

A Brief Analysis of Conflict Intervention in the Sri Lankan Civil War

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Abstract: Since the post-Cold War era to the current development of world multi-polarization, the global society has maintained a situation of overall peace, ease and stability, but local wars, turbulence and tension, among which conflict intervention has increasingly become a hot issue. Rather than being a conventional form of confrontation just involving the two sides, a conflict will always involve third-party actors such as great powers and international institutions. This article aims to illustrate the most appropriate role for international actors in a conflict society through analyzing the intervention case in the Sri Lankan Civil War while referencing some arguments about international norms and morality.

Keywords: Military intervention, Mediation, The United Nations, Geopolitical.

1. Intervention Background

Sri Lanka is a tropical island of the Indian Ocean, located in south of Indian Peninsula and it is also a member state of the Commonwealth of Nations. Sri Lanka Civil War is a conflict between the government of Sri Lanka (the GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (the LTTE, also known as the Tamil Tigers), which aimed to create an independent Tamil state in the northeast of the island. After the independence of Sri Lanka, Sinhalese people, who constitute 75% of the Sri Lankan population, have mastered the state power and the Tamil people (comprise about 24% of the population) have been increasingly dissatisfied with the government's national policy (Department of Census & Statistics, 2012). As a response, they established Tamil United Liberation Front, among which the LTTE is an extremist organization and in 1983 it launched a large-scale national insurgency in capital Colombo, resulting in a lot of casualties. This has intensified the already serious ethnic contradictions in the country, which has led to a protracted civil war. Until May of 2009, when the leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, was killed, this war has been going on for 26 years and has caused at least 80,000 people death and most are innocent civilians (ABC Australia, 2009). India, the United States, Britain, Canada and the European Union has successively put the LTTE on their list of terrorist organizations.

On the one hand, in the 1980s, the Indian government decided to deliver military force to intervene Sri Lanka conflict. India officially claimed that it was in order to help the government calm the rebellion of the LTTE and save more people's lives. On the other hand, there are some other states and international organizations such as Norway, the US and the EU which thought it extremely difficult for India to resolve the conflict just through hard power especially facing increasingly ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka. Instead, they tended to intervene the conflict through diplomatic and peaceful way. According to Darby & MacGinty (2008), peacemaking can be regard as political and diplomatic efforts to bring a peaceful resolution to a conflict and it does not allow a force to make the contending parties find a solution.

2. Intervention Details

2.1. Military Intervention from India

India is the most "enthusiastic" participant in Sri Lanka's domestic crisis. In view of the characteristics of different stages of the conflict in Sri Lanka, India has taken the corresponding intervention strategies. In the beginning of the war, rather than supporting the Sri Lanka government, India choose to help the LTTE: they deliver supplies, weapons to the LTTE while providing militants of the LTTE with training bases, which makes the GOSL very passive. As a response, the GOSL have repeatedly protested to the Government of India. In 1987, the government of India changed sides in the war and signed a peace agreement with the GOSL. Then it persisted in the military intervention in this conflict and sent about one hundred and fifty thousand troops to Sri Lanka so as to help the GOSL to quell the rebels of the Tigers guerrillas (Khobragade, 2008). However, the involvement of Indian armed forces not only did not destroy the force of LTTE effectively but also made the military clashes between the GOSL and the LTTE intensified. Due to suffering a heavy loss, India finally decided to withdraw from Sri Lanka in March 1990. Indian troops stationed in Sri Lanka for two years and eight months, whereas what they got from the intervention are a huge spending and nearly ten thousand soldier casualties.

A mistake was made in believing that the Indian peacekeeping force would be able to contain the LTTE insurgency (ICG report, 2006). Regan (2000) also holds a negative attitude toward outside interventions which, he indicates, are likely to increase the duration of internal war. In fact, the military intervention of India has widely been condemned as an illegitimate and unethical action by international public opinion, although the government of India insisted that their intervention is out of humanitarian purposes. Even both the GOSL and the LTTE regarded its involvement as a serious violation of their national sovereignty. After retreat, India pursued a policy of non-intervention and neutrality in this issue, but it failed to get the understanding from the LTTE. In 1991, Rajiv Gandhi, Former Prime Minister of India was killed in a human bomb assassination hatched by the LTTE. There is some voice that

the Indian peacekeeping force was to fight for their national interests under the guise of helping reducing innocent casualties caused by LTTE. More specifically, it is because of geopolitical considerations (the control of the Indian Ocean) that provoked India to militarily intervene. In an obvious contrast to the failed military intervention, since 2000 a series of bilateral talks Norway facilitated have brought the hope of securing a peace settlement between the two parties.

2.2. A soft way--the mediation of Norway

Format Mediation is regarded by many people as the most common and effective solution for conflict management. "Mediation facilitates the transfer of information quite efficiently. An outside mediator serves as the conduit for information, ideas, and possible concessions that civil war parties would not possibly convey without a third-party intermediary...Absent an outside intervention, the information held by the warring parties is at best asymmetrical." (Regan and Aydin 2006) At the invitation of Chandrika Kumaratunga in 2000, the president of Sri Lanka (1994-2005), Norway began to mediate between the GOSL and the LTTE and finally after several rounds of negotiations, both parties signed an agreement on a permanent ceasefire in 2002. Although the LTTE withdrew from the peace talks in 2003, it still stayed in the ceasefire agreement. Despite suffering some setbacks, the government of Norway decided to restart the mediation process of Sri Lanka repeatedly in the following five years, helping both parties reach a consensus in some disputes such as high degree of autonomy. According to Höglund (2004), the government and the LTTE did not choose to establish a contact after the outbreak of the war and they lacked a third party who should provide a platform for the both them to clear up their misunderstanding concerning the motives behind their actions. In this case, the diplomatic intervention of Norway Government provide an ideal channel for both the government and the LTTE to know mutual preference and help them reach a mutually acceptable solution.

Differing from the coercive military intervention of India, the soft power way Norway adopted in Sri Lanka has been widely supported by the international community because of its convincing legitimacy. In the United Nations Charter, Article 2(4) states: 'All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.' And article 2(7) states: 'Nothing contained in the present Chart shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Chart, but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.' It is clear that although the significance of coercive military involvement is not denied, hard power intervention, according to the UN's principles, should be advocated as the last resort. That is why the legitimacy of some intervention actions of the NATO such as in Libya has been challenged: they actively advocated military intervention in a situation that there was still is a room for negotiation. Moreover, they did not end the war and their true purposes were also questioned by international society. In the contrast, the United States played the role of mediator in Northern Ireland peace process. America's mediation accelerated the realizing of peace in Northern

Ireland and has been widely accepted by international society. "Soft power 'co-opts rather than coerces people', using the attractiveness of its example, the persuasiveness of its arguments, the appeal of its values, the influence of its advocates and the colour of its money" (Hayward and Murphy, 2012). Similarly, Norway insisted peaceful mediation to solve the conflict in Sri Lanka and this peace process was supported by the robust group of influential international actors including US, Japan, and Germany. It is thus clear its intervention is not only effective but also moral and legitimate.

It is also notable that why Norway, as a small wealthy country in distant Northern Europe, offered to intervene in the Sri Lanka affair—the action of an outsider far away from the conflict seems no bias and much more convincing. "The Norwegian mediators represented a very different type of mediator, seemingly neutral and powerless and ready to take a strictly facilitating role." (Øvstegård, 2008) That is to say, diplomatic intervention can work better in solving a conflict when the mediator is thought to be neutral. "Norway's role... enhance Norway's legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of conflict parties who are less likely to perceive them as motivated by self-interest, as well as in the eyes of other regional players who do not see them as a threat." (Goodhand, et al, 2011)

3. Summary

This essay has taken the Sri Lanka Civil War for example, showing the unique significance of diplomatic mediation in conflict resolution through comparison with a failed violent intervention of great power, while arguing the legitimization of diplomatic intervention in terms of international support and Charter of the UN. It is true that outside intervention can have a positive impact on war termination, but they are also likely to prolong the war. In this case, the military intervention is not a thorough solution, just same as that death penalty cannot end crimes, whereas diplomatic mediation, like those efforts Norway did, can help establish a communication bridge between warring parties, thereby preventing the further escalation of the conflict. "Norwegian peace engagement continues to enjoy broad political support and to be an important part of Norway's foreign policy. Norway's peace efforts in Sri Lanka thus fit within a larger set of foreign policy engagements over the past two decades" (Goodhand, et al, 2011). Clearly, instead of being a violent interventionist, a peaceful mediator is more likely to be an appropriate role for international actors in the domestic conflict of Sri Lanka.

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