

Indo- Sri Lanka Relations after the LTTE: Problems & Prospects

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Abstract

India-Sri Lanka relations are recorded more than 2,500 years of history and both sides have built upon a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic intercourse. However, these links have been deeply affected and held hostage by the question of the legitimate rights and welfare of the Tamil minority and fishing dispute, on the other hand the growing presence of China in Sri Lanka. India cannot be isolated itself from the developments of Sri Lankan polity, when India-Sri Lanka relations are under stress and its disturbing strategic connotations for national security have also been another challenging factor in India-Sri Lanka relations. On this backdrop, this study focuses on the current crisis of Indo- Sri Lanka relation after end of internal war in Sri Lanka in 2009. In this paper I highlight some of the important problems and prospects which have a bearing on India and Sri Lanka relations. The fundamental questions of this research are the following: what are the factors affecting the relation between India and Sri Lanka? What role by extra-regional power causes smooth relation of these countries? Are there any stemming-blocks in the relations of India with Sri Lanka? This study is based on an interpretive approach. The data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The study discuss the issues in the period between 2009-2014. The various problems plaguing indo-Sri Lanka relations, ethnic conflict and reconciliation process, fishing problem, China involvement, among others, indicate a common theme underlying bilateral relation: mutual mistrust and suspicion. India's approach to Sri Lanka has so far failed to achieve its stated aims, in the ultimate analysis; India's soft diplomacy succeeded neither in bringing about a political settlement of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict, nor in bringing down the ethnic tensions.

Keywords: Indo- Sri Lanka relations, foreign policy, ethnic problems, South Asian politics

INTRODUCTION

India-Sri Lanka relations are "more than 2,500 years old and both sides have built upon a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic intercourse". It goes on to add that "the shared cultural and civilizational heritage of the two countries and the extensive people to people interaction of their citizens provide the foundation to build a multi-faceted partnership".

Sri Lanka's external environment has always been important. It is a small country separated from India, the regional hegemony, by a narrow strip of water, the Palk Strait. As the country's most immediate neighbour, India has always had an enduring interest and influence on Sri Lanka's development. To a large extent Western actors have tended to accept that Sri Lanka lies within India's sphere of influence. Although India's involvement in Sri Lanka has changed significantly in the last thirty years, the issues driving this interaction have for the most part remained similar, "The nearly three-decade long armed conflict between Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE came to an end in May 2009. During the course of the conflict, India supported the right of the government of Sri Lanka to act against terrorist forces. At the same time, it conveyed at the highest levels its deep concern at the plight of the mostly Tamil civilian population, emphasizing that their

rights and welfare should not get enmeshed in hostilities against the LTTE".

Moreover, India has played a significant role in Sri Lanka's post-independent political life, as it did in many centuries before. (ICG:2011) With just 30km separating the southern Indian coast from Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna peninsula, the two countries have always shared deep cultural and economic ties. Given India's size and political and military power, it is not surprising that its political dynamics and policies have directly affected the course of Sri Lanka's civil war. From Indira Gandhi's decision to arm Tamil militants in the early 1980s and Rajiv Gandhi's dispatching of the Indian Peace keeping Force (IPKF) to enforce the 1987 Indo-Lanka accord, to India's support for Sri Lanka's final military campaign against the Tamil Tigers in 2008-2009, the violent conflict between Tamil nationalist militants and the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan state has always been intertwined with policies and attitudes in New Delhi and in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

Likewise, it has long been assumed that if any country could encourage Sri Lanka to seek a sustainable political settlement to its ethnic conflicts it would be India. Certainly, no lasting settlement is possible without Indian acceptance. As the traditional regional hegemon, India has been willing to impose

its will on its neighbors. With India's rise as a global economic power and its growing ambition to play an influential role internationally, many analysts and Western diplomats continue to hope that India can help influence Sri Lanka's post-war policies.

To date, India, like other governments that support a sustainable peace in Sri Lanka, has struggled to contain the Rajapaksa administration's strongly Sinhala nationalist and authoritarian policies. Despite private criticisms from Indian officials, the military continues to play an unprecedented role in the everyday administration of the Tamil majority north, and the government continues to use antidemocratic measures to weaken the political opposition and repress dissent.

This paper attempts to analyze indo- Sri Lanka relations on the recent development after the war against LTTE. It highlights the contrast in Sri Lanka's approach to bilateral ties with India during the war against LTTE and thereafter.

South Asia Region and Indo –Sri Lanka Relations

Sri Lanka's place in South Asian states-system has undergone a fundamental change in recent years, partly as a result of the aggravation of the internal conflict in the island and its internalization, and partly because its strategic importance to India and other big power became considerably enhanced consequent to changing configurations of politics in the international system as well as in the region itself. India-Sri Lanka relations in the post-1990 period have undergone a contextual change together with changes in India's foreign policy perceptions. After the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the US as the sole superpower, India's foreign policy perceptions too have changed. In keeping with the changing global economic and trade scenario, India's strategic priorities in the Indian Ocean region have also undergone a change during the last two decades. India's national security perceptions have now been enlarged to include economic security, free trade and commerce, energy security, and social security of the population in addition to territorial integrity(Gurnam Chand:2010)

The geo-strategic environment in which Indo- Sri Lanka relations have been taking place has undergone change in some respects in recent years due to a number of factors, among which the most war against LTTE, growing relation between China –Sri Lanka, and changes in the strategic scenario in South Asia. But the basic parameter of this relationship, the post war reconciliation in Sri Lanka, remains unaltered over time.

India's relations with Sri Lanka have been some ups and down since independence. This has been partly due to the natural suspicion of Sri Lanka towards

India and vice-a-versa and partly to the machinations of some outside great powers. However, good relations with India have been considered the cornerstone of Sri Lanka's foreign policy and India too has good relations with her South Asian neighbours as a basic principle of her foreign policy.

After the Cold War, India's interests in Sri Lanka shifted from geo-strategic power balance to pragmatic security considerations. During the 1980s and early 1990s, India's strategy to avoid the Cold War power struggle eclipsed efforts to support Sri Lanka's peace and stability. In the post-Cold War period however, India's economic and pragmatic security interests led it to emphasize Sri Lanka's peace and security in an effort to control the externalities of the conflict which threatened to undermine India's. Thus, today, Sri Lanka's unity, peace and stability are India's primary concern. Additionally, maritime security in the Indian Ocean and between India and Sri Lanka has developed into a prominent concern for Indian policymakers. Third, the influence of China and Pakistan in Sri Lanka is also worrisome for India's security interests.

Since the defeat of the LTTE 2009, India has offered significant humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka. This has included loans for infrastructural development and developmental projects in the north-east, as well as active support to the Tamil National Alliance and the Rajapaksa government to encourage a process leading to power sharing and political devolution. Sri Lanka's deepening economic and political relationship with China, its defence relationship with Pakistan and its government's disregard of India's public and private pressure to promote political devolution have contributed to the general sense of unease between the two neighbours.

Ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka and India

India pursued a range of policy approaches over the past three decades, none of which succeeded in achieving a peaceful settlement of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflicts or ensuring minority rights. Past interventions have in fact helped deepen the conflict and led to significant mistrust of India's intentions among large parts of the Sri Lankan public.

While several actors around the globe were involved in this conflict in different ways, the actor most heavily and most consistently entangled in the Sri Lankan civil war has been India, the "regional power" in South Asia. Different kinds of negative security externalities (Lepgold 2003: 19–20) have affected India over the past few decades: the steady stream of Tamil refugees escaping the island, the formation of an LTTE network in the South of India and, most notably, the great interest in Sri Lankan affairs were displayed by the Tamil population of the state of Tamil Nadu.

Two major influences pushed India's policy response to the Sri Lankan conflict: the active engagement of foreign influence by the Sri Lankan government and demands of India's own Tamil population for India to act on behalf of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Sri Lanka pushed for a military solution to the conflict by seeking external support from countries that India was not comfortable having a presence so close to its southern border. As scholar S.D. Muni points out in his authoritative account of India's peace keeping venture, *Pangs of Proximity, Sri Lanka* "wanted to isolate India in the region by facilitating the strategic presence of the forces inimical to India's perceived security interests." (S.D. Muni:1993). Also of concern to India was the backlash among kin Tamils in Tamil Nadu. India's Tamil population in Tamil Nadu, then some seventy million strong, felt India had a responsibility to control the Sri Lankan state's harsh response against Sri Lankan Tamils. For India, the July 1983 events in Sri Lanka were alarming, and the Government of India, then under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, asserted its influence on the situation as a regional power, kin state, and close neighbor.

India played a unique role during the conflict. Most of the Tamils were Indian origin and had their ethnic group in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu that pressured Indian government to get involved in the conflict. India accepted the Tamil immigrants and also provided assistance to them. India played a special role in peace negotiations and also sent their troops to Sri Lanka. (Zwier, 1998:63-65). In the new geopolitical set up after the defeat of the pro-Tamil rebellion, the role of India has substantially changed from being an anti-rebellion partner to development and reconstruction partner of Sri Lanka.

India's official position on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has been clear and relatively consistent for the past three decades. While opposing the LTTE's military and terrorist struggle for a separate state of Tamil Eelam, India has supported greater rights for Tamils and other minorities. India further intervened by dispatching the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in the north and east of Sri Lanka, and concurrently impelled the GOSL to sign the 'Indo-Lanka Agreement to Establish Peace and Normalcy in Sri Lanka', referred to as the 'Indo-Lanka Accord' (Bose 1994). The Indo-Lanka Agreement to Establish Peace and Normalcy in Sri Lanka", was signed by Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayawardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Colombo on 29 July 1987. The accord also made Tamil an official language. The decision to establish councils in all provinces, the councils would be granted a decentralized budget and some autonomy of guiding development (Coomaraswamy 2003), not just in the north and east from which the demand for devolution had come, was designed to weaken Sinhalese resistance and dampen the sense that the amendment was granting

territorial and ethnically-based autonomy and was the first step towards a separate Tamil state. Provincial councils have functioned everywhere but the north and east since 1988, but with little power, few resources and no great effect. It has consistently endorsed devolution of power to the northern and eastern provinces, urging the full implementation of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution, to be followed by further constitutional reforms. (ICG:2011) Given its support for Sri Lanka's territorial integrity and its bitter dislike of the LTTE, India lent Sri Lanka crucial military and political support for the defeat of the Tamil Tigers in the final phase of the war. Indian officials were promised that after the war ended, the Sri Lankan government would address the political marginalization of the Tamil community by devolving power to provincial councils. (ICG:2011) However, India was not aiming for a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka, though attempted to exercise pressure towards the Sinhalese dominated GOSL to be more responsive to Tamil aspirations and demands.

India brought its involvement in Sri Lanka's internal ethnic conflict to a complete halt. After 1991, India reversed its policy of active involvement, distancing itself from an interventionist role that in the past it had felt compelled to play. During the last years of the war in 2008/ 2009, the Rajapaksa administration repeatedly promised to the Indian government to bring about political reforms that would satisfy vast sections of the Tamil community. President Mahinda Rajapaksa said..

"My government is ready for a political solution. It should be based on devolution of power, ensuring democracy and politics and all rights of our Tamil brethren including the language within an undivided Sri Lanka"
- (The Hindu: 2008)

These promises were made to India by Rajapaksa, his close aides as well as senior ministers at a variety of venues. (M.R. Narayan Swamy:2012). New Delhi believed that with the military defeat of the LTTE, the armed component of the Sri Lankan ethnic issue has come to an end, making the conflict resolution easier. After military victory over the LTTE the government of Sri Lanka and the Rajapaksa regime argued loudly that there was only a terrorist problem in Sri Lanka and there was no political issue – a line that did not find acceptance in New Delhi. However, to India's disappointment, Colombo has not taken the political process forward to find resolution for the Tamil minority.

Aggressive activism in Tamil Nadu, concern with the situation of Tamils in Sri Lanka has grown since the

2011 return to power of Chief Minister Jayalalithaa and her AIADMK party.(ICG:2012) The state government has urged New Delhi to increase pressure on the Rajapaksa government on a range of issues, including alleged war crimes and the continued hardships faced by Tamils in the north and east. It has interceded to block training of Sri Lankan military personnel in Tamil Nadu and even sent back a visiting sports team.(Nita Bhalla :2012). Jayalalithaa's long-time rival, M. Karunanidhi, has tried not to be outdone, resurrecting his defunct Tamil Eelam Supporters' Organisation (TESO), regularly criticizing mistreatment of Tamils by the Sri Lankan government and expressing support for a separate state of Tamil Eelam.(The hindu:2012). India's situation on the Sri Lankan conflict is confusing, allowing policy makers' flexibility in crafting responses to developments in the conflict. The policy concurrently supports Sri Lanka's "unity and integrity" and a "negotiated settlement" to the ethnic conflict, which raises questions about where India stands. For instance, will the Centre resist pressures from India's Tamil Nadu constituency to intervene if Sri Lanka's Tamil populations face mass suffering? For the Indian government, the two positions articulated as one — valuing Sri Lanka's "unity and integrity" and pressing for a "negotiated settlement" — allow for a flexible policy under which it can tailor responses to developments in Sri Lankan politics and the ethnic conflict. India's incoherent policy is at times a frustrating balancing act between domestic political pressures from Tamil Nadu and pragmatic security concerns. However, Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict continues to irritate relations where its spill-over effects affect India's interests.

Moreover, the political environment that prevailed during the closing stages of the Rajapaksa regime led to the involvement of the two regional powers – China and India – in Sri Lankan politics. The heavy funding of infrastructure developments such as harbours and an airport in Sri Lanka raised Indian concerns on the basis that it may have geostrategic implications. Of course India has been raising concerns about any foreign power coming to Sri Lanka – including Pakistan – if it considers inimical to her interests, from the days of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.(Sunday Leader:2015)

The Tamil Nadu Factor and Delhi Dilemma

Instead of India has assured to assist the post war economy in Sri Lanka, the relations of both countries have been entered to a critical condition during last three years. The Tamil Nadu Only 30km from Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu is a sprawling state of nearly 70 million people, a country within a country. Its size and proximity to Sri Lanka has unsurprisingly left its historical imprint on the island's society, most obviously on its Tamil-speaking north and east, but also on the Sinhalese south. The proximity of the

large Tamil community across the water has contributed to the paradox whereby many Sinhalese, the majority inside Sri Lanka, view themselves as an embattled minority in the broader region.

Tamil Nadu's political parties, to a significant degree, have the power to translate Tamil Nadu's sympathies for its kin population into Indian government policy. Over 70 million Tamils in Tamil Nadu have kin, community, and cultural ties with the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu's political representation in coalitions at the Centre (2004-2013), as is the case in the past UPA coalition, gives it formidable influence on the Centre's policy. The Tamil kin connection entrusts Tamil Nadu politicians with the obligation and moral authority to prevent Indian support to the suffering of Sri Lankan Tamils. This means that India's policy decisions on matters involving Sri Lanka have to take into consideration Tamil Nadu's likely reactions to the effects such decisions may have on the Sri Lankan Tamil population.

Though, the Eelam War made headline news in India, it was the death of thousands of civilians in the war and the sufferings of Tamils as a result of the war that kindled emotions in Tamil Nadu. It was further whipped up when Rajapaksa trivialized allegations of war crimes in the last stages of war came up at the end of the war and dragged his feet in going through the national reconciliation process.

Initially, New Delhi tried to soft pedal the Sri Lankan President's lackadaisical attitude to India. But New Delhi was fast losing credibility at home and it became an irritant in its relations with Tamil Nadu coalition partners. Over a period of time, Sri Lanka's inaction had its adverse fall out on Tamil Nadu politics as well. The Sri Lankan Tamil issue which was shunted to political sidelines in Tamil Nadu staged a major comeback during Tamil Nadu elections and the DMK, coalition partner at New Delhi suffered a severe drubbing. The writing on the wall for New Delhi was clear: it has to urgently recoup its credibility suffered due to its pedestrian Sri Lanka policy

Regardless of other aspects, New Delhi has the unenviable task of winning over Tamil Nadu support to keep on leash anti-Sri Lanka elements in Tamil Nadu from raising the pitch of their rhetoric and getting into some 'direct action' (euphemism for anti-Sri Lankan hooliganism). This is likely to be an emerging challenge for New Delhi on the home front as it will have its impact on shaping India's Sri Lanka relations in the near term.(R Hariharan:2012). With many pro- Eelam groups in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, it supports an UN-organised plebiscite for Tamils in the north and east to determine whether "Eelam Tamils" wish to establish their own state or

remain within Sri Lanka. Demands for investigations into alleged genocide and for a separate state of Tamil Eelam are at the core of demands of a growing number of Tamil activist groups throughout the world.(ICG:2012)

Moreover, concern with the situation of Tamils in Sri Lanka has grown since the 2011 return to power of Chief Minister Jayalalithaa and her AIADMK party. The state government has urged New Delhi to increase pressure on the Rajapaksa government on a range of issues, including alleged war crimes and the continued hardships faced by Tamils in the north and east. It has interceded to block training of Sri Lankan military personnel in Tamil Nadu and even sent back a visiting sports team. And also Political leaders of almost all hues including the Congress party in Tamil Nadu have called for a boycott of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting CHOGM. However, skipping of the CHOGM by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh under coercion of Tamil political groups has put a question mark on India's strong foreign policy under regional political compulsions.

Fishing Disputes

The issue of fishermen came to the fore only with emergence of violent ethnic conflict between the Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan government in the mid 1980s. The issue of fishermen straying in each other's territorial waters has come as a potential irritant in the otherwise generally good bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka. The end of war, however, has resulted in relaxation of fishing restrictions along Sri Lankan coasts resulting in its fishermen to venture into the seas around without any fear(N Manoharan:2012)

The re-emergence of longstanding tensions between fishermen from South India and fishermen from Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan navy is straining relations between the two countries. For years, fishermen from both sides have been arrested, and in some cases killed, after crossing the maritime boundary. (R. K. Radhakrishnan :2011).The current controversy surrounds fishermen from Tamil Nadu who move into Sri Lankan waters to exploit its more plentiful stocks. Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen, who suffered through decades of fishing restrictions designed to limit LTTE smuggling, complain that the bottom trawlers used by their Indian counterparts threaten to devastate fish stocks on the Sri Lankan side after depleting supplies in Indian waters.(Arun Janardhanan:2011) "The Navy's actions have been fairly consistent over the years", a Sri Lankan political analyst explains, "but [south] Indian fisherman have been bolder because they've assumed that post-war, they wouldn't be mistaken as LTTE and wouldn't be treated so harshly".(ICG:2011)

Recent contentions have risen over the Palk Strait, a strait between the southern tip of India's state of Tamil Nadu, and the northern tip of Sri Lanka, in which fishermen from both nations compete for limited resources. Sri Lankans have accused Indian fisherman of encroaching into their waters, while Indian fisherman accuse Sri Lankan naval vessels of threatening behavior, including damage of vessels, robbery of stocks, and abuse against the fishermen. The dispute stands as a piece of a larger long-standing grudge between the native Tamil Indians who empathize with the defeated Tamil minorities in Sri Lanka, and their mistrust and anger against the Sinhalese dominant government. (The Economist:2013).

In finding a solution to the fishermen issue neither Sri Lanka nor the Government of India can ignore South India. During his recent visit to Colombo, DrSubramaniamSwamy, one of the most influential policy advisors to the BJP Government said, "One weakness in India's policy towards Sri Lanka is the veto power Tamil Nadu has." Explaining further, he suggested that this situation will not remain the same under the current government. Even though this is a positive remark for Sri Lanka, one cannot ignore the fact that South India is Sri Lanka's closest neighbour. (AsangaAbeyagoonasekera:2014). In a context in which territorial boundaries are located in close proximity, these types of issues can happen. Failure to agree on a suitable solution by both countries will only result in continuation of this problem.

Economic Relations

Bilateral economic engagement is the hallmark of and impetus for improved India-Sri Lanka relations. The benefits of these prospering economic ties extend beyond economic gains to political and strategic relations. The resultant goodwill and increased interaction within the institutional framework and enthusiasm from enhanced economic engagement has helped repair political wounds and advance overall bilateral relations. By 2006, trade totaled \$2.6 billion, five times the amount ten years earlier. (The Hindu: 2006) Indian investment in Sri Lanka, a measly \$4 million in the late 1990s, reached \$150 million in 2006. (The Sunday Times: 2007). By 2005, Indian investment in Sri Lanka accounted for 50 per cent of total Indian investment in SAARC countries, making India the fourth highest source of investment in the island, thereby further interweaving the fates of India and Sri Lanka (The Hindu:2006).

India-Sri Lanka relations are now broad based with the economic agenda being a priority followed by strategic considerations. India's strategic interest in Sri Lanka has been enlarged to protect and project India's strategic and economic interests by building strong bonds with Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka was the first country with which India signed a Free Trade

Agreement; the trade between the two countries is expected to grow to \$ 4 billion by 2010. There is greater appreciation between the two countries of each other's problems and perceptions. (Gurnam Chand:2010)

Sri Lanka's trade with India changed dramatically following the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement FTA, In the period 1995–2000. While India was an important source of imports even prior to the FTA, it was not a major export market, and in 2000 it ranked 14th in terms of export destinations. By 2005, Sri Lanka's exports to India reached US\$566 million, a tenfold increase compared to 2000, and stood at US\$567 million in 2012. India was the fifth largest destination for Sri Lanka's exports in 2008, and by 2012 India had become the third largest export destination after the European Union (EU) and the United States (US).

The number of products exported by Sri Lanka to India also increased substantially during this time. While in 1999 Sri Lanka exported 505 tariff lines to India, by 2005 this had increased to 1,062, and by 2012 had further increased to 2,100. In the early years of the FTA there was trade creation, with a number of new products being exported from both countries (Mukerjhi, Kelegama, and Jayawardena 2003). The ILFTA did not become a discriminatory trading framework for the rest of the world and according to Joshi (2010) it had a trade creation effect on the rest of the world. Despite differences, India and Sri Lanka have a close relationship through commercial interests, the growing tourism industry, educational cooperation, and migrant workers as well as mutual cultural and religious interests. (India is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner.

Human Rights Issues and India

After the end of the war, India also diplomatically supported Sri Lanka in international forums. On May 28, 2009, a special session of the United Nations Human Rights Council UNHRC was held to investigate the reported war crimes and atrocities committed by both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed force. India was among the 24 countries that voted for the U.S. draft resolution on Sri Lanka's accountability in respect of human rights violations which was passed at the 19th meeting of the UNHRC at Geneva. India's vote for the U.S. resolution may be considered a major departure from the past in India-Sri Lanka relations.

India was one of twenty-four countries which voted for the resolution which pulled up Sri Lanka for its poor human rights record and sought an early political resolution to overcome its ethnic divide. It was an unprecedented act. It shocked not only Sri Lanka but many even in India and the West. Even before the vote was taken, I had warned that India

was inclined to back the US resolution but only after ensuring that the move did not destabilize Colombo. In the process, it moderated the resolution to read that the UN would act vis-à-vis Sri Lanka only with Colombo's consent, not unilaterally. Over the years relations between the two nations have become multifaceted with a larger strategic security content as India considers Sri Lanka as the forefront of Indian Ocean security. This is one of the main drivers of India's Sri Lanka policy which has been reciprocated by Sri Lanka as well.

The Indian vote was a clear message that New Delhi's patience had run out. Manmohan Singh explained after the Geneva vote; "What we did was in line with our stand on Sri Lanka. We did not want to infringe on the sovereignty of Sri Lanka but our concerns should be expressed so that Tamil people can get justice and lead a life of dignity." (M.R. Narayan Swamy:2012).

China - Sri Lanka Axis and India's Concerns

With the designs of major powers for gaining economic and military footholds in the island, Sri Lanka finds itself vulnerable to major power incursion. Since then, China and Pakistan's strategically-oriented persuade on Sri Lanka's defence and economic activities have also worried Indian policymakers. The supply of defence equipment to a Sri Lankan military at war provides one of the major in-roads for China and Pakistan to expand strategic influence within Sri Lanka. While the threat of foreign power penetration in Sri Lanka, inimical to Indian interests, is real. In New Delhi's views of China, perceptions matter as much as reality. The security community in India sees China as posing the most formidable constraint to its influence in Sri Lanka. There are many factors that lead to this conclusion. China's vast resources; its desire to guarantee itself access to the world's principal oil shipping lanes;(ICG:2008) its veto power on the UN Security Council; its professed emphasis on non-interference; and its aversion to holding others to account on human rights and governance issues. Beijing has long been Colombo's largest arms supplier but its support spiked from a few million dollars in 2005 to roughly \$1 billion in 2008.(Robert D. Kaplan :2010) Chinese weapons, such as F-7 fighter jets as well as ammunition and radars, were vital. (The Economist:2010) Political support from China, as well from other countries, prevented any meaningful discussions of the war in the Security Council despite the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Vanni. Beijing's backing allowed the Sri Lankan government to win the war while circumventing India, ignoring the West and blatantly violating the Geneva Conventions. After the war, China strongly opposed the UN Secretary-General's establishment of a panel of experts on accountability for alleged war crimes, pointing out that the Sri

Lankan government had already set up its own commission in May 2010.

Sino-Lankan ties have strengthened over the years with China replacing Japan as Sri Lanka's top donor. On his most recent trip to China in May 2013, His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa along with Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to upgrade the relationship between the two countries from friendship to *strategic cooperation*. Presidential Spokesperson Mohan Samaranayake is quoted saying, "China has been a consistent friend of Sri Lanka even before full diplomatic relations were established in 1957. It was elevated to a high level to reap maximum benefits to the country due to President Rajapaksa's far sighted diplomatic policy and understanding of current global order." (Manjula Fernando:2013)

There is no denying that the West and India are concerned with the extent of China's presence in Sri Lanka, more for the geostrategic and security implications than for economic impact. This could be because of the tendency of the current Modi administration to perceive issues from a traditional security perspective rather than from threats to security from political developments (Neville Ladduwahetty:2015)

In May 2013 China's Development Bank stated that Sri Lanka was a top priority country when providing developmental aid. The strong financial ties were furthered when the Sri Lankan cabinet approved a US \$580 million loan from China. China-Sri Lanka trade is based on the economic, social, tourism and construction fields and Chinese investment has also been intrinsic in the development of Sri Lanka's infrastructure development. In August 2013, a US \$500 million Chinese-built port opened in Colombo. The port, the first of its kind in Sri Lanka is designed to handle mega-ships and is key in making Sri Lanka the regions shipping hub. (Daily News:2013)

Beijing's importance to Sri Lanka, and the challenge it poses for New Delhi, is economic as well as political and military. Development assistance has exploded since the end of the war with an infusion of donations, grants, investments and loans. For example, in 2009 China was, in terms of commitments, Sri Lanka's biggest aid donor, responsible for \$1.2 billion out of a total of \$2.21 billion offered. According to the country's Board of Investment, Beijing is its biggest investor, too. Much of the Chinese assistance appears to have few strings attached, and there is little transparency about the financial terms of the deals and how the money is being spent.

It is important to remember that historically, Sri Lanka's bilateral relations with Pakistan and China

are better than Indo-Sri Lankan relations. Economically however, Sri Lanka's relations with India are more valuable to Sri Lanka than its relations with China or Pakistan. So, while India's relationship with Sri Lanka will not preclude relationships Sri Lanka has with other external powers, India hopes that as economic interaction between the two countries expands Sri Lankan foreign policy attunes to Indian sensitivities to meddling by foreign powers.

China's strategic clout in Sri Lanka is increasing every day. These will have serious connotations for India's national security and maritime security. Political perceptions of President Rajapaksa are likely to favour China as a counterpoise to reduce his dependence upon India. The strong anti-Sri Lankan flavour of Tamil Nadu politics has caused serious damage to India.

Prospects

Post-LTTE Sri Lanka has emerged as a far more peaceful country and the prospects of Indo-Sri Lankan relations are good. There are certain challenges in the form of the unsettled ethnic question, presence of extra-regional powers in the island, issue of fishermen and balance of trade. These are, however, manageable. There is a sincere acknowledgement in Sri Lanka that it needs India for its own peace and long-term development. For Colombo, India's fast growth and rising stature are worth recognition. India also knows well that its own rise as a world power depends largely on peace in its neighbourhood. It cannot afford to remain isolated as an island of stability for long when its immediate neighbourhood is in turmoil.

In resolving Sri Lanka's ethnic issue India's role is important. New Delhi should take periodic reviews of the needs of the conflict-displaced and must consider providing more aid as and when necessary. Disbursing the aid directly to the affected people and areas of the island instead of routing it through the government is appropriate just to make sure that it reaches the intended beneficiaries. India should also persuade more countries to come forward to help, but directly, in all aspects of reconstruction of the war-ravaged north-east. This will go a long way in resettling the displaced Tamils in their place of origin. Decent resettlement of the IDPs will also take care of the hue and cry in Tamil Nadu over the humanitarian issue.

Rehabilitation of former LTTE cadre is yet another short-term role that India could take up seriously. Given the economic situation of Sri Lanka, providing suitable employment to the demobilized LTTE cadres is not going to be an easy task. In this regard, India could provide specific aid for the rehabilitation of former rebels. Indian schools and universities could be thrown open with sufficient scholarships to former

child soldiers. Sri Lanka Donor Conference countries, which include the United States, the European Union, Japan and Norway, can be persuaded to invest, especially in the north-east, in manufacturing and services industries that could offer numerous job opportunities to the Tamil youth. Dignified rehabilitation of all surrendered LTTE cadres will convert them into non-fighters once and for all. Revival of the LTTE in any form is not in the interest either of Sri Lanka or India or the rest of the world.

For lasting political settlement, India should at the outset make sure that the recent military victory over the LTTE does not result in triumphalism in the Sinhala-dominated regime vis-à-vis the Tamil minorities. It should rather be converted into a political opportunity. India has to exercise maximum leverage on Sri Lanka to deliver a meaningful devolution package to the minorities, both Tamils and Muslims (N.Manoharan:2012)

The issue of straying of fishermen from both countries into the other country's territorial waters and the consequent harassment by the naval forces requires urgent attention. Despite the existence of certain practical arrangements to deal with the issue of bonafide fishermen of either side crossing the international maritime boundary line, firings on fishermen continue. A comprehensive and humane approach needed to solve the problems.

Postscript

After the presidential election in Sri Lanka in January 2015, relation between India and Sri Lanka get new disposition. Sri Lankan premier visit to India not only as described it as a visit "mainly to establish a good rapport with New Delhi but have also gained new direction and momentum".(The Hindu:2015) , both sides signed four substantive agreements. Of these, the agreement on Co-operation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy was the most significant as it imparts a new strategic element to bilateral relations. Its decision to move ahead on this front with India shows the maturity of the new Sri Lankan leadership and the importance it attaches to its relations with New Delhi. The agreement envisages "exchange of knowledge and expertise, sharing of resources, capacity building and training of personnel in peaceful uses of nuclear energy". The two sides have also agreed to enhance their defence and security cooperation in the existing trilateral format with the Maldives. The travails of fishermen on both sides of the Palk Bay received attention have agreed to pledging to resolve them in a "constructive and humanitarian" way.(The Hindu :2015)

CONCLUSION

The various problems plaguing indo-Sri Lanka relations, ethnic conflict and reconciliation process, fishing problem, China involvement, among others,

indicate a common theme underlying bilateral relation: mutual mistrust and suspicion. India's approach to Sri Lanka has so far failed to achieve its stated aims, Given Colombo's stiff resistance and its willingness and ability to play China off against India and Western powers under the Mahinda regime.

India's soft diplomacy succeeded neither in bringing about a political settlement of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict, nor in bringing down the ethnic tensions. When mediation failed, India was left with the only possible option: direct involvement. Whatever the merits of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement, it once again reaffirmed India's role as the manager of South Asian crises. But once again the intransigence of the militants has dragged the Indian army so deeply into the ethnic mire that pulling out of it does not seem possible in the near future. A prolonged military presence on a neighbor's soil, whatever the true intentions may be, does not augur well for genuine nonalignment and regional cooperation.

The bi-lateral relations between India and Sri Lanka in the postwar era are based on two important facts. One is India's internal politics and the party interest which have always sought for strengthening their coalition power with the ruling government. The Tamil Nadu politics play an important role in this regard, by influencing to the central government to intervene to the Sri Lanka Tamil issues during the civil war in Sri Lanka. This also further complicated by fishermen issue. It is very clear the ruling coalition seek to protect its popularity with the help of AIDMK in Tamil Nadu amicably with support of Sri Lanka.

The second issue is India's emerging power in the Asian region and its future threats from China who is ready to further strengthen her bi-lateral relations with Sri Lanka. This factor is always influenced to India within her strategic plan in the Indian Ocean and security. Growing Sino- Sri Lanka relations are suspected by India and India shows her dislike to Sri Lanka with pressuring the Sri Lanka government through human rights violations on Tamils not only in regionally but also internationally. The bi-lateral relations India and Sri Lanka in the post-LTTE era are not amicable and trustful. The growing political issues have been spoiled the historical amicable relations of the two countries.

It is imperative that India adopts a pro active policy towards Sri Lanka, in order to not only save the people but also for its own security reasons. Economy aid could be a big trump card in India's policy. Indian corporate houses have shown interest in investing in Sri Lanka. There is also a favorable mood in Colombo in allowing Indian houses to invest. India can use this leverage to not only develop the north and east that has been affected by the protracted war.

The capacity of India to engage actively in peace-building in Sri Lanka is limited. Yet, it wants to maintain some leverage over the political process in order to ensure that Tamil politics remain pluralistic, that the government offers a political package of devolution to the Tamils, and more importantly to attempt to check the influence of China and Pakistan on the country. India's interests in Sri Lanka stem predominantly from geopolitical concerns and security needs. Economic and business interests are also important and create the need to maintain regional peace and stability. To that end, India has worked in favour of maintaining a strong bilateral relationship with Sri Lanka and in a majority of instances opposed multilateral initiatives. While this is driven partly by India's motivation to deflect any internationalization of its own internal conflicts in Kashmir, the north-east, and the Naxal affected states, it is also influenced by its desire to maintain autonomy, and to a degree control, over its relationship with its neighbours. Tamil Nadu politics and the close political, social and economic relationship between Tamils in Sri Lanka and India, have contributed to India's analysis that the relationship is best conducted through bilateral forums.

To date, India's policy in Sri Lanka has focused on supporting humanitarian needs and reconstruction in the north east, while pushing the government and the TNA to talk about devolution, funding economic and infrastructure development throughout the country and promoting the integration of the two economies. While designed at least in part to support lasting peace and stability, such efforts will not yield meaningful reconciliation or devolution of power without a fundamental change in the way Sri Lanka.

In the post-LTTE era, a perceptible change came over the Indian government's Sri Lanka policy. The new government led by Modi no doubt made a sincere effort to gain the Sri Lankan government's trust by restraining militant Tamil activity in India. This policy, of course, was part of the new leadership's overall effort to promote greater understanding between India and its neighbors. A long-term solution for all the problems needs intensive cooperation and agreement, which in the current situation seems a pipe dream. In this framework, India should work together with Sri Lanka for building win win achievements and prosperity in the regions of South Asia.

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