

Third-Party Mediation in Sri Lanka's Peace Attempts: A Study on the Role of Norwegian Mediation

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Abstract

Regional and international mediation by third parties in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict have had diverse impacts on the country's political scene at various times. India spearheaded a significant regional mediation following the July 1983 pogrom against minority Tamils. An international mediation effort by a third party was initiated in 2000, with Norway playing the role of facilitator. Both of these attempts to resolve Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, which were taken to bring an end to the intense and continued violence, have had mixed outcomes. In particular, Norway's initiative to bring an end to the conflict with international facilitation was taken in the backdrop of the changed world order that prevailed after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. It is against this backdrop; this article attempts to examine the contributions made by Norway towards the resolution of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. The major finding shows that Norwegian initiative fell into fail after a period and the armed insurgency did not come to an end until 2009. In May 2009, the government forces defeated the LTTE militarily and declared the war victory.

Keywords: Norway, Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, third party mediation

1. Introduction

Sri Lanka was a colony of the British Empire until its independence on February 4, 1948. Since independence, Tamil minority have not had vigorous relations with the Sinhala Buddhist supremacist state. The actions of the Government caused fear among minorities. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's election victory in 1956 led to the rise of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in the country. The fear among Tamils was further doubled soon after the Bandaranaike's Government declared the Sinhala-only policy in 1956. Tamils refused to accept this policy and engaged in boycotts against the Government. It resulted in conflicts between the nationalized Sinhalese and Tamils after 1956. In the mid-1970s, the demand for a separate state arose among Tamils. In 1977, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) won the election on the platform of Tamil homeland. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) embarked on an attempt to establish a separate Tamil state through military means. The July riots of 1983 prompted the launching of an armed struggle. Thus, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) emerged as a strong organization than any other Tamil armed groups. The LTTE targeted not only state forces but also Tamil militants (Fazil, 2016).

On the other hand, there were several attempts to solve the ethnic conflict by political arrangements before an armed struggle broke out between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Tamil rebels in the mid-1970s. Since then, the Thimpu Talks of 1985; the Indo - Lanka Agreement of 1987, and GOSL - LTTE talks of 1989 / 1990 were also achieved but met limited success (Fazil, 2016). Notably, President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge came to power in 1994. Even as the country was facing a challenging period during her rule, her Government adopted a two-pronged policy of 'war for peace' and 'formulating a devolution package' at the same time as solutions to address the ethnic problem. The Government's objective in implementing both options was to solve the national problem either through political means or military means. Even as military operations were continuing, the Government kept repeating that it was engaged in formulating a devolution package at the provincial level to satisfy the aspirations of the Tamils (Fowsar, 2012).

During this period, violent incidents had increased markedly as a result of the security forces' military onslaught against the LTTE. Both sides kept winning small victories alternately and eventually transformed themselves into equally strong fighting forces. It was at this juncture that the government forces launched a large scale military

operation called Jayasikurui (Victory Assured) through which they were able to re-capture Jaffna. To compensate for losing Jaffna to the government forces, the LTTE launched other attacks on military targets and emerged victorious (Gooneratne, 2007).

The successive military victories of the tigers caused a serious loss of morale among the security forces personnel. In particular, the overrunning and capture of the highly fortified Elephant Pass Army Camp by the 'Unceasing Waves - 3' military operation of the LTTE proved to be a devastating loss to the Government and its forces. This attack blocked the land route to the peninsula from the mainland, putting a halt to the free movement of people and supplies. Following the debacle at Elephant Pass, many doubts were raised about the fighting ability of the government forces, while estimates of the military capabilities of the LTTE rose sharply (Keethaponcalan, 2005).

Besides affecting the military balance, these battles had terrible repercussions on the country's society, economy and politics. The repeated military losses from the 'war for peace' policy pursued by the Government were gobbling up the economic resources of the country. Due to the increased war expenditure, it was not possible to attain the projected economic growth targets. Instead, economic development had slowed down to a crawl. This caused inflation and increased the Government's debt burden. The consequence of the 'war for peace' was that the economic infrastructure of the country was seriously undermined. Every citizen became a debtor. In 1999 and 2000, due to the unbearable expenditure, the national treasury remained depleted. This led to a situation that could lead to the collapse of the Government (Keethaponcalan, 2005).

Both the government forces and the tigers who had reached a stalemate in the battlefields appeared to welcome Norway's peace effort, and Norway too was desirous of taking it forward to restore peace in the Island. As an initial step, some members of Norway's peace delegation met and spoke to the LTTE leader. During this meeting, the leader of the LTTE expressed his desire for peace and his aspiration for a political solution to the Tamil's national problem. This meeting that lasted about two hours explored the possibility of arranging peace talks between the Government and the Liberation Tigers. During this meeting, the Tiger leader had imposed certain preconditions for holding the talks. They were the suspension of all hostilities, lifting of the economic embargo, and restoration of normalcy in the Tamil homeland (Balasingham, 2004).

Following this, the Norwegian peace delegation met President Chandrika Kumaratunga and conveyed the LTTE's position to her. However, the Chandrika government did not show any enthusiasm to restore normalcy before holding any peace talks. Despite this setback, the Norwegian representatives continued to talk with both sides to persuade them for the sake of peace. In the year 2000, on Christmas Day, the LTTE suddenly declared a unilateral suspension of all war activities. But there was no favourable response from the Government. Neither did the Government relax its 'war for peace'. The air force dropped bombs in and around Trincomalee and Mullaithivu. Eventually, in April 2001, the LTTE revoked their unilateral declaration of suspension of war (Balasingham, 2004).

In April 2001, the Government in a bid to re-capture the Elephant Pass army camp it had lost earlier launched the Agni Khiela (Fire Flame) military operation. In this exercise, too, the government forces suffered heavy losses within a short period. According to Anton Balasingham (2004), 600 government soldiers were killed and 2000 troops injured, while 141 Tiger cadres were killed. The net result was that the Agni Khiela operation turned out to be a failure. Even the government side had acknowledged this. This loss undermined the fighting strength as well as the morale of the army. The result of this operation seemed to impress on both parties the reality that neither side could win a conclusive victory over the other side.

In July 2001 the Tigers once again proved their ability to take the enemy by surprise and strike hard. A squad of Black Tigers entered and attacked the Katunayake Air Force Base located in a High-Security Zone. In this attack, \$500 Million worth of military and civilian aircraft were destroyed or damaged beyond repair. This attack harmed the economy and also on tourism. It led to negative economic growth. The treasury struggled even to pay the salaries of government servants. Such was the impact the sabotage mission targeting the Katunayake Air Force Base had on the economy (Balasingham, 2004).

In this situation, it appeared that the military strength of the government forces and that of the Tigers were evenly matched. It was also evident that from 1983 onwards, the increasing intensity of warfare had resulted in a massive loss of life on both sides. The number of dead, including civilians, amounted to more than 64,000. Consequently, the combatants on both sides were tired and battle weary. At around this time, a global wave of sentiment rose against terrorism as a result of the horrific attack against the World Trade Center in New York in September 2001. The attitude of the international community towards terrorism was used opportunistically by the Sri Lankan diplomats, who persuaded the international community to adopt a hardline approach against the LTTE (Keethaponcalan, 2005).

Meanwhile, the local citizenry on whose behalf the LTTE were fighting and who were subjected to such hardships

as a result of the war was sick and tired of the whole situation. A similar situation prevailed in the Southern parts of Sri Lanka too. Furthermore, the political instability confronting the Government and the Tiger's desire to regain international sympathy and support created a favourable atmosphere to recommence the stalled peace initiative. It was under these circumstances that both parties requested the Norwegian Government to facilitate in taking forward the peace efforts (Keethaponcalan, 2005).

Around that time, near the latter part of 2001, there was a change of Government in Sri Lanka. The elections that were held in December returned the United National Party to power, while at the same time there was a change of Government in Norway too. That is, after the Labour government resigned, a coalition of the Conservative and Christian Democratic parties assumed power. Norway's new Government also showed much enthusiasm in continuing with the peace efforts. The United National Party government once installed in office promptly expressed its interest in going ahead with the peace process. The LTTE who appeared to welcome this announced a unilateral suspension of hostilities for one month on December 19 2001. The Government reciprocated by announcing a cessation of hostilities from December 21 2001 (Keethaponcalan, 2005).

On February 22 2004, a formal ceasefire agreement was signed between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam with the facilitation of Norway. After signing the ceasefire agreement, both sides refrained from engaging in hostilities and based on that a new peace initiative was commenced. It was notable that Norway, playing the role of mediator, worked out the modalities for this peace process. Against this backdrop, this article attempts to examine the role of Norwegian mediation in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict.

2. Research Method

This study is a historical and descriptive analysis based on data gathered from secondary sources. The secondary data were collected from different sources and analyzed using the qualitative method of analysis. The descriptive findings of the study were presented in text form.

3. Conceptual Notes

3.1 Ethnic Conflict

Ethnicity is a new concept. It became a popular concept among academics and used as a common term in international disputes and discourses. Conflicts based on ethnicity came to the forefront of the world's attention and took centre stage during the latter part of the 20th century. The demise of the Soviet Union resulted in the formation of new nations based on ethnicity and religion while it also resulted in various manifestations of ethnic conflict. At the same time, the end of the inter-state war in the world had raised certain other expectations. Some considered this as the end of a historical era. Others saw it as the sign of a new world order. But none of these expectations was realized because, after the end of conflicts between countries, these were replaced by ethnic conflicts (Keethaponcalan, 2005).

The principal cause of ethnic conflicts involves a competition for the control of status, rewards, resources and territory. Today, these conflicts are becoming more intense and numerous, and their impact even more deadly to the civilian population because of the new and creative ways these militant groups have devised to combat opposing groups. In particular, ethnic conflict in the third world has drawn some attention since the 1960s, the beginning of the end of the era of British colonialism, mainly because colonialism left behind inappropriate constitutional arrangements in which the all ethnic groups were given equal and fair opportunities and representation. Sri Lanka is a typical example of this (Fazil, 2016).

Ethnic conflict occurs when the socially or politically dominant group perceives that other groups are oppressing better economically and are likely to alter the power equation in the future, and takes a step to safeguard its interests. There is a risk for conflict when there are imbalances in distribution due to identity differences. Ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka between majorities and minorities sometimes appear hopeless and protracted. Countless attempts at resolving the disputes are made, and often there is a glimmer of hope as the parties at war may settle the problems for a period of time.

3.2 Third Party

The term 'third party' refers to an external party that is not involved directly in the conflict but acts in an intermediary role. A third party acts as a facilitator to bring the warring parties together for talks aimed at finding a compromise solution that would be acceptable to both, and it could be another government, government delegation, international governmental or non-governmental organization, international court, mediating group, a representative group of individuals or even a single individual. In any case, they should be acceptable to both parties to the conflict. The strategies employed by the third party to resolve the conflict may also be challenging to work out. They would vary from conflict to conflict (Uyangoda, 2005).

Fisher and Keashly (as cited in Keethaponcalan, 2005) give examples of different types of third party intervention, such as Conciliation, Consultation, Pure mediation, Power mediation, Arbitration, and Peacekeeping. Hopman (as cited in Keethaponcalan, 2005) mentions Good Offices, Conciliation, Arbitration and Mediation as examples of third party intervention. Recourse to third party intervention is an important option for settling disputes between two parties. But third parties are not sought for this purpose in all cases. When opposing groups do not wish to negotiate directly with each other, they find the assistance of a third party. In that way, the third party is given some authority to impose its own views in working out a solution to the conflict. But the third party's proposals are accepted only under certain circumstances.

3.3 Mediation

Mediation is an intermediary activity of a third party to bring conflict parties for an acceptable settlement. At every stage of human history, whenever there was an interaction between different peoples and different nations, there have always been numerous conflicts. On such occasions, recourse was always made to mediation, and this approach has been endorsed as being very effective at both national and international levels. According to Jacob Bercovitch, "Mediation is a process of conflict management, related to but distinct from the parties' own efforts, where the disputing parties or their representatives seek the assistance or accept an offer of help, from an individual, group, state or organization to change, affect or influence their perceptions or behaviour, without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of the law" (Jacob Bercovitch as cited in Bercovitch & Rubin, 1992).

Oran Young defines mediation as "any action taken by an actor that is not a direct party to the crisis, that is designed to reduce or remove one or more of the problems of the bargaining relationship, and therefore to facilitate the termination of the crisis itself" (Oran Young as cited in Bercovitch & Rubin, 1992). In simple terms, mediation is often referred to as a sort of discussion. But it has many dimensions. The effort taken by a third party that is not in any way directly involved in the conflict, to resolve one or more issues, or to ameliorate the situation, or bring an end to the conflict, is known as mediation.

Mediation does not involve any force or coercion, and neither can it be considered as interference in the affairs of another. Mediation transforms a dispute between two parties into a three-way discussion. When the number of actors increases from two to three, the framework of the entire discussion and negotiation forum changes drastically, and at the same time this opens up new avenues to pursue in quest of a solution. However, mediation may not be entirely free from the influence of the third party acting as the mediator. The mediator may have some control over certain aspects of the dispute. Despite that, the parties to the conflict have the freedom to accept or reject any suggestions put forward by the mediator. Mediation is not based on the strength of the mediator but on the actual needs and perceptions of the disputants (Uyangoda, 2005).

Mediation is a specific type of political activity that highlights the role of a third party in facilitating a negotiation process. With mediation, the third party employs a variety of process. Two key characteristics are the appearance of neutrality and controlled communication. The expected neutrality conflict resolution is premised upon the idea that the third party has no vested interest in the outcome of an intervention. Third-party guarantors can change the level of fear and insecurity that accompanies peace treaty implementation and thus facilitate settlement of the dispute.

4. Results and Discussion

In the long history of Sri Lanka's ethnic dispute, the second international peace initiative with a foreign country playing the role of mediator took place at the time when Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge was the president. With the start of the new millennium, new hopes for peace emerged with the involvement of Norway in the Sri Lankan conflict. The new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe formally requested Norway to participate as a facilitator in the peace process on December 27 2001. LTTE also made a similar request to Norway on January 1 2002. Initially, both parties announced the ceasefire on January 20 and later extended it to last until February 24 2002. Norway wished to continue the one-month long cessation of hostilities announced by both protagonists into a permanent ceasefire by drafting an agreement. This was signed on February 22 and came into force from February 23 2002 (Fowsar, 2012).

4.1 Norway as the mediator

Norway played a pivotal role in taking forward the peace process in Sri Lanka from the year 2000. However, it had contributed significantly to global peace by playing the role of an international peace broker from the early 1990s (Paramanathan, 2007). Norway is by no means a world power. But building world peace is a cornerstone of its foreign policy. It has had a good reputation as a peaceful nation in the world (Rupasinghe, 2006). Norway has traditionally had a broadminded national ethos. Even if the government changes or the internal policies change,

the country's passion for building world peace never dims. Its determination to pursue a policy of peacebuilding wherever possible remains firm (Paramanathan, 2007).

Norway's internal policy is based on tolerance and accommodation, which has made it easy for it to handle peace and conciliation issues naturally. Moreover, Norway has extensive experience in working with both National and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and has played vital roles in many peace processes across the globe. It has participated in peace efforts in the Middle-East, Guatemala, Columbia, Philippines and other countries. Norway is also considered a neutral state. It has never colonized foreign territories, and it has no political or economic motives or other hidden agendas (Paramanathan, 2007).

Moreover, Norway is on good terms with all countries and does not engage in power politics. It maintains contact with all other countries that are also interested in global peace. It is always at the forefront of all international peacebuilding activities. The fact that the Nobel Institute that awards Nobel prizes is headquartered in Oslo should be a good indicator of the concern that Norway has for peace. The reasons mentioned above can be taken as convincing evidence of Norway's unique credentials to serve as a mediator and peace facilitator (Fowsar, 2012).

Where Sri Lanka is concerned, there are additional reasons for choosing Norway to contribute to its quest for peace. Norway has no political or economic interests in the South Asian Region, and it has been sponsoring a development aid program in Sri Lanka for a very long time (Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation – NORAD and the Norwegian Children's Fund – Redd Barna) (Paramanathan, 2007). The Norwegian delegation has maintained contact with the decision-makers on both sides and been engaged in building goodwill between them over a long period of time. Norway has maintained confidentiality in the peace process according to the wishes of both the Government and the rebels (Fowsar, 2012).

A long-running sentiment of many in respect of the festering ethnic problem is that it is absolutely essential to arrange an external party as a mediator if any progress was to be made. Both the Government and the LTTE had often expressed their willingness to engage in political negotiations with the assistance of a foreign mediator. As a result of this, Norway took on the role of mediator. However, at the higher levels of the government hierarchy, Norway's involvement was viewed as mere facilitation. Sri Lankan former Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar declared, "We do not need a mediator. We only need a facilitator". He said this because the Government wished to avoid the impression of foreign intrusion in addressing the ethnic problem (Rupesinghe, 2006).

Norway's involvement in Sri Lanka's peace efforts unofficially commenced in 1998. But it was only in February 2004 when both President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran requested Norway to participate as the third party and work out a solution that it accepted the call and took on the official role. However, Norway's initial effort did not yield any useful result. The new UNF government that came to power in 2001 also requested Norway to take on the role of facilitator in Sri Lanka's peace effort. At this time the LTTE too welcomed Norway's participation. Even ex-president Chandrika Kumaratunga approved of Norway's role in the peace process. Norway was keen to work on the process as well. Accordingly, Norwegian parliamentarian Erik Solheim was appointed as the Special Advisor of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry to the Sri Lankan peace process. Following this, a new peace initiative was officially launched with Norway as the main facilitator.

4.2 Ceasefire Agreement

One of the major outcomes of Norway's mediating effort was a Ceasefire Agreement. In the year 2000, the LTTE declared a unilateral cessation of hostilities. However, the People's Alliance (PA) government headed by President Kumaratunga did not reciprocate this gesture. Then there was a change of Government, and the United National Front (UNF) came to power after the electoral victory on December 5 2001. The LTTE again announced a cessation of hostilities and the new Government responded by announcing a cessation of hostilities on its part. In order to formalize this arrangement, both parties signed a Ceasefire Agreement on February 22, 2002, with Norway's facilitation.

The Ceasefire Agreement consisted of a preamble and four articles. The preface expressed the hope of both parties to refrain further violence and establish a positive environment to bring a political solution to the conflict. Other four articles verbalized modalities of a ceasefire, measures to restore normalcy, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and entry into force, amendments and termination of the agreement respectively. This agreement came into force with effect from February 23 2002. Both parties then agreed to the formation of a ceasefire monitoring mission to implement the provisions of the ceasefire agreement. Accordingly, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) was then formed to inquire into any instance of violation of the terms and conditions of the ceasefire agreement, which included representatives of both Nordic and other countries.

However, several hardline social forces and groups kept protesting, claiming that this agreement infringed the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Even President Kumaratunga shared this view. At the same time, it must be noted that some Anti-LTTE Tamil parties too expressed their opposition to this agreement. In any case, the ceasefire agreement only served to restore a temporary peace without any battle action, and the ceasefire agreement laid the foundation for a peace effort by reducing the intensity of the war. Even when the agreement was in force, many incidents and infractions were regularly occurring, but they were far less threatening than all-out war. Still, it must be noted that during the latter stages and well before the agreement lapsed, and both sides were fighting an undeclared war.

Whatever might have been the shortcomings of the ceasefire agreement, it did, in fact, represent an important milestone. According to Anton Balasingham (2004), “the only substantial achievement of the entire peace process was the Ceasefire Agreement...” Norwegian diplomat Erik Solheim also stated during an interview that one of the important benefits of the peace process was the ceasefire agreement. In this way, the Ceasefire Agreement was the most important product of the peace process. An important aspect of this agreement was that it was far more effective than the cessation of hostilities that prevailed at the time the People’s Alliance Government was in power.

4.3 Six Rounds Direct Peace Talks

An important feature of Norway facilitated the peace process was the six rounds of direct peace talks that were held. Notably, after the ceasefire agreement went into effect, it was expected that in order to restore faith and confidence between the two parties, Norway would arrange face-to-face peace talks. But as the Tigers were a proscribed terrorist organization, it was not legally permissible for the Government to hold discussions with them. To overcome this legal obstacle, the Government lifted the ban on the LTTE and published a gazette notification to that effect to pave the way for the talks (Gooneratne, 2007).

Six rounds of direct talks took place with Norway’s facilitation during the period from September 2002 until April 2003. Following the first round of negotiations held at Thailand’s Sattahip Naval Base, five more rounds of talks took place in quick succession in Norway, Germany, Japan and so on. After these six rounds of negotiations, in April 2003 the Tigers withdrew temporarily from the peace talks. Therefore, further discussions were temporarily suspended. No effort was made to hold another round of negotiations. So the peace talks came to an end after only six rounds of talks. Despite that, both at national and international levels, the six rounds of talks were considered to be a good beginning.

However, these six rounds of talks did incorporate some distinctive features. They were: as four sub-committees were appointed it was possible to proceed with the negotiations in an organized manner; it was assumed that the interest was taken in addressing the immediate problems and reaching agreement on same and the experience gained would assist in finding solutions to the more fundamental issues; both parties agreed to explore the possibility of establishing a federal system with some autonomy within a united Sri Lanka; in order to take forward the peace process the talks adopted a step-by-step approach; though disagreements frequently arose between the parties, these were usually sorted out through discussion. Though there were several positive aspects to the talks, there were also some negative aspects. Ultimately, the negative aspects proved responsible for the failure of the negotiations.

4.4 Oslo Declaration

Among the remarkable achievements of the peace process were the decisions reached in Oslo. The term ‘Oslo Declaration’ refers to the set of decisions made during the third round of peace talks that were held in Oslo. The crucial feature of the Oslo Declaration was that both parties agreed in principle to explore the possibility of establishing a federal system of Government with some autonomous powers within a united Sri Lanka. A significant achievement of the peace process was that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who had been fighting for an independent homeland for three decades, had been persuaded to examine the idea of federalism. The fact that not only the Tigers but the Government of Sri Lanka had also agreed to consider this proposal was seen as a significant step forward in reaching an understanding between the parties. The willingness of both parties to find this option pointed out their knowledge of reality. Consequently, the Oslo Declaration served to reinforce both parties’ faith in the peace process besides providing a starting point for those who might be seeking a solution in the future (Balasingham, 2004).

When the United National Front Government was in power, the Oslo Declaration was widely publicized, and it also had extensive international support. But after this Government lost power and the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) took over the reins of power, the new Government did not pay much attention to this matter. Furthermore, the United National Party that had earlier agreed to consider a Federal solution later found itself caught in a power struggle. This caused it to backtrack from its earlier position on federalism and then practically

abandon this idea. However, it must be said that the Oslo Declaration provided a powerful impetus to Sri Lanka's peace process. Further, it provided a clear picture of the workings of the peace process to the international community.

4.5 Donor Conferences

Another important aspect of the peace process was that it enabled Sri Lanka to receive a large quantum of foreign aid through the donor conferences. Both parties involved in the peace talks kept asking for assistance from the international community constantly. It was due to this reason that the Oslo and Tokyo donor conferences were held and then they made donations to both parties. So there was, in fact, a close connection between the donor conferences and the peace process. Because of the long-running civil war, this country had suffered a lot of destruction. Especially in certain areas of the North and East, there had been total destruction, and this called for urgent humanitarian aid as well as immediate restoration of basic infrastructure facilities and other services. It was totally beyond the capacity of the Sri Lankan government to raise funds needed for this purpose.

Even as the early rounds of talks began, the immediate needs were identified, and both parties called for funds from the international community to fulfil those needs. Following these formal requests, certain donor countries convened aid conferences in Oslo and Tokyo with the intention of providing funds for the humanitarian, restoration and basic infrastructural activities in the war-ravaged areas. It is notable that even before the Tokyo conference started, a preparatory conference was held in Washington, DC.

4.6 Geneva Talks

The talks that took place in Geneva can be pointed out as that part of the peace process that occurred after Mahinda Rajapaksa became president. The Geneva talks between the Sri Lanka government and the Liberation Tigers was carried out in two stages. Both parties participated in the negotiations with different agendas in the two sittings.

The first Geneva talks (known as Geneva 1) were held on the 22nd and 23rd of February, 2006. The main topic was about the need to strengthen the ceasefire agreement, which was being rendered ineffective by the increase in violence that had occurred. Therefore, both parties agreed to discuss only the ceasefire at these talks. As the Government and the LTTE wished to speak about the humanitarian and political issues, they requested additional sittings. Complying with their request, meetings were arranged for the 28th and 29th of October, 2006, and talks took place. These are known as the Geneva 2 talks.

Considering both rounds of talks in Geneva, their main shortcoming was that they were not based on a well-defined framework. Both parties used these talks mainly to express their demands and direct accusations at the other side. The Geneva talks differed entirely from the previous six rounds of talks that were held during the time of the United National Front government. Therefore, the Geneva talks ended up as failures.

4.7 Resurgence of the War and Post-War Reconciliation

A series of the battle between government forces and LTTE resumed following the failure of the Geneva peace talks. There have been explosions in several places and a suicide attack on Sri Lanka's army commander. While the ceasefire was in effect, a full-scale war broke out between the two sides. The Government took control over the Eastern Province and withdrew from the ceasefire on January 2, 2008. In this regards, the United States, Canada and Norway, which co-chaired the peace talks, expressed their concerns. The Government, however, did not back down from its position. After the Eastern Province was liberated from the LTTE's control, military operation towards Northern province was immediately launched. The Tigers suffered a series of defeats in the war that lasted more than a year. On May 18, 2009, the Sri Lankan government announced the death of the LTTE leader and declared the war victory.

After the end of the war, efforts to pursue reconciliation repeatedly surfaced in Sri Lanka's domestic political scene and certain foreign countries including Norway also urged the ethnic reconciliation. While President Mahinda Rajapaksa was in power, he adopted a triumphalist attitude against minorities and used the war victory to consolidate his power in national politics. He did this by repealing the Seventeenth Amendment, which restricted presidential power by transferring several important powers to a constitutional council. He also forced through the Eighteenth Amendment to enable him to contest the presidential election for an unprecedented third term (Hoglund & Orjuela, 2011; Stokke & Uyangoda, 2011). However, due to pressure from various quarters, his Government commissioned an internal process for reconciliation through the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). The LLRC conducted inquiries in different parts of the country to investigate the violations that were alleged to have taken place during the period between 2002 and 2009. Subsequently, the report was handed over to the president in 2011. Unfortunately, few of the recommendations proposed in the report have been fully implemented while many have been only partially implemented or not at all (Uyangoda & Peiris, 2012).

By bringing about the regime change in 2015, the previous Government's victory consolidation approach was strategically defeated by a coalition government. Soon after his electoral victory, Maithripala Sirisena became president of the country, and he appointed Ranil Wickremesinghe as the prime minister. His Government immediately abandoned the previous Government's approach and adopted a new course of action that may be described as a peace consolidation approach. Soon after this, the Government conducted the parliamentary election and formed the so-called national Government, which was a coalition of the two major political parties, United National Party (UNP) and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Sirisena's Government introduced the Nineteenth Amendment to the constitution, which restored the restrictions on presidential power again and initiated several processes including the formulation of a new constitution to bring about reconciliation among the various ethnic communities of the country. However, the present Government headed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa that came to power at the end of 2019 did not initiate any meaningful process to the political settlement of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict.

5. Conclusion

A series of peace negotiations were initiated to find a political solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict with regional and international mediators assisting in the process. The Norwegian Government facilitated a successful peace negotiation in 2002, which led to a two-year ceasefire between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. Though Norway continued its efforts as a facilitator for an extended period of time to bring the Island's ethnic conflict to an end, it had to confront serious obstacles in its quest to take forward its mission and bring the warring parties together due to the unfavourable conditions that prevailed in the local political scene. Eventually, all initiatives of Norwegian mediator failed after a period, and the armed insurgency did not come to an end until 2009. In May 2009, the government forces defeated the LTTE militarily and declared the victory. The end of the civil war presented a new opportunity to bring about reconciliation in the country. However, the victorious governments did not feel obliged to initiate any meaningful process to address the grievances of the minority Tamils.

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