

SRI LANKA

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THE MACHIAVELLIAN ART OF DAMAGE LIMITATION

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Who or what is the international community? For our purposes, the international community consists of governments. In almost every country, the government is controlled by the largest nation, which invariably is also the numerical majority. International opinion is the collective views and prejudices of these dominant nations. In almost every country, the dominant nation operates through its government to repress the linguistic and national rights of the respective smaller nation(s) and people(s). International opinion does NOT reflect the interests of these oppressed nations.

The United States Government conquered and colonised Hawaii, banned the Hawaiian language in 1898 and imposed American English language on the subjugated Hawaiians in the name of "nation building". The Hawaiians tenaciously fought back for decades and, early this year, they won the right to re-introduce the Hawaiian language in schools there. Partly unsettled by Hawaiian nationalism, the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant(WASP) nation that controls American Government is seeking now to legislate English as the sole official language of the country. The intention of WASP nationalists is also to repress the growing Hispanic nationalism among Spanish-Americans, a nation that may soon demand autonomy/independence for their south-western linguistic regions in a manner akin to that of Quebec.

Similar national oppression of French-Canadian and Inuit nations in Canada,

Welsh and Scottish nations in Britain and Corsican nation in France are well known. And these examples are drawn from countries that would easily qualify as beacons of democracy. Indeed, there are approximately 40 national movements for autonomy / independence within countries of the European Union. Among them the Scottish and Basque National Liberation Movements are in the forefront. The Scottish National Party (SNP) has earmarked 2007, the 300th anniversary of the conquest and subjugation of the Scottish nation by England, as the year of full independence for Scotland.

The point we, in The Action Group Of Tamils (TAGOT), wish to make is this: in almost every country, the government is looking over its shoulder at its respective smaller nation(s). The governments bolster each other to repress national movements of smaller nations and neutralise the competing challenge to State power that they pose. Almost every government has on its hands copious blood of its smaller nation(s). And the international community is essentially an alliance of these governments.

During the Cold War, each superpower backed one or the other national movement as part of the global competition for ideological domination. The history of superpower intervention in the Eritrean National Liberation Movement is a good example. In the case of Bangladesh, the Indian Government intervened to liberate

the then East Pakistan to gain strategic advantage against Pakistan.

In the post-Cold War era, all that has changed. And the Indian Government so far sees nothing to be gained from an independent State of Tamil Eelam.

Today, the member-governments of the international community almost universally oppose national movements. The “peace process” is their chosen political instrument to repress the demand for national liberation. In this context, the shenanigans of the Norway-fronted international community and Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) to defeat the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and undermine the Tamil National Movement make interesting reading.

The Norwegian Government formally announced its involvement in the Sri Lankan armed conflict, between the GSL and the LTTE-led Tamil National Movement, when its then Foreign Minister Knut Vollebaek visited Colombo on 16 February 2000. The Norwegian Special Envoy Erik Solheim held an unprecedented meeting with the Leader of LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, on 1 November. Subsequently he confirmed that Prabhakaran is ready to negotiate a political solution to the armed conflict within a united Sri Lanka. On 24 December, Prabhakaran declared a unilateral cease-fire and sued for peace. He specified two pre-requisites for commencing negotiations. First, the GSL must reciprocate the cease-fire; and second, the economic embargo that includes severe restrictions on food supply imposed upon the Tamil people in the Tamil-majority North East Province (NEP) must be lifted completely. In short the LTTE indicated that it would not sit at the negotiating table as long as the GSL stared at it down a gun barrel and held the Tamil people hostage using food as a weapon of war.

Both pre-requisites would be considered reasonable under international law. And soon it was evident that Prabhakaran

caught President Chandrika Kumaratunga in the proverbial cleft stick, the “peace trap”. And Kumaratunga twisted and turned, this way and that. The GSL refused to reciprocate LTTE’s offer of a cease-fire. It rejected LTTE’s pre-requisites. Kumaratunga in many instances publicly denigrated the Prabhakaran, calling him a “murderer” (Divaina, 1/Mar/01). And she continued to repeatedly provoke him by demanding LTTE’s proscription in other countries and openly rejoiced when the British Government proscribed the organisation on 1 March 2001.

Obviously the GSL was goading the LTTE to abandon the goal of a political solution to the armed conflict. Instead, Prabhakaran steadfastly stood committed to a negotiated settlement, which position enhanced the organisation’s political stature nationally and internationally.

Clearly the “peace process” cunningly designed to crush the LTTE-led Tamil National Movement was in shambles. The GSL stood exposed as a warmonger and struggled futilely to salvage its image as “peace maker”.

At about this stage the international community acting through the Governments of the United States of America and Norway stepped in to rescue the GSL.

US Ambassador Ashley Willis did not express displeasure when President Kumaratunga and her Peoples Alliance (PA) Government in Colombo refused to respond positively to LTTE’s pre-requisites. Instead he took the trouble to travel to Jaffna on 7 March to issue a blunt warning to a select audience of Tamils. He arrogantly declared: “If the LTTE is still fighting for Tamil Eelam, please accept that that goal cannot be achieved” (The Island, 9/Mar/01). And his speech was crafted to convey the impression that the political objectives of the LTTE-led Tamil National Movement remain the main stumbling blocks to starting negotiations.

The Ambassador skilfully drew attention away from the military ambitions of Kumaratunga and her Government, sabre rattled against the Tamil National Movement and so carefully shifted the political debate to Tamil aspirations and LTTE's military strategy. Those who responded by defending the Tamil National Movement fell squarely into the trap.

The Norwegian Ambassador Jon Westborg made the next major anti-Tamil manoeuvre. He asserted without any basis in truth that "the preliminary base to conduct talks at the end of May have already been laid out" (Lakbima, 26/Mar/01). Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar followed with another ploy. He duplicitously alleged in Parliament, "considerable progress has been made with the facilitation of the Norwegian Government towards getting the LTTE to the negotiating table" (Daily Mirror, 3/Apr/01). He claimed he would announce the date for negotiations before the end of April. A few days later Ambassador Westborg propped up Kadirgamar's deliberate disinformation. He misled the world, alleging that "the Norwegian peace efforts have progressed to the extent of the two sides...deciding now on a date and venue for the peace talks...recent statements made by Foreign Minister Kadirgamar also indicate that the Norwegian peace initiative is headed in the right direction" (Thinakural, 5/Apr/01).

In contrast, Solheim was refreshingly honest. No doubt guided by his political roots in socialist philosophy, he took a principled position and placed on record the ground situation. In a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) interview in late March, Solheim reportedly underlined the extremely weak prospects for negotiations. He explained, "both the LTTE and Government must develop mutual trust and a strong basis must be found for talks...When the BBC asked Solheim when talks will actually take

place, he said that he does not know" (Suderoli, 10/Apr/01). Indeed where he was optimistic, he emphasised the positive stance of the LTTE. For instance, in a telephonic interview to an Indian newspaper, The Hindu, he reportedly argued that the prospect for talks is attractive because the LTTE stopped attacks outside the NEP and dropped the condition that the Sinhalese army must be withdrawn from Jaffna (Virakesari, 26/Mar/01).

Meanwhile, Kadirgamar and Westborg obviously believed that their disinformation had raised high the hopes for peace. They also expected that since the GSL refused to declare a cease-fire or lift the economic embargo, the LTTE would reject their invitation to commence negotiations. That, they hoped, would lend ammunition to castigate Prabhakaran for his "aggression" and "intransigence". So when Westborg met LTTE's Tamilchelvan in the Vanni on 7 April 2001, he queried Tamilchelvan as to the date on which negotiations could commence (Daily Mirror, 9/Apr/01). This ploy is a throwback to President Kumaratunga's insistence during "talks" in early 1995 that the LTTE should discuss a so-called "peace package" while efforts to satisfy the organisation's pre-requisites – the elimination of the embargo and a return to normalcy for Tamils in the NEP – were supposedly proceeding in parallel. At that time Kumaratunga had exploited the LTTE's refusal to discuss an alleged "peace package" until the prerequisites were met as evidence of Prabhakaran's rejection of a political solution.

Westborg attempted a similar ruse. However, although Westborg's question took him by surprise, Tamilchelvan nimbly sidestepped Westborg's thrust. Instead of rejecting negotiations, Tamilchelvan countered with an eminently rational argument that the GSL must lift the proscription it imposed on the LTTE before a decision could be made about the date for negotiations. In this way Tamilchelvan

focussed attention on the proscription of LTTE as a major obstacle.

Stymied by the necessity to de-proscribe the LTTE, both Westborg and Kadirgamar twisted and turned. They put their heads together. The result was a fairly clever manoeuvre to put the LTTE in the dock. On 10 May, Kadirgamar issued a statement in which he alleged that the GSL has reached "agreement" with the LTTE on "certain humanitarian measures"; and he revealed that he has asked the Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorbjorn Jagland "to embody what has already been agreed...in a document" (AFP Report, 10/May/01).

A cursory knowledge diplomatic practice is sufficient to show that Kadirgamar did not arbitrarily and unilaterally send the request to Jagland. In fact our information is that extensive consultations took place over many days between Kadirgamar and Westborg on ways to checkmate Prabhakaran. TAGOT understands that the upshot was a Machiavellian strategy. The plan was as follows: Kadirgamar was to raise hopes for peace even higher by alleging that GSL has reached a consensus with the LTTE on "certain matters", left unspecified. Jagland was to confirm it by consenting to Kadirgamar's request to "embody" the consensus in a "document". Since there is no such consensus whatsoever, Prabhakaran would of course be compelled to refute both Kadirgamar and Jagland. The next step was for both of them to accuse Prabhakaran of "dishonesty" and condemn the LTTE for undermining prospects for peace. Westborg carried the plan with him when he rushed back to Oslo on 9 May (Lakbima, 11/May/01). On hearing that Jagland would collude in the trickery, Kadirgamar released the statement of 10 May.

However, as it often does in life, the unexpected intervened. Reacting to Kadirgamar's statement, Solheim immediately issued a denial, that "there was no agreement between the parties to the conflict in

conflict in Sri Lanka" (AFP Report, 10/May/01). The Kadirgamar-Jagland subterfuge crumbled to dust before their eyes.

Virtually overnight, Solheim became the proverbial loose cannon in the eyes of the two foreign ministers. Because, he is honest. He did not collude with the anti-Tamil machinations of the GSL and Norway-fronted international community. He had to go.

Therefore, we in TAGOT are not at all surprised that Solheim was sidelined. Desperate to salvage GSL's tattered credentials as peacemaker, Kadirgamar urgently requested Jagland to meet him in Colombo. At the meeting, held on 7 June, both governments decided to ease Solheim out under the transparent guise of "upgrading" Norwegian participation.

Simultaneously, Kadirgamar and Jagland once again provoked Prabhakaran. The Norwegians with wide experience in conflict resolution in Latin America and West Asia knew only too well that at the 7 June meeting, the two governments were making a bilateral decision about a tripartite arrangement. Both governments were well aware that excluding the third party, the LTTE, was ethically and legally wrong. However, there were two reasons for ignoring the organisation. First, if the LTTE was consulted, and it rejected the "upgrading", Solheim could remain the facilitator; and that would strengthen LTTE's hand. Second, it was hoped that the violation of tripartite procedures would provoke Prabhakaran to abandon his commitment to a political solution. But he, too, moved adroitly. The LTTE criticised the partiality of Norway for siding with the GSL but nevertheless resolutely reiterated its willingness to seek a negotiated settlement to the armed conflict (Thinakkural, 11/Jun/01).

The never-tiring apologists for the anti-Tamil international community trotted out their so-called "assessments". For instance, an expatriate Tamil journalist ex-

tended extreme benefit of doubt to Jagland, whom he portrayed as an “ill informed” person who committed the “grave blunder” of violating the procedural norms of a tripartite arrangement (Sunday Leader, 24/Jun/01).

TAGOT thinks not. Jagaland knew exactly what he was doing and did it for the Machiavellian reasons we have adduced. There is hardly a better example of conflict resolution gobbledegook purveyed by Sinhalese apologists for the GSL than the assertion made by a Sinhalese “peacenik”; he mired himself in his own words: “fortunately, it appears that though the Government may have problems with Mr Solheim, it retains faith in Norway. The LTTE retains its faith in Norway and also in Mr Solheim. The decision of the Norwegian Government to upgrade its representation in the peace process may be a means by which both Government and LTTE interests are met” (The Weekend Express, 23/Jun/01).

TAGOT does not wish to dignify this gibberish with a response.

The time has come to stop deifying the international community as a neutral force and the giver of all things good including peace.

And it is time to look at the “peace process” squarely in the face as the arena of power struggle. It is a power struggle between the GSL and Norway-fronted international community on the one hand and, on the other hand, the LTTE-led Tamil National Movement together with Sri Lankan Tamils living inside and outside the country.

The military component of the “peace process” aims to re-establish the military dominance of the Sri Lankan Government, the dominance that was shattered when the Tamil National Movement armed itself. This is to be achieved by starting “talks” and then coercing the LTTE to de-commission weapons as a non-negotiable condition for continuing “talks”. The objective of the political component is to neutralise the popular support for the LTTE among the Tamil people. The strategy is to drive a political wedge between Tamils and the LTTE by hoodwinking the Tamil people into believing that peace is at hand and that the LTTE is the real obstacle to conflict resolution.

The most recent ploy of the Norway-fronted international community is creation of a so-called “Board of Delegates”, which includes Solheim as an eyewash, in Norway to resurrect the “peace process” (Lakbima, 6/Jul/01). If the governments that constitute the international community believe that Sri Lankan Tamils could be deluded by this crude deception and induced to withdraw their support for the LTTE, then they know next to nothing about the historical dynamic that propels the Tamil National Movement.

It is also time for Tamils to recognise, and draw strength from, the inevitable victory of the LTTE-led Tamil National Movement. And it is equally important to be aware that it is only the unflinching armed resistance and phenomenal sacrifices of Sri Lankan Tamils everywhere that will ensure final victory.

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