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# The politics of winning in the Wann

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by: Dayan Jayatileka Fascists launch a final surge before they lose wars. The Kamikaze pilots were a last card against the US fleet. The Nazis developed the Tiger tank, launched the V-1 and V-2 rockets and fought the Battle of the Bulge in the closing stages of the war, when they had already lost in the strategic sense. The battle of Iwo Jima is the classic model of a fanatical, suicidal, dug-in fighting force defending its home turf against a final onslaught. It was the toughest possible going but the US Marines won. It is only to be expected that the Tigers would offer the stiffest possible resistance in their Ithiyabhoomi or 'heartland'. In their best case scenario, they would turn Kilinochchi-Mullaitivu into a meat-grinder and then launch tactical counteroffensives which could develop into strategic ones, reversing their losses. In a more modest scenario, they would simply hold on until the combination of casualties, propaganda about IDPs, international and regional political developments (USA and India), and economic pressures would cumulate in Colombo agreeing to negotiations.

The Tigers strategy containing these two scenarios can be defeated by a combination of superior thinking and planning, strategy and tactics, resources and performance, and political and military will. Finally it comes down to a clash of wills: whose "will to power" shall prevail? That of the side that strives to re-unify the country, defeating those who want to divide it? Or that of those who seek to retain their shrinking tyranny, the despotic kingdom they have carved out on this island? H.E. Dr. Dayan Jayatileka Sri Lanka's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva While the LTTE's resistance and the ensuing SLA casualties are only to be expected, every single SLA casualty and every single day the Tigers gain, have four sources of causation. These are: 1. The LTTE's own intrinsic motivation, efforts and strength. Some of this strength derives from collective emotions that are "pathological", to use Professor Richard Falk's term to classify certain extremist insurgencies. 2. The policies of unilateral appeasement of the UNP administration during the CFA which permitted the Tiger buildup and accumulation of assets including their air arm, and enabled the LTTE to eliminate the SLA's intelligence gathering Tamil assets in the Wann. 3. The policies of the SLFP's liberal Rightwing which cut into military recruitment by a unilateral peace drive at a time the war was on - the Sudu Nelum campaign. The plans for excessive devolution such as the "union of regions packages" of 1995 and 1997 provided the space for a Sinhala chauvinist backlash, which would otherwise not have taken off since the UF government was fighting the Tigers and had liberated Jaffna. The SLFP's Rightwing liberals tilted against Karuna during the split, permitting the Tigers to make a sea landing in the rear of the Karuna rebels. They picked up where the UNP's CFA and the LTTE's ISGA left off and agreed on the PTOMS which was to be headquartered in Kilinochchi and gave the Tigers more representatives than the GOSL in its operationally vital second tier. 4. The Sinhala chauvinist caucuses which have prevented the reforms which would have secured the necessary military assistance for us from the regional power, and helped us avoid the soft sanctions on military equipment from other quarters. The Tigers' Wann resistance could be more swiftly overcome with force multipliers such as real time satellite intelligence and sophisticated firepower. The Sinhala racists have given and are giving the Sri Lankan state, government, and worst of all, our war effort, a certain profile, or to put it plainly, a bad name. Their policies bring no external support from any quarters or corner of the globe, but impede support from almost everywhere. Our soldiers in the waterlogged Wann pay the ultimate - arguably avoidable - price. We have been fighting this war for over a quarter century. It has been hampered by two opposing compulsions typified in two sets of lobbies. On the one hand, the liberals, NGOs, and INGOs who de-motivated the military through programmes such as Sudu Nelum, sustained policies of appeasement and provided the loopholes that enabled the Tigers to strengthen themselves with the support of the Tamil Diaspora. On the other hand, the Sinhala cultural conservatives, religious fundamentalists and majoritarian chauvinists who have cost the Sri Lankan state and military a very considerable degree of external economic and material support. Had the chauvinists (KMP Rajaratne's JVP, LH Mettananda's BJB and the EBP), not succeeded in imposing Sinhala Only in 1955-56 and frustrating the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayagam Pact of 1957, and their successors (VW Kularatne, Nath Amarakone and the Sinhala Tharuna Sanvidanaya) not succeeded in pushing for district and media-wise standardization at university entrance in the early 1970s, there would have been no powerful Tamil separatism, we would not be fighting for the Wann today, and would instead be players, sharing in the Asian economic renaissance. Had the Sinhala chauvinists in President Jayewardene's Cabinet (Cyril Mathew) not contributed the ideological fuel for the conflagration of 1983 (see the SCOPP's new book Lest We Forget: The Tragedy of July 83), India would not have tilted against us and the fanatical Tigers would not have greatly surpassed the more flexible and political groups such as the PLOTE and EPRLF. Had the chauvinists not insisted on the inclusion of the religious lobbies in the All Parties Conference of 1984 and had those lobbies not objected to Annexure C proposed by Indira Gandhi's Special envoy G Parthasarathy, we would not have had to pay the huge price three years down the road, of Indian intervention aborting Operation Liberation, the presence of 70,000 peacekeepers on Sri Lankan soil, and a Southern Civil war. (My 1982 lecture at Fr Balasuriya's Centre for Society and Religion, published in the 1984 volume by the Committee for Rational Development [CRD] entitled 'Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict: Myths, Realities and Perspectives' clearly predicted such an external intervention by the regional power). Had the violent Southern chauvinists of the late 1980s, who are the leaders of today's parliamentary chauvinist vanguards, not retarded the implementation of the Indo-Lanka accord (the 13th amendment went before the legislature a year after the signing of the Accord), Delhi would have felt less constrained by the Tamil Nadu factor in unleashing the full power of the IPKF against the Tigers. That unleashing took place only in late 1988, precisely to create the environment for Provincial council and later the presidential elections. After 9/11, Sri Lanka lost out because of both the ultra-liberals and their polar opposite the hard-line racists. President Kumaratunga opined to audiences in London and Delhi that terrorism cannot be dealt with by

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military means but that the root causes had to be addressed instead. She should of course have said "by military means alone" or "by purely military means", and argued for a twin track policy which addressed the root causes &mdash; but she didn't. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesingha did worse, using platforms in Washington DC and New York to draw a distinction between "local terrorism" and "internationalism terrorism" and exempting the Tigers from the latter category and charge. Similarly and simultaneously, had the Southern chauvinists not blocked President Chandrika's Equal Opportunities Bill and the Draft Constitution of August 2000 (the latter was a great improvement on the ultraliberal 1995-97 packages), Sri Lanka's international profile would have been infinitely better as we faced the LTTE. In my 1995 book Sri Lanka &mdash; the Travails of a Democracy, pertinently subtitled Unfinished War, Protracted Crisis, I pointed out that the Tigers fight a total war while all their opponents &mdash; Sri Lanka and India &mdash; fight a limited war. That book was written out of the gratification and frustration of working for and with President Premadasa, in the worthy cause of his project of patriotism and growth with equity. The Tigers fight to win, while we, their enemies fought to drive the Tigers to the negotiating table. It is this asymmetry which was the principal reason that forestalled victory. (That book was culled out of a mountain of memoranda in which I had argued against such a strategy and in favor of a war-winning one). Presidents Premadasa and Kumaratunga didn't fight to win because they did not believe that victory was possible. That weakness of perspective damaged the credibility of the enlightened multiethnic multicultural discourse of the two presidents. President Jayewardene did want to win the war but could not have, because he had de-legitimized his government by holding a referendum instead of a parliamentary election, strengthened Tamil separatism by permitting the July '83 pogrom to go unchecked, and isolated Sri Lanka by deviating from its Non-aligned foreign policy and alienating its great neighbor India. We are fortunate in that today, at last, we have a President and a Prime Minister who are determined to win the war, to defeat the Tigers. A war however cannot be won by military means alone. Had the Sinhala chauvinist pressures not reinforced Tamil maximalist conspiracies, more countries would have got off the fence and helped us in this decisive battle for the Wannu. Unfortunately we have been unable to capitalize on the LTTE's dreadful reputation as one of the world's worst terrorist organizations, and our own reality as a durable if flawed democracy and market economy of long standing. This is because our own image &mdash; not least in the neighboring capital &mdash; has been tarnished for decades, by the Sinhala chauvinist fringe. Our ethical and moral standing as a state and society have been damaged by the fundamentalists. The unfolding and outcome of the recent challenge to the higher judiciary may decide whether Sri Lanka will be perceived as a de-facto theocracy, in which activists or activist clergy of one religion enjoy impunity. What will be the outcome of this war? What is the post war deal we are offering the Tamils? What are the guarantees against discrimination that we are willing to put in place? The best we can do for our military fighting in the Wannu is for our political leadership to be supported in maintaining the resolute political will need to push on to victory whatever the difficulties, and also be socially and politically permitted to answer the above questions in an enlightened manner, loud and clear, before regional and international audiences. Had Abraham Lincoln not been determined to win the war against the secessionists &mdash; not propel them to the negotiating table &mdash; he would have been unable to push through the emancipation of the slaves. Conversely, it must be understood that had he not emancipated the slaves, he would not have been able to cut the ground from under the Southern confederacy and hasten the victory over secessionism. Sri Lanka has been unable to strike that balance and arrive at that dialectical synthesis. Thus the cumulative efforts of the lobbies &mdash; the appeasers who facilitated the LTTE's strengthening and those who forestalled the devolutionary and anti-discriminatory reforms which would have secured us more firepower from our friends and neighbors &mdash; are helping the Tigers in their lair and making our military's job that much more difficult where it could have been made easier. The strength of the opposing lobbies of unpatriotic appeasement on the one hand and chauvinism and fundamentalism on the other; the fact that these lobbies succeed in blackmailing or hijacking the mainstream parties and administrations, point to a basic weakness in our political system and underlying society. Ranil Wickremesinha organizationally affiliated his party with the global Right, the International Democratic Union headed by the US Republicans and UK Conservatives. The real question is why &mdash; given especially the moderate pragmatic nature of public opinion as reflected in polls &mdash; has our social and political mainstream been unable to produce a mass based liberal-democratic party such as the US Democrats? Why have we been unable to produce a mass based social democratic party such the British Labour Party? Why is there no progressive, secular-centrist mass party such as the Congress Party of India? Why is there no Marxist Left such as that on the subcontinent (India, Nepal) and why was there never such a Left? Why are our modernist cosmopolitans unpatriotic and unconcerned about national security, while our patriots are parochial and chauvinist? In a recent book which he was kind enough to mail me, Richard Falk, Professor Emeritus at Princeton, draws a distinction between "tribal patriotism" &mdash; which he condemns &mdash; and "cosmopolitan patriotism" &mdash; which he commends. As our thoughts are with our troops on the dark night before the final bitter battles, we should commit ourselves to the construction of such a "cosmopolitan patriotism" or "internationalist nationalism" (as I prefer to call it), on the morning after victory. (These are the personal views of the author). (Courtesy: The Island ) Also published in &mdash; groundviews.org , srilankaguardian.org )