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Analysing the Sri Lankan civil war through the lens of conflict resolution theory [version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review]

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Abstract

The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict can be identified as a landmark event in recent history, reflecting a visible social disunion between the majority and minority ethnic communities. Sri Lanka witnessed a major turnover of events, from circumscribed ethnic clashes to a full-scale civil war. The ripple effects of this Sri Lankan civil war crossed borders and it was neighbouring India that bore the brunt. Responding to the crisis, the Sri Lankan government deployed forces to contain the growing insurgency and involved external powers for added assistance. Neutral third parties were also involved for an unbiased resolution to Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict. However, there were a multitude of shortcomings that restricted the scope for a successful conflict resolution. This paper highlights both conditions for success and failure of conflict resolution, and the use of third-party intervention as a crucial toolkit. It also throws light on the pre-conditions that were set for introducing third-party intervention in Sri Lankan, exposing the limitations that led to the fateful end of the Sri Lankan civil war. This research points out the equation between roles of third-party mediators and behavioural patterns of the disputed parties in conflict resolution processes. Theory teaches us how third-party intervention can be used as a preferred tool in attaining desirable outcomes. However, application of such tools become subjective on ground, depending upon the behaviour of the parties involved and their intentions towards solutions. Thus, exposing a variety of challenges that the mediators are often unprepared for. Such unpreparedness of third-party negotiators brings to the surface the drawbacks of this method of conflict resolution. Challenges faced in the Sri Lankan peace process uncovered the shortcomings of third-party mediation. This study holds potential to drive future researchers closer to exploring means to minimize the impacts of such limitations on forthcoming reconciliations.
Keywords
Conflict Resolution, Sri Lanka, Civil War, Third-party intervention, Mediation, Peace Process, International Community

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Introduction

Conflicts can be understood as the phenomenon of clash of interests. The root cause may vary from personal to political or between families and communities. Understanding the causes and consequences of conflicts is considered integral in studying the evolution of social sciences, as energies released from conflicts evolve societies to the following stage. Conflicts bring along with it conflict resolution, which is essentially a process in which institutions and policy options negotiate the needs of parties involved in the dispute. Therefore, an effective negotiation establishes the basis of a successful conflict resolution.\(^1\) The above stated definition is an ideal situation of conflict resolution, which for various reasons differ from the ground reality. Resolution to conflicts is not only subjected to academic theories but also by inputs from field applications and practical understandings. Conflict resolvers or peace facilitators envision a harmonious world, where clashes can be avoided with the help of dialogues and mediations, and willingness to cooperate from the parties involved.

The groundwork of conflict resolution laid out between 1946–1969, was aimed at future reconciliation.\(^2\) Amongst them the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European coal and steel community, and the World Bank are some of the notable examples.\(^3\) One of the first conflict resolution conferences was held in Switzerland in 1946 to bring together people from different regions, living in conflict. The initiative was taken to mediate the conflicts and reach a mutual understanding through negotiation. Unbiased and correct analyses of conflicts are one of the key elements for a successful resolution. Correct analyses of conflicts help in determining appropriate actions or strategies to be applied for maximum effectiveness. Practices of conflict resolution has evolved over time and focus on generating solutions are designed to benefit both sides.\(^4\)

Having been introduced to the basic tenets of conflict resolution, one example that defies the ideals of conflict resolution is the failed peace process in Sri Lanka. The decades-long ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is one of those events whose imprints are still evident to this day through the social divide in Sri Lankan society. The peace process in Sri Lanka is a comprehensive study of conflict resolution in a violent society that brings along a multitude of challenges and limitations in carrying out a successful conflict resolution.

The Sri Lankan peace process largely witnessed the use of third-party intervention as an indispensable toolkit, aiming to reach a negotiated settlement. As we will study later in the chapter, third-party interventions or external engagements bear the potential to yield positive outcomes. However, in the Sri Lankan case, the limitations and challenges became too overwhelming for peace custodians to reach any accords with the negotiations. In the given scenario, this research paper aims to identify whether third-party intervention, which is considered as a crucial tool for successful conflict resolution, can always yield the desired results. To reach a definite answer to this question, this paper navigated through all the possibilities that could have been undertaken in order to understand the third-party intervention in the Sri Lankan case. This study attempts to assess the hypothesis that, having applied the most sought-after tool in conflict resolution amidst the presence of neutral parties and adequate foreign aids, the Sri Lankan peace process had limitless opportunities for a successful peace process. Despite this, the failure makes it equally significant to understand the shortcomings and varied challenges that were posed, and to determine the lessons learnt that could help avert future contentions.

The methodology for this study involved analysing the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict through the lens of conflict resolution theory, focusing on the tool of third-party intervention. ‘Third-party intervention’ was used as one of the tools of conflict resolution practices, involving external actors and their contribution towards the peace process. The paper pinpoints the conditions of a successful conflict resolution and identifies the gaps and absence of such conditions in the case of the Sri Lankan conflict. The existing literature helped in a larger way to substantiate the argument. Apart from traditional practices, the paper also sheds light on contemporary analyses of conflict resolution theory in order to understand different approaches of the theory and its application in the Sri Lankan model.

Understanding conflict resolution

Conflict resolution is largely defined in terms of the efforts made to resolve any ongoing conflict and reaching a mutually negotiated settlement. Conflicts arise when two players fight for a similar interest. Contradictions in ideologies and values have contributed to a surge in violent uprisings in the past. Inter-religious, inter-communal, and ethnic conflicts have also been major contributors to some of the most violent social discords. The equilibrium of power plays a major role in the need for resolving a dispute. When an opponent to authority possesses influence, the need for a peace settlement of dispute arises. Whereas in the case of weaker opponents, such uprisings are usually suppressed at the nascent stage, crushing its potential from becoming a war from a conflict. Such as the Tiananmen Square massacre where the Chinese student-led demonstration for democracy, free speech, and free press in China was crushed mercilessly by government-backed Chinese armed troops and hundreds of armored vehicles, in order to “restore order in the capital”.\(^5\) The protesting students were silenced at an

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1. John Burton, “The Theory of Conflict Resolution” in *Current Research on Peace and Violence* 9 (3) Conflict and Conflict Resolution (1986): 125
   [https://www.jstor.org/stable/40725036](https://www.jstor.org/stable/40725036)
2. Louis Kriesberg, “The Evolution of Conflict Resolution,” in *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremer and I. William Zartman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009): 5
3. Ibid. 5
4. Ibid. 5
5. “1989 Tiananmen Square protests”, Amnesty International UK-China, May 31, 2019,
   [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/china-1989-tiananmen-square-protests-demonstration-massacre](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/china-1989-tiananmen-square-protests-demonstration-massacre)
early stage, leaving no scope of them turning insurgents in the future. This is not necessarily called conflict resolution but what we will later study as muscle mediation. The following section defines both the traditional and contemporary approaches of conflict resolution, drawing a distinction between compromised decision making to a more problem-solving approach.

Traditional models of conflict resolution consist of power bargaining, dispute settlement, mediation, and negotiation. Analysts have defined power bargaining as coercive decision-making in order to arrive at a dispute settlement.\(^6\) Having said that, conflict resolution has evolved from enforced or compromised decisions to a more problem-solving approach. The concept of mediation in conflict resolution has evolved from seeking reasonable compromises to facilitation. Facilitation helps warring parties agree to a common understanding, re-defining relationship, clarify individual goals and discover options which meet individual needs. Negotiation techniques suggest that in order to reach an effective understanding, accommodating interests of both sides in a dispute is essential for bringing stability. Traditional conflict resolution aims at restoring interests, which ultimately results in either winning or losing. What is left unconsidered are the non-negotiable values that reflect certain group’s identity needs. When groups refrain from socializing into behavioural practices that run counter to their natural system, such situations do not lead to healthy conflict resolution environment.\(^7\)

The evolution of conflict resolution is not only confined to problem solving but also transforming the discourse of relationships. Contemporary analysis views conflicts through the lens of transformation. Conflict transformation necessarily reflects two important aspects, that is, positive orientation towards conflict and willingness to change. In such circumstances, conflict is no more seen as a tool for destruction but rather a facilitator of constructive change, and an opportunity to grow along with situations. A transformational approach towards conflict resolution seeks constructive changes, using the energy that conflicts generate.\(^8\)

Tools for conflict resolution: Communication plays a significant role for any attempt of conflict resolution, irrespective of its intensity. Communication can initiate dialogues and talks as one of the key elements for conflict resolution. Adrian Guelke lists out some of the crucial stages of dialogues that can be directional to a successful peace settlement.\(^6\) He first describes pre-talk stage as the one where parties to the conflict are initially reluctant to enter negotiations as they believe that their objectives could be achieved using other means, preferably physical means. Having said that, negotiations not only provide legitimacy to the demands to the insurgents but also give opportunity to the government to engage with the opponents at an earlier stage of a conflict. Conflicts usually represent a complicated structure that is highly unlikely to be resolved by the conflicted sides themselves. In that case, a third-party presence is well-appreciated in bridging the gap and bringing the two sides to the negotiation table. On many occasions, conflicted parties show unwillingness for a face-to-face negotiation and in situations like this the need for proximity talk arises, as explained by Guelke. In proximity talks, either the third-party or the negotiator acts as a shuttle of communication between the two delegations.\(^9\)

The most widely used tool in conflict resolution is third-party intervention. A neutral third-party intervention firstly, is a functional structure in international relations (like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), responsible for restoring international peace and security), secondly, consciously employed by international actors, and lastly, is involved on the request of adversaries. External engagement in any conflict is considered vital as it involves fact-findings and enquiry, and it acts as a tool to break the ice with systematic communications. Third party involvement is sometimes considered as a preferred mean to settle disputes, especially when internal parties are unable to reach an understanding. Gerald Eisenkopf and André Bächtinger stress three key characteristics, of communication, punishment, and mediator interests which manipulates the third-party mediation. While explaining communication, they pointed out that the availability of information in the public domain is a tool for effective mediation.\(^7\) Information lessens uncertainty and that helps disputants to perceive the conflict transparently and put forward their bargaining terms accordingly. With regards to punishment, the authority vested in mediators to penalize adversaries in case of the violation of peace terms can influence conflict resolutions in a major way. Mediator interests also help in shaping outcomes of conflict resolution. Under an ideal situation, unbiased mediation proves most effective. However, many have argued that a mediator’s biasness can put pressure on its ally as well as extract concessions from the favoured side.\(^10\) Foreign involvement is also desirable when a third-party mediator is approached by the adversaries, which is quite relevant in the Sri Lankan case as Norway was approached by both by the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil rebel organization.\(^11\)

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6 John Burton, op. cit., p. 125
7 John Burton, op. cit., pp. 125–129
8 John Paul Lederach and Michelle Maise, excerpt from “The Little Book of Conflict Transformation” (Good Books, 2003)
http://peacebuildingforlanguagelearners.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/73426925/Lederach%20and%20Maise%20Conflict%20Transformation.pdf
9 Adrian Guelke, “Negotiations and Peace Processes,” Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes, ed. John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty, Palgrave Macmillan, New York (2003), pp. 57–60
10 Gerald Eisenkopf and André Bächtinger, “Mediation and Conflict Prevention”, The Journal of Conflict Resolution 57, no. 4 (2013), pp. 570–572
https://www.jstor.org/stable/24545609
11 Jacob Bercovitch, “Third Parties in Conflict Management: The Structure and Conditions of Effective Mediation in International Relations,” International Journal 40, no.4 (Autumn, 1985): 737–739
https://www.jstor.org/stable/40202320
Conditions for success in conflict resolution: Successful conflict resolution requires a multitude of conditions, which in coherence could lead to several positive outcomes. Emeric Rogier stresses that peace processes are most likely to yield positive outcomes when driven internationally. His study points out three core conditions that are absolutely necessary for successful conflict resolution, which are coherence, commitment, and consistency. Participating actors are required to synchronize their actions because lack of coherence, as Rogier puts it out, can lead to detrimental effects on conflict resolution. Capabilities to reduce differences in opinion, sharing common understanding of the problems, and a shared position for the solution yields greater coherence in any decision making. When multiple actors are involved in peace settlements, optimizing differences in opinion can lead to greater coherence. Consistency is another key factor for success in peace settlements. The right policy implementation, meeting the needs of the ground reality, is what defines consistency. Rogier acknowledges that consistency in peace processes should not come in a pre-formatted range of options, rather the conflict should be understood with respect to the situation on the ground, such as the intensity of the conflict and the commitments of parties towards peace. Having said that, participating actors’ commitments towards long-standing peace settlements also enhances success in conflict resolutions. Commitments do not necessarily always refer to resources provided by negotiators, but also their willingness and dedication to end the conflict, irrespective of the means required. Apart from the conflicted parties, commitments from the third-party is arguably more crucial for successful outcomes, which is ideally derived from their commitment to persist against all odds and not resigning after initial failures.

Violence in conflict resolution: Violence acts as a major setback as it not only escalates tensions but also affects the confidence building measures, leading to disruption of faith. Authors like John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty have stressed that no peace process could yield result if parties involved are indulged in acts of violence or use forces to achieve their objectives. On many occasions, intra-party dynamics often alters according to the choice to resort to the use of violence. For example, if one faction of an organization chooses the route of using violent means in achieving their objective, the other faction prefers dialogues or other peaceful means. As Kristine Hoglund argues, violence can not only impact adversaries’ contributions to negotiation but also poses greater threat to external actors or custodians to negotiations. Violent situations can compel parties to withdraw from peace processes. Similarly, violence can also disrupt and weaken peace negotiations by driving external actors to withdraw from the process. Peace custodians are often targeted by adversary groups who prefer no external mediation and would rather choose violence as the only way to achieve their aim.

On the other hand, it has also been argued that violence, apart from being a breaker of peace processes, also holds the potential of pushing hesitant parties towards peaceful settlements. Stephen John Stedman has pointed out certain key factors that can facilitate the processes of peace implementations. First, is to identify and overcome the spoiler behaviour that either comes from a leader or the followers’ ill-intentions towards peace settlements that can be detrimental to the progress of a potential peace-making process. The second most significant point made was the demobilization of armed forces and re-integrating them into civilian life. This helps to lessen differences between the two sides and encourages them to work for self-help solutions. Stedman has also highlighted the significance of long-term peacebuilding and how reforms in the role of civil society organisations and reduction in use of force can facilitate peace implementations. Violence in peace processes makes one realise the importance of ceasefires and peace agreements. Kristine Hoglund states that peace agreements are often viewed in different lights in varying situations. In some cases, she argued, ceasefire agreements are considered pre-requisite for parties to begin negotiation, whereas in other cases ceasefires are often the outcomes of comprehensive peace agreements. Many have argued that ceasefires are significant beginnings in conflict resolution as it helps build trust and confidence.

Ethnic conflicts, however, are occasionally less responsive to mediation or negotiation, as disputed parties are expected to reach compromised understandings. As a matter of fact, the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict stands as a perfect example in this case because mediation or negotiation for both Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government meant less gains and more compromises. In some instances, resolutions are achieved through muscle power, also called ‘mediation-with-muscle’ as conceptualised by Kingsley M. De Silva while stating the concept as one of the structural approaches to conflict resolution. Such a practice eventually does more damage than good. Mediation-with-muscle does not necessarily mean problem solving, rather it reflects enforced decisions on the weaker side. The Indian peacekeeping mission in Sri Lanka can be viewed as one such muscle-mediation, which not only did little for conflict resolution but also affected India’s

12 Emeric Rogier, “Strategizing Conflict Resolution.” Rethinking Conflict Resolution in Africa: Lessons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Sudan. Clingendael Institute, 2004, p. 29
http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05412.7

13 Ibid. pp. 29–31

14 Kristine Hoglund, “Violence-Catalyst or Obstacle to Conflict Resolution: Seven Propositions Concerning the Effect of Violence on Peace Negotiations,” Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University (September 2001), p. 5
http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1451987/FULLTEXT01.pdf

15 Ibid. pp. 5–8

16 Stephen John Stedman, “Peace Processes and the Challenges of Violence,” Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes, ed. John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty. Palgrave Macmillan, New York (2003), pp. 106–110

17 Kristine Hoglund. op. cit.
national interest and damaged their reputation. The assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by LTTE suicide bombers in May 1991 proves how muscle-mediation can be a total loss.  

Failure of conflict resolution: Conflict resolution can result in failure owing to a multitude of reasons. As we studied earlier, a successful peace process can be achieved when shown consistency in peace efforts by both adversaries and mediators, with a regular communication throughout and all groups being cohesive in actions. Having said that, when participating parties fail to work in coherence and show a lack of commitment in their efforts to bring peace, all attempts with conflict resolution starts to take the downward slope. However, use of violent means in achieving objectives dampen the spirit of any peace process and lead to the failure of negotiation. When adversaries use violence despite being in peace agreements, it not only leads to the failure of the peace arrangement but also exhausts faith within each other and reduces scopes for future reconciliations. On certain occasion, the nature of external mediation can also influence the success rate of conflict resolution. Mediators’ imposition of authority on adversaries can be hazardous for the peace process. For instance, India’s ‘unilateral’ decision to send the Indian peacekeeping force (IPKF) to monitor the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Agreement turned out to be a massacre. The word ‘unilateral’ was deliberately used as IPKF was part of the 1987 Peace Accord, which was neither participated with nor approved by LTTE. In that case, India’s use of good offices for peace in Sri Lanka in the future went into vain as the LTTE and the greater Tamil community further viewed India’s participation as biased towards the Sri Lankan government. The following section of the article attempts to discuss the Sri Lankan civil war as a case study and analyse the effects and consequences of external mediation in the conflict.

Sri Lankan civil war: conflict between government and rebel forces

The Sri Lankan civil war was one of the deadliest wars in the history of mankind, which witnessed the usage of some of the most sophisticated weaponry of those times. The Sri Lankan government’s fight against the Tamil radicals was not an easy battle to win. The Tamil militants were some of the most well-trained and highly skilled fighters who had signed up for the Tamil cause. They consisted mostly of the educated Tamil youths who were deprived of their rights and privileges after the Sinhalese government took over after the Sri Lankan independence from the British in 1948.

The birth of Tamil militancy was dated between 1973 to 1977, at the time when Sri Lanka’s northern provinces started to witness political violence between Tamil radicals and Lankan government. In 1975, the youth wing of the premier democratic Tamil party (the Tamil United Liberation Front) officially identified themselves as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). They steered the mass movement, demanding an autonomous Tamil state, Eelam, in Sri Lanka. LTTE emerged as the strongest Tamil nationalist group, among other Tamil radical groups, and was known for their violent war tactics. With respect to use of violence, other Tamil nationalist groups strongly disagreed with LTTE’s operation styles, creating noticeable differences among Tamil supporters.

The Tamil militancy gained momentum from 1983 onwards. Sri Lankan government’s measures of deterrence led to a systematic destruction of the country’s Tamil-held provinces in the north, leading to a full-scale civil war. LTTE insurgents used guerrilla warfare as their methods of attack and trained young recruits in the southern states of India. After establishing hegemony in Jaffna in 1987, LTTE began its systematic attacks on their political oppositions, including rival Tamil nationalist groups.  

LTTE used the lull period of negotiations to eliminate their rival Tamil groups and re-arm themselves. LTTE’s confrontation against the Sri Lankan forces, in keeping them from overrunning LTTE’s stronghold Jaffna, witnessed the use of improvised armour supported by artillery and extensive siegeworks, coupled with high concentration of anti-aircraft weapons. In fact, LTTE was one of the first terrorists’ group who possessed air assets, including aircrafts and an airstrip which also provided surveillance and self-protection means.

LTTE was largely responsible for radicalizing a big section of the Tamil diaspora, who came together to form a political and cultural community through Computer Mediated Communication. Tamil diaspora, known to be one of the largest diasporic communities in the world, had funded LTTE operations. The LTTE went to every length to achieve their Eelam dream, starting from violent attacks on Sri Lankan armed forces, political opponents, kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and forced child recruitment from local Tamil civilians. As M. Sarvananthan called it, the LTTE garnered support through persecution rather than persuasion. The violent methods of LTTE operations met with brutal consequences at the hands of Sri Lankan armed forces. The Escalation of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict into a full-scale civil war called for a conflict resolution with the help of neutral third parties.

Third party intervention in Sri Lanka

Third-party intervention paves the way for communication through dialogues or roundtables and sometimes provides material or financial assistance for post-war rehabilitation and

18 Kingsley M. De Silva, “Conflict Resolution in South Asia,” International Journal on Group Rights 1, no. 4 (1994): 262–265

www.jstor.org/stable/24674523

19 Nira Wickramasinghe, “The Search for Sovereignty: Tamil Separatism/Nationalism,” in Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 293–303.

20 RS Vasan, “Implications of LTTE’s Air Capability,” ORF Commentaries, June 03, 2005.

https://www.orfonline.org/research/implications-of-ltte-s-air-capability/

21 Op. Cit., p. 279.

22 Mutukrishna Sarvananthan, “‘Terrorism’ or ‘Liberation’? Towards a Distinction: A Case Study of the Armed Struggle of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE),” Perspectives on Terrorism 12, no. 2 (April 2018): 6

https://www.jstor.org/stable/26413310
reconstruction. In the Sri Lankan case, efforts were made by both regional as well as international actors to mediate between the government and LTTE. Then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi tried to mediate by using his diplomatic relations with Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene, which led to the formation of the 1987 Peace Accord that deployed IPKF forces in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, for ensuring peacekeeping. Since LTTE was not part of the peace accord, they showed discontentment when IPKF arrived in Sri Lanka. The resistance by the LTTE against IPKF turned the third-party mediation into a muscle-mediation, resulting in a massive failure of India’s peacekeeping mission. In May 1991, the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination by LTTE suicide bombers in Tamil Nadu was an act of revenge against the IPKF operation. The Rajiv Gandhi assassination proved fatal for LTTE as an organization, as following the event New Delhi marked LTTE as a terrorist organization and lost all sympathy for the Tamil-rebels and their cause.²³

In late 1999, the Norwegian peace envoy, Erik Solheim, held talks with the Sri Lankan leader Ranil Wickremesinghe and the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. Norway also engaged with New Delhi in terms of information sharing while trying to mediate the conflict. The Norwegian effort resulted in the drafting of the February 2002 ceasefire agreement. This initiative was welcomed by the international community because both the warring parties accepted the third-party involvement for the first time. Many pointed out that Norway adopted the role of an ‘international social worker’. Along with the ceasefire agreement, there were multiple rounds of peace talks and development conferences, attended by around 20 donor countries who showed willingness to participate in the mediation process.²⁴ With the help of the Norwegian effort, the Sri Lankan government agreed to accept a model that devolved state power, which the LTTE too agreed upon. In correspondence to that, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) was created to monitor the ceasefire, with Norway as the neutral observer.²⁵

The international community not only initiated conflict resolution but, at the same time, assisted Sri Lanka in several rehabilitation projects. Japan, a significant donor country for Sri Lanka, had sent representatives to meet LTTE leadership for rehabilitation projects. Japan, a significant donor country for Sri Lanka but, at the same time, assisted Sri Lanka in several rehabilitation projects. Norway, a significant donor country for Sri Lanka, had sent representatives to meet LTTE leadership for rehabilitation projects. Japan, a significant donor country for Sri Lanka, had sent representatives to meet LTTE leadership for rehabilitation projects. Japan, a significant donor country for Sri Lanka, had sent representatives to meet LTTE leadership for rehabilitation projects. Japan, a significant donor country for Sri Lanka, had sent representatives to meet LTTE leadership for rehabilitation projects. Japan, a significant donor country for Sri Lanka, had sent representatives to meet LTTE leadership for rehabilitation projects.

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²³ Sandra Destradi, “India and the Civil War in Sri Lanka: On the Failures of Regional Conflict Management in South Asia,” German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), no. 154 (December 2010) www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07570
²⁴ N. Manoharan, “Peace Process in Sri Lanka.” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Issue Brief, no. 04 (January 2003) https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09157
²⁵ Hemantha Dayaratne, Comment. “An appraisal of Norway’s Role in Sri Lanka.” IDSA (February 2011) https://idsa.in/idsacomments/AnappraisalofNorway%27sRoleinSriLanka_hdayaratne_030211

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before the February 2002 ceasefire agreement was signed, Japan, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) had rolled out funding for initiating peace processes in the country. All the official development assistance (ODA) to Sri Lanka was channelled through their Ministry of Defence in Colombo, which was highly objected by the LTTE who later demanded direct access to foreign funds.²⁶

**Challenges faced by international actors**

LTTE’s demand for the right to direct access to the foreign funds came as a major challenge for international donors. Granting them such access would have compromised Sri Lanka’s quest for maintaining a unitary system of government. Sri Lankan government’s denial of direct access of funds to LTTE and the latter’s insecurity towards the aiding institutions clearly portrayed the lack of mutual trust and absence of internal coordination.

After the 9/11 attack, the Sri Lankan government received added support from the international community to ban LTTE’s overseas communication and funding from the Tamil diaspora. In April 2003, Washington D.C., who by then was actively engaged in the Sri Lankan peace process, proposed a pre-donor meeting to be held in the United States. LTTE was not welcomed in said meeting since the USA had already listed the group as a terrorist outfit post 9/11. The humiliated LTTE reacted by withdrawing their participation from the Tokyo donor conference, scheduled in June 2003, which was aimed at the distribution of aid in Sri Lanka. The international community, including the European Union (EU), tried hard to materialize the peace negotiations through the formation of the Sri Lanka Donor Co-chairs Group, chairing Norway, USA, the EU, and Japan. In the meantime, the devastating tsunami of December 2004 changed the course of the peace process. Soon the issue of the peace process became intertwined with tsunami aid, deepening mistrust between the two sides as one side accused the other of partial re-distribution of the foreign aid.²⁷

In response to the disastrous tsunami of 2004, a Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) was established in June 2005. The P-TOMS delegated each party their share of responsibility for the post-tsunami reconstruction, allowing some sense of social voice to LTTE. Feeling threatened, the Sinhalese hardliners protested P-TOMS. They claimed that the body was created to ‘deterritorialize’ the Sinhalese Buddhist nation.²⁸ Followed by that, the Sri Lankan supreme court declared certain features of the P-TOMS was unconstitutional. Very soon the tsunami aid was linked to political objectives.

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²⁶ Kristine Höglund and Isak Svensson, “Schizophrenic Soothers: The International Community and Contrast Strategies for Peace-making in Sri Lanka,” Cooperation and Conflict 46, no. 2 (May 2011): 166–184. www.jstor.org/stable/45084636
²⁷ Kristine Höglund and Isak Svensson, op. cit.
²⁸ Rosihan de Silva Wijeyeratne, “Centralization and the cosmology of Buddhism.” Nation, Constitutionalism and Buddhism in Sri Lanka, (New York: Routledge, 2014): 183
and contradicted humanitarian principles, which erased the hope of bringing the communities together.²⁹

Alongside this, LTTE’s refusal to denounce weapons despite the ceasefire, coupled with Sinhala hardliners’ mistrust over the Norwegian peace process, came as a major setback for the mediators. The Buddhist Sinhalese stuck to their demand for a Sinhala majority federal structure.³⁰ LTTE’s attack on the Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga in 1999, violated ceasefire terms and exposed the group’s reluctance to negotiate.³¹ According to SLMM reports, LTTE was responsible for the violation of the 2002 ceasefire agreement and held responsible for child recruitment, using civilians as human shields, abductions and harassments, extortions, and restriction of movement.³² Abducting members of Eelam People’s Democratic Party (EPDP) and Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (Varathar) (EPRLF (V)) were incidents of major breaches of trust.³³

**Failure of conflict resolution**

Norway’s distinguished efforts to resolve the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict were well appreciated. However, the efforts failed to yield positive outcomes due LTTE’s dogged determination on Tamil Eelam that drove the Sri Lankan government closer to oppressive military solutions. Moreover, LTTE’s desperate measure to assassinate Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar in August 2005 unleashed fresh political violence in the country.³⁴

This event completely changed the EU’s outlook towards the group, and they issued travel ban on the LTTE members. Funding from the Tamil diaspora in North America, Western Europe, Australia, India, and Singapore were blocked, hindering the group’s operations. Security situations in Sri Lanka continued to deteriorate and, responding to the widespread violence, the Rajapaksa government opted for a military solution. Considering LTTE’s reluctance to negotiate, Rajapaksa’s decision for military oppression received a nod from the international community while India also backed Sri Lanka’s decision on taking military action. Countries like China, Pakistan, and Iran also supported Rajapaksa’s military intervention. LTTE tried to utilize the influence of the Tamil diaspora to voice against the military oppression, which unfortunately was of little to no help.³⁵

The military assault on LTTE proved fatal when China reportedly provided fighter bombers and other weaponry to Sri Lanka, to be used in the final phase of the Eelam war. Moscow too was willing to assist Sri Lanka in its war. Ultimately, with the help of Chinese advanced weaponry and fighter bombers, the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict came to an end with the LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran death in the jungles of northern Sri Lanka in May 2009.³⁶

The reasons behind the systematic failures of conflict resolution in Sri Lanka can also be attributed to several other factors. Firstly, there was an absolute lack of any internal consensus in post-independence Sri Lanka about minority representation in the country’s political structure. The majority Sinhalese, empowered with the transfer of power, failed to outline rights and representation for the ethnic minorities or religious groups in the country. An intentional political and economic under-representation of Tamil minorities in mainstream Sri Lanka unfortunately gave rise to class stratification and lowered the chances of social integration. The second most significant reason was the readiness to use force rather than dialogues. It was easier for Colombo to eliminate the Tamil uprising by use of force and advanced Chinese weaponry, rather than any further reconciliation. Third was the lack of trust between LTTE echelons and the Sri Lankan government over the incoming of international aid.

LTTE’s dismantled international network and the end of financial support came as a back-to-back setback for the organisation. The last nail to the coffin was the internal split of LTTE into two different factions, in which ideological differences between Karuna (a LTTE loyalist) and the leader Prabhakaran allegedly broke the group’s spirit. The final analysis of the failure suggests that had LTTE stuck together as one separatist organization, driven towards the cause of Tamil identity and channelizing their fight in a more action-oriented fashion with less violence involved, the peace process could have had a better opportunity to succeed. The last leg of LTTE’s fight emerged more as a competition between factions, rather than a social cause for their people. In their fight for supremacy, the common cause of Tamil Eelam took a backseat; something that Colombo could take advantage of.

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²⁹ Georg Freks and Bart Klem, “Muddling the Peace Process Post-Tsunami Rehabilitation in War-torn Sri Lanka.” Clingendael Conflict Research Unit, no. 2 (January 2005): 1–3. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05331

³⁰ N. Manoharan, op. cit.

³¹ Jason Burke, “Suicide Bomber Blasts Sri Lanka’s Woman Leader,” The Guardian, South Asia. (December 1999) https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/dec/19/srilanka

³² Government of Sri Lanka, “Sri Lanka: Complaints and Violation of the Ceasefire Agreement in December 2002.” Sri Lanka (January 2003) https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-complaints-and-violations-ceasefire-agreement-december-2002

³³ Human Rights Watch, “Sri Lanka: Political Killings During the Ceasefire,” (August 2003) https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/asia/srilanka080603.htm

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Sri Lanka: Political Killings Escalate. Murder of Foreign Minister Spotlights Crisis.” (August 2005) https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/08/16/sri-lanka-political-killings-escalate

³⁵ M.R. Narayan Swamy, “Sri Lanka and the Peace Makers A Story of Norway and India.” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Issue Brief, no. 178 (December 2011): 3–4 https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09193

³⁶ Alan Bullion, “India’s Regional Role Challenged by Chinese Presence in Sri Lanka,” Indian Journal of Asian Affairs 22, no. 1/2 (June-December 2009): 54–55. www.jstor.org/stable/41950495
The application of conflict resolution theory in the Sri Lankan conflict puts forward a clear message that any dispute can only be resolved when it is treated with cooperation and commitment. In terms of schools of thoughts, traditional theory of conflict resolution in Sri Lanka rooted for negotiation through compromise, whereas contemporary conflict transformation’s problem-solving approach failed to deliver a pragmatic solution for the country’s fundamental problem. The mediators too encouraged for a quick and compromised route, resulting in the 1987 peace accord which excluded the Tamil separatist group while penning down the agreement. Thus, leading to an unsettling ending to the negotiation between the Sri Lankan government and the separatist LTTE, leaving very little scope for a peaceful resolution.

Conclusion
The research question that has been raised earlier was ‘can third-party intervention, a significant model in the conflict resolution theory, yield desired outcomes under challenging circumstances?’ The answer to this question largely depends upon the intent of the parties involved and their level of cooperation for a successful negotiation. In the Sri Lankan context, third-party engagement was seen as the prominent tool used for conflict resolution, participated by some of the world’s largest and influential powers. Quickly, the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict escalated from a local crisis to a global matter that drew attention from various parts of the world. Countries poured in developmental aid and other resources for restoring order in the country. Neutral parties were also involved for delivering unbiased judgments and assisted in maintaining ceasefires and peace agreements. However, none of it proved helpful as the parties involved were non-cooperative for a peaceful settlement.

Third-party intervention is largely believed to be the most used tool in conflict resolution, which in the past has generated positive outcomes out of some of the most complicated conflicts. However, India’s IPKF deployment in Sri Lanka, as part of New Delhi’s involvement in the conflict, had not only failed in its purpose of restoring peace, but rather it drove India farther from future peace initiatives. In addition to that, LTTE’s attempts to re-arm the organization while being in ceasefire was a major setback for the peace process. It gave impetus to the Sri Lankan government to show reluctance to negotiate and, with external assistance, the power equilibrium of the Sri Lankan conflict changed.

Another significant aspect of third-party intervention in Sri Lanka was Norway’s role in ceasefire agreement and peace talks which again failed to materialize due to lack of cooperation between adversaries. Countries, financial institutions, and regional organizations too came forward with funding, reconciliation plans and mediation processes. Mediators tried every possible means to make the peace process work. However, it was rarely seen that peace custodians came up with an approach that promised to solve what the Sri Lankan society was suffering. It is understandably not an easy task to fundamentally correct the wrongs that were taking place in Sri Lanka at that time, but a system with inclusive approach towards the minority ethnic groups could have suggested changes. Moreover, it would take a lot for the Sri Lankan government to bring about a structural change in their society, without upsetting the majority Sinhalese community.

LTTE’s spree of assassinations projected their desperateness and made them walk the quickest road from being a separatist group to a terrorist organisation. The Rajapaksa government too had ignored calls for ceasefires at the time when the civilians were getting caught in the crossfires. Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights made statements that during the last phase of the war, both LTTE and Sri Lankan army grossly disregarded the value of lives of the civilians. The army’s indiscriminate firing and LTTE’s forceful holding of civilians and using them as human shields drew massive criticism from the international community. LTTE’s determination over Eelam and rejection of the three autonomy plans offered by Chandrika Kumaratunga in 1995, 1997, and 2000 emphasized the group’s reluctance for ensuring peace. The LTTE had most probably over-estimated the might of their assets and their willingness to fight a war rather than negotiate, which apparently had compelled the Sri Lankan government to bank on external powers who promised military support. The Sri Lankan government also tapped into the fragile crack of LTTE after the group’s internal fall-out as it was easier to break what was already broken. Therefore, the course of ongoing actions left no space for any peaceful settlement and the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka died with the death of their supreme leader Prabhakaran.

The failure of the Sri Lankan peace process therefore proves that the ultimate pre-requisite in a conflict situation is internal cooperation and coordination, which forms the basis of every conflict resolution. With internal coordination, any conflict situation can be further treated with the help of external actors or neutral parties, something that was majorly missing in the Sri Lankan case, and the effects of which are still reflected on the lives of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The current plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka can be gauged from the attitude of the country’s leadership. Winning the 2019 Sri Lankan election, wartime defence chief Gotabaya Rajapaksa became the eighth President of Sri Lanka, replacing Sirisena who promised upliftment of minority Tamils in the country. Not only did Rajapaksa remove Sirisena from his position, but also from his promises made to the Tamils. During the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Sri Lanka in June 2019, PM Modi raised the issue of providing equality to Tamils. In response Gotabaya Rajapaksa clarified that giving political powers to Tamils was not his priority, and power devolution to Tamils meant going against the Sinhalese. However, Rajapaksa has assured that his government holds an inclusive attitude towards Sri Lankan Tamils and their

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37 Alan Bullion, op. cit., 54.
rights in the country. This attitude by the current leadership makes it evident that the Tamil minority community is still subjected to differentiation, despite the ‘pledged inclusiveness’. Therefore, the reality of Sri Lankan peace process resonated with the conditions of failure in conflict resolution theory, that leaves a major scope for learning from the failures and applying them in future reconciliations.

Data availability
No data are associated with this article.

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