with the help of which collaborationist personalities and agencies, elected and unelected, local and foreign? Now that we are besieged by calls for rapid, full and unimpeded access, the Sri Lankan people surely deserve to know what took place — and especially the degree of international involvement with the Tigers, naming the external agencies and personalities involved in buttressing the LTTE. It is absurd and unthinkable that there should be any role for the UN in domestic political reconciliation. We know what happened in Kosovo with UN involvement, and in any case the Serbian army lost the Kosovo war, we did not. Elements in the West, allied with the pro-Tiger Tamil Diaspora seek a role for the UN in political reconciliation in order to secure for the Diaspora based Tiger political network (though they would claim it is for the Tamil minority) the kind of political role in the postwar settlement that is ruled out by the outcome of the war. Some could not obtain for the Tigers or rather the Tamil Diaspora, or for the Tigers on behalf of the Tamil Diaspora, a stalemate on the battlefield. They are now trying to obtain a stalemate at the negotiating table. This will not work either. We have nothing to negotiate with the pro-Tiger Diaspora. Any negotiations will be with the Tamil democrats, i.e. the non Tiger Tamils. This too will probably be fuelled by the new parliamentary balance that results from the holding of elections. None of this provides political space or a political role for any extra-regional entity or elements. I for one am for a General Fonseka’s idea of 300,000 strong military, though it should be as balanced between the three services and as multiethnic as possible. Sri Lanka is being subject to intense external pressure and these could turn coercive in one form or another. We must have a capacity to deter them from which ever quarter they emanate, and the sole way of doing this is to have a trained military which is capable of imposing unacceptably heavy casualties on any hostile force that steps on our soil, whatever its technological advantages. We must, if needed, merge our own successful strategy, tactics and weapons systems with those that are valuable of the defeated Tigers, creating a deadly

Sri Lankan military synthesis. Of course, the cost of maintaining a 300,000 strong military must not be at the expense of investment in education and social services, or else we’ll doom ourselves to stagnation as a nation that simply cannot compete in the world, not least with its enemy, Tamil separatism. Does this mean that the Tamil people will be under the Sinhala jackboot? This is the scenario that is painted in order to justify the slogan of "unfettered access", "international inquiry" and a "central role for the UN in political reconciliation". There are only two types who think that this is a likely scenario: the bloc of Tamil separatists/ultranationalist, the UNP leaders, the Sinhala liberals and their Western allies on the one hand, who fear this outcome or thrive on it, and on the other hand the Sinhala chauvinists and supremacists who fantasize along the same lines; one person’s nightmare being another’s fantasy. The Tamil ultra-nationalists think that the 13th amendment is too little, too late and in any case will never be implemented by the Rajapakse administration due to its own ideological predispositions as well as the pressure of the Sinhala chauvinists. For their part the Sinhala chauvinists think that the 13th amendment is too much, and in any case they can prevail over the Rajapakse administration not to implement it. In their dark fantasies both these extremist camps have forgotten one "tiny" factor: India. The full, if reasonably graduated implementation of the 13th amendment is the cornerstone of our postwar relationship with India, the relationship with which is the cornerstone of our international relations. As the paradigmatic victory in Geneva showed, we can win against the Tiger Diaspora and the Western European bloc influenced by it, when we are supported by our neighbors, our continent and our natural constituency the developing world plus Russia. In this strategy the support of India is critical. Without India’s support, the rest will distance itself from us, leaving us wide open to Western pressure and coercion. China alone cannot carry the weight: it is too far away and cannot be expected to risk its relationships with important powers for the sake of Sri Lanka. Contrary to the nonsense of Sinhala racist propaganda, the implementation of the 13th amendment is not the tithe or "protection money" (kappan) paid by the Sri Lankan state to Tamil separatism and/or our Western critics and adversaries. It is the minimum cost of accommodation between the Sinhalese who are the majority on the island and the Tamils who dwarf the Sinhalese outside it. It is the only way to balance the two aspects of Sinhala collective existence: a majority on the island and minority worldwide, as well as the dual character of Tamil collective existence- a majority outside the island and a minority within it. The implementation of the 13th amendment, and the equitable expeditious treatment of the IDPs, constitute the minimum requirement for Sri Lanka to retain its friends and allies in the face of a hostile Western project. It is also the sole realistic option by which the Sri Lankan state, the Government, the Sri Lankan military and the Sinhalese can retain the support of the anti-Tiger Tamil democrats and through them the moderate Tamils on the island with whom coexistence and partnership are imperative. (These are the strictly personal views of the writer).Courtesy: Island.lk, srilankagaurdian.org, transcurrents.com, groundviews.org