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THE INDO-SRI LANKA AGREEMENT : AN ASSESSMENT

The 'Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement to Establish Peace and Normalcy in Sri Lanka' (hereinafter referred to as agreement) signed in Colombo on 29 July 1987 is by any standard a landmark in contemporary South Asian history. Peace and normalcy have for too long been wanted in the island of Sri Lanka. Under the agreement Sri Lanka and India have committed themselves to resolve the ethnic crisis and consequent violences. In the words of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, it was a momentous event in the history of the two countries.¹ At the conclusion of what has been described by President Jayewardene as the 'most controversial visit by an Indian leader to Sri Lanka'², Rajiv acclaimed the agreement to have heralded peace. Whether and how peace is going to be established in Sri Lanka 'torn by conflict, violence, death and all other depredations of human wickedness'³ remain by all indications to be seen for a long time to come. In the meantime, the main theme of this paper is that the agreement, far from resolving

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- 1, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's remarks at reception hosted by President Jayewardene in Colombo on 29 July 1987. See *Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement*, published by External Publicity Division, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, P. 13.
 2. President Jayewardene's Address on Sri Lankan TV on 29 July 1987. See *Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, op. cit.*, p. 15
 3. *ibid.*

the crisis, has added new dimensions to the same. It has brought certain qualitative changes to Indo-Sri Lankan relations with far-reaching implications for interstate relations in the volatile and conflict ridden region of South Asia. India has not merely demonstrated once again its determination to establish its exclusive influence in the region but also emerged as an interventionist regional power—both with apparent blessings of super and major powers. The paper also argues that the smaller states of the region should reassess their domestic policies so as to minimize their vulnerability to such intervention.

The theme is developed through an examination of the agreement itself, followed by a study of the compulsions and motives of the signatories. The prospect of peace through the agreement is briefly examined. The implications of the agreement for the region are also highlighted.

1. The Agreement, Compulsions, Motives

The main highlights of the agreement⁴ are :

— Provisional merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces to join to form for an interim period of a year one administrative unit having one elected Provincial Council composed of one Governor, one Chief Minister and one Board of Ministers ;

— Elections to the Provincial Council of the North and East to be held before 31 December 1987 and Indian observers to be invited for such elections ;

— A referendum to be held before the expiry of the interim period i.e., on or before 31 December 1988 to enable the people of the Eastern province to decide whether the eastern province should remain linked with the Northern province as one administrative unit and continue to be governed together under a single provincial council, or the

4. Highlights of the agreement, annexure and exchange of letters are taken from *Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, op. cit.*, pp. 5-11.

Eastern province should constitute a separate administrative unit having its own distinct provincial council with similar composition ;

—The President of Sri Lanka may, at his discretion, decide to postpone such a referendum ;

— The emergency to be lifted in the Eastern and Northern provinces by 15 August 1987. A cessation of hostilities to come into effect all over the island within 48 hours of the signing of the agreement. All arms held by militant groups to be surrendered within 72 hours of the cessation of hostilities in accordance with an agreed procedure to authorities to be designated by the Government of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan army and other security personnel to move to barracks within the same 72 hours ;

— The President of Sri Lanka to grant a general amnesty to political and other prisoners held in custody under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and other emergency laws, and to combatants, as well as to those persons accused, charged and or convicted under these laws. The Government of Sri Lanka to make special efforts to rehabilitate militant youth with a view to bringing back to the mainstream of national life. India to cooperate in the process ;

— The Government of Sri Lanka to accept and abide by the provisions while the Government of India to underwrite and guarantee the resolutions and cooperate in their implementations ;

— In the event if any militant group operating in Sri Lanka does not accept the provisions;

— India to take all necessary steps to ensure that the Indian territory is not used for activities prejudicial to the unity, integrity and security of Sri Lanka ;

— Indian Navy/Coast Guard to cooperate with the Sri Lankan Navy in preventing Tamil militant activities from affecting Sri Lanka ;

— India to cooperate by giving military assistance to Sri Lanka if so requested by the latter ;

- India to expedite repatriation from Sri Lanka of Indian citizens to India who are resident there concurrently with the repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from Tamil Nadu ;
- India and Sri Lanka to cooperate in ensuring the physical security and safety of all communities inhabiting the Northern and Eastern provinces ; and
- Tamil and English to become official languages of Sri Lanka beside Sinhala.

The main agreement was further substantiated by an annexure to it and what has been called an exchange of letters between Rajiv Gandhi and Junius Jayewardene. The annexure lays down inter alia that :

- The referendum and the election to the Provincial Council will be observed by a representative of the Government of India ;
- The Home Guards would be disbanded and all paramilitary personnel will be withdrawn from the Eastern and Northern provinces with a view to creating conditions conducive to fair elections to the council ;
- The surrender of arms by Tamil militants shall take place in the presence of one representative each of the Sri Lankan and Indian Red Cross ;
- A joint Indo-Sri Lankan observer group will monitor the cessation of hostilities from 31 July 1987 ; and
- An Indian Peace Keeping contingent may be invited by Sri Lanka to guarantee and enforce the cessation of hostilities.

The main thrust of the 'exchange of letters' which apparently took place on the same day as the agreement was signed was India's security concern. The stated objective of the letter which was addressed by the Indian Premier to the Sri Lankan President was to decide that Sri Lanka and India would not allow their respective territories to be used

for activities prejudicial to each other's unity, territorial integrity and security. Jayewardene, in the words of Gandhi, had during their discussions agreed to meet some of India's concerns which the latter elaborated in the letter and wanted Jayewardene to confirm. The confirmation was conveyed by Jayewardene through a single-sentence note saying that the content of Rajiv's letter "correctly sets out the understanding reached" between them. The letter ensured that :

- i) Sri Lanka and India will reach an early understanding about the relevance and employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel with a view to ensuring that such presences will not prejudice Indo-Sri Lankan relations;
- ii) Trincomalee or any other ports in Sri Lanka will not be made available for military use by any country in a manner prejudicial to India's interests;
- iii) The work of restoring and operating the Trincomalee Oil Tank firm will be undertaken as a joint venture between India and Sri Lanka;
- iv) Sri Lanka's agreement with foreign broadcasting organisations will be reviewed to ensure that any facilities set up by them in Sri Lanka are used solely as public broadcasting facilities and not for any military or intelligence purposes;
- v) India will deport all Sri Lankan citizens who are found to be engaging in terrorist activities or advocating separatism or secessionism;
- vi) India will provide training facilities and military supplies for Sri Lankan security forces ; and
- vii) India and Sri Lanka will set up a joint consultative mechanism to continuously review matters of common concern in the light of the objectives stated in para (i) and specifically to monitor the implementation of other matters contained in the letter.

Compulsions of Jayewardene

The agreement in tone, tenor and meaning is beyond doubt one between unequals and as has been recognised by Rajiv Gandhi himself, its conclusion "has not been an easy exercise for the Sri Lankan Government and Sri Lankan Leadership."⁵ The most pertinent question that has since the signing of the agreement been asked is why did Sri Lanka go for signing it which has been viewed within and outside Sri Lanka as no better than Sri Lankan 'subjugation' or 'sell-out'. In retrospect, Sri Lanka has plunged itself into the ethno-political cauldron in a historical process characterised by a failure of integration and mutual accommodation of the two ethnic communities—Sinhalese and Tamils. The tragic Sinhala-Tamil violences and killing are indeed the outcome of continued alienation and deepening mistrusts between the two communities over decades, particularly during the post-independence years. The conflict has had its roots in the diverging perceptions of the Sinhala and Tamil communities about the island's history and even national identity.⁶ The perception gap culminated in the bloody conflict claiming over 6000 lives as a result of increasingly disparate and intransigent claims-counter-claims and measures-counter measures on the part of the two communities. Like in any other case of ethno-political violence, the issues in conflict included such matters as religious, linguistic, cultural, social, economic and political rights, privileges and concessions.⁷ One basic element in the whole conflict has been a wide gap, *hiatus valde deflendus*, in the mutual

5. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's Statement in Parliament on 31 July 1987. See *Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, op. cit.*, p. 4
6. See for details A.G. Noorani "Constitutional Framework for Sinhala-Tamil Accord", in Bhabani Sen Gupta (ed), *Regional Cooperation and Development in South Asia*, Vol. 2, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 56-97.
7. A considerable literature on the genesis and development of the crisis is available. See for example, *ibid.*; Urmila Phadnis, "Ethnic Tensions in South Asia: Implications for Regional Cooperation", in *ibid.* pp. 1-54. and Mahbubur Rahman, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Future Dimensions", *BISS Journal*, Vol, 7, No. 2, pp. 234-256.

perception—the majority Sinhalese perceived that the Tamils were enjoying too many advantages compared to their proportionate size in the nation so that Sinhala politics and administration reflected a vested pressure for cutting down such advantages while the minority Tamils found themselves endemically discriminated so that an acquired deprived psychosis in course of time was turned into a violent separatist movement. In retrospect, the Tamil-Sinhalese relations would have taken a different course if the post-independent rulers of Sri Lanka had deftly tackled the ethnic problem from the very beginning.⁸ That however did not happen, the Sri Lankans have had exposed themselves to one of the worst ethno-political violences in history to reach now to an agreement to provide concessions to Tamils at a cost which in the view of many could have well been avoided.

The Indian Prime Minister has claimed that the agreement “meets the basic aspirations which animated the Tamil’s struggle, namely, the desire to be recognised as a distinct ethnic entity, political autonomy for managing their political future, and appropriate devolution of governmental power to meet this objective, the recognition of the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka as areas of historical habitation of the Tamils and the acknowledgement and designation of Tamil as an official language of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.”⁹ The Sri Lankan President Jayewardene, when asked as to why he did not sign the agreement 4 years ago and prevent the violence, responded that it was because of his “own lack of intelligence.”¹⁰ The question obviously is under what compulsions a politician of Jayewardene’s maturity and experience finally became ‘intelligent’ enough to concede to the stated Tamil demands and to much more by implications. It is possible to view Sri Lankan compulsions in three main ways.

8. Mahbubur Rahman, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

9. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s Statement in Parliament, *op. cit.*, P. 3.

10. Joint Press Conference held in Colombo addressed by the Prime Minister of India and President of Sri Lanka on 29 July 1987. See *Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

Firstly, the agreement appeared to have meant for Sri Lanka *clarior e tenebris*, opening for peace after years of bloodshed, violence, turmoil and instability. Sri Lanka has long been one of the few bright examples of working democracy in the Third World. It had a thriving and prosperous economy. The distributive aspects of development including social, health, educational and cultural development with one of the highest PQLI (Physical Quality of Life Index) by Third World standard was a matter of pride for the Sri Lankans. Years of civil war have had put severe strain on the development process with heavy drain of resources for military purposes. Sri Lankan military spending in current figures more than doubled between 1981 and 1984 from rupees 1,051 million to 2,300 million.¹¹ Defence budget for 1985 reached Rs. 3.60 billion, an amount that excluded Rs. 2 billion for development of defence infrastructure.¹² Latest available estimates show that the war against Tamils was costing the government in Colombo Rs 12 billion (US \$407m) a year out of a total government annual spending of Rs 65 billion.¹³ For the government of Jayewardene prospect of peace surely meant an opportunity to rebuild a ravaged economy. The war meant substantive cut down in government revenues from vital sectors including tourism. Some 400,000 tourists used to pack the Sri Lankan golden beaches and modern hotels. Only half of that many now come.¹⁴ Colombo would not merely anticipate a boom in tourism once the fighting is over, but as claimed by Finance Minister Ronnie de Mel, "The financial aspect of ending the war would be tremendous...(and) the billions spent on defence can now be used to improve the quality of life for Sri Lankans."¹⁵ More articulate and specific was Jayewardene

11. *SIPRI Yearbook 1985*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Taylor and Francis, London, 1985, p. 278.

12. *The Military Balance 1985-1986*, IISS, London, 1985, p. 134.

13. *The Economist*, London, 01 August 1987, pp. 25-26.

14. *ibid.*

15. *Asiaweek*, Hong Kong, 16 Aug. 1987, p. 9.

when he said in his address on the Sri Lankan TV on 29 July 1987. He said,

After this (agreement)... there will be no fighting in the North and the East. Terrorism will be a thing of the past, and peace will be restored once again to our land. This would mean a tremendous accession of wealth through the aid the countries are giving. This would mean a tremendous accession of foreign investment. It will mean tourism looks up again and employment is available for our people. It should mean also the increase of wages to Government servants who have been waiting for years to get what they deserve.¹⁶

In a word, Jayewardene and his government would like the Sri Lankans and others to believe that the agreement would restore peace and prosperity to the country and "give a rebirth to the Sinhala race."¹⁷

An apparently indomitable Indian pressure might have provided the second source of compulsions for Sri Lanka. Sri Lankans view its equation with India with a feeling of existing in close proximity to a mountain which at any moment might send down destructive avalanches.¹⁸ At one point of history, not so many centuries ago, much of Lanka was even part of Indian Tamil empire and even through the British Raj Sri Lanka has been tacitly regarded as falling within India's sphere of influence.¹⁹ Despite the omnipresent fear-psychosis out of the Indian juxta position Colombo has always seemed to have nurtured an ultimate reluctance to recognize the primacy of India's rulers.²⁰ Jayewardene's own proud nationalism which shaped

16. *Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, op. cit.*, p. 15.

17. *ibid.*

18. Shelton Kodikara, "Asymmetries and Commonalities", in Pran Chopra, (ed.), *Future of South Asia*, University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1986.

19. Pranaya Gupta, "When Worlds Collide", *Newsweek*, 15 June, 1987. P. 4

20. *ibid.*

the more recent Sri Lankan self-image, endeavoured to assert Colombo's sovereign political and regional identity, however tiny Sri Lanka was compared to India. The independent stance was maintained through a reasonably balanced relations between New Delhi and Colombo which hardly came to a boiling point despite deep-rooted suspicion and misgivings between the two.²¹ Thus over the years of crisis Sri Lanka has engaged itself in fairly friendly negotiations with India which posed itself in the dual capacity of protector for Tamils and mediator for Colombo government. The process of negotiations was long and arduous, not-too-scarcely marred by violences and killings which ran parallel. But on the whole, India has been reportedly constructive and Sri Lanka has been grateful.²²

But earlier this year the situation took a grave turn when following a host of separatist outrages, Jayewardene imposed a blockade on the northern Jaffna Peninsula, a Tamil stronghold at that time completely in rebel hands, vowing to "wipe out terrorism". Later 3000 soldiers

The compelling urge for lasting peace after years of turmoil instability, apparent Indian pressure, prospect of no assistance from any quarter vis-a-vis India might have worked behind Jayewardene's signing the accord with Rajiv Gandhi.

and airborne Commandos were sent to the area in a punishing counter-offensive against the guerilla bases.²³ The Sri Lankan army and air attack into the peninsula seemed to have dictated New Delhi to some action. As food supplies in Jaffna ran short and bombing caused many civilian deaths India tried some "Gandhian peaceful intervention".²⁴ A flotilla of relief boats with food and medicine intended for civilian

21. Abdur Rob Khan, "Strategic Aspects of Indo-Sri Lankan Relations", *BIISS Papers*, No. 4, June 1986 p. 20

22. *The Economist*, London, 6 June 1987, p. 27

23. *Newsweek*, 15 June 1987, p. 10.

24. *The Economist*, *op. cit.*

victims was dispatched. The Sri Lankan navy faced down the relief flotilla escorted by at least one Indian gunboat,²⁵ near the Katchchativu island and forced the ships back. Sri Lanka wanted the relief goods be delivered to Colombo, claiming that the government in Colombo can look after the needs of the Jaffna peninsula's people. Jayewardene went to the extent of threatening to intercept the boats, unperturbed by the certainty that any serious military clash between India and Sri Lanka would leave the island with all the bruises. India's exasperation was to be obvious. One Delhi official put it, "if we wanted to, we could smash up Sri Lanka in 40 minutes."²⁶ Sri Lanka was not of course smashed, but its pride was. The next day an Indian Air Force squadron, with five Soviet-made transport planes and a fighter escort of four French-made Mirage jets, set off for Sri Lanka and within an hour parachuted 25 tons of relief goods.²⁷

The airdrop was denounced by Colombo as "naked violation" of Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity²⁸ and launched a diplomatic offensive to offset the counter-humiliation. Sri Lanka called for an urgent meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to discuss the issue, although Colombo knew it very well that SAARC was never mandated to do so. The SAARC Council of Ministers however met two weeks later for a scheduled session wherein the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister made a pointed reference to the situation and asserted :

... if any religious or ethnic group in a country has a problem, it should (the country) settle that within the framework of its national boundary, without involving any other country in the region on the basis of a religious or ethnic commonality. Ethnic and religious conflicts are combustious issues and cross-border

25. *Newsweek*, 15 June 1987, p. 10

26. Quoted in *The Economist*, *op. cit.*

27. *Newsweek*, *op. cit.*

28. *ibid.*

involvements could seriously affect bilateral relations and undermine the spirit of SAARC.²⁹

The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister concluded his speech with an appeal for signing.

... a convention that will bring us (SAARC member-states) together, bind us together by a solemn declaration to respect one another's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity by refraining from any acts of aggression, interference, violation or oppression. A convention of this nature is the crying need of the hour.³⁰

The statement of Sri Lankan Foreign Minister had hardly any impact on the proceedings of the meeting itself, although some of the other Ministers including Bangladesh and Pakistan made rather innocuous reference to the event pointing to the principles of non-interference in internal affairs of each other as enshrined in the UN, Non-aligned and SAARC Charters. (The issue was never discussed as an item on the SAARC agenda, but the fact that some member-states found SAARC as an appropriate forum to raise such an issue has once again reaffirmed the importance of the new association as a tension-diffusing platform. Details on this, are however, beyond the scope of this paper.) Whatever may be the outcome of the Sri Lankan moves following the airdropping incident, it seems plausible to think that it provided the crunch. The event gave Colombo the realization that India was determined to stop Colombo's efforts to defeat the Tamil rebels. India succeeded in its objective of checking the Sri Lankan army's offensive. The Indian Government, which had been acting as a mediator between Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil radical groups, had throughout expressed its strong discontent with the Sri Lankan use of armed forces and warned that it might withdraw from

29. Statement by A.C.S. Hameed, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka at the Third Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers, New Delhi, 18 June 1987.

30. *ibid.*

any negotiations for a political settlement.³¹ The government in Colombo had already realised that in view of the intransigence of the militant Tamils direct talks with them were hardly viable. It had now realised that military option was not merely unacceptable to India but will also invite disastrous Indian reaction. Jayewardene's only way out was clearly to negotiate on Indian terms. It is more than coincidental that the agreement would be signed only a few weeks after the airdropping event which by all indications seems to have been the prelude to the agreement.

The third factor that motivated Sri Lanka was that after the airdropping incident Sri Lanka appears to have discovered itself almost alone without much prospect of assistance from any potential friendly source. The reaction of major powers particularly was suggestive of *aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera*. Stephen Solarz, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee of the US Senate went to the extent of saying that it was "better to drop supplies than bombs".³² The fact that Jayewardene had no scope to anticipate any external assistance and thus had little option but to sign the agreement was clear when he said,

I am a practical man. It is a fact India is the great power in the region and the world's powers have accepted that. Americans won't lift a finger to help me without asking India You never know these big powers, they chop and change. You can't trust anybody.³³

That Moscow would welcome the agreement was too obvious. But the way Washington, London and Paris rushed special messages to congratulate Colombo and New Delhi surprised many. Analysts find a *quid pro quo* between Moscow and New Delhi. Moscow holds that it intervened in Afghanistan on the invitation of Babrak Karmal while New Delhi maintains that it has entered into Sri Lanka at the request

31. Asian Security, Tokyo, 1986.

32. *The Holiday*, Dhaka, 19 June 1987.

33. Quoted in *The Holiday*, Dhaka, 14 August 1987.

of Jayewardene. Hence neither has a problem. But the West was to have. It rejects the Soviet claim but accepts the Indian. The US backs the Afghan people's struggle against the Soviet occupation with massive arms aid, but fails to recognise the Sri Lankan people's fierce protests against what they view as a sell-out.³⁴ The US reaction has been viewed in the frame of a trade-off between New Delhi and Washington in which USA agrees to respect Indian version of Monroe Doctrine in return for New Delhi's recognition of the legitimacy of the US naval presence in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf.³⁵ Whatever may have been the determinants in the convergence, the US and West's approval of the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement and particularly the presence of Indian troops in Sri Lanka is akin to what Charles Manning at the London School of Economics used to call "it's all right about x" syndrome. What is condemned in unfriendly country Y is condoned in friendly country X. And its specially "all right about us".³⁶ Such subjectivity coupled with considerations of 'realpolitik' creates blind spots in the perspective of greatest of nations which not merely help justify one's violation of norms but also attribute morale to one's own predations.

Indian Motivations

India, in the words of Rajiv Gandhi, has a deep interest in Sri Lanka's unity, integrity and stability.³⁷ Finding a solution to the crisis was of course the objective of four years of India-sponsored peace negotiations between Colombo and the militants that culminated in the agreement. The fact that in a span of four years, from the role of a

34. Ghani Eirabi, "Sri Lanka: A Go Ahead for India's Hegemony", *The Muslim* (Islamabad), 31 August 1987.

35. Selig Harrison, quoted in *ibid.*

36. T.B. Millar, "Conflict and Intervention", in Mohammed Ayoob (ed). *Conflict and Intervention in the Third World*, Croom Helm, London, 1980. p. 3.

37. Rajiv Gandhi's public address in Madras, *Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement*, *op, cit.*

'mediator' India became the 'guarantor' of peace on the island surprised none who followed the 'mediatory' role of India in the conflict. Despite repeated New Delhi denials Indian involvement in the Tamil separatist movement as the source of its moral and material strength has been too obvious a matter to be authenticated. It was also obvious that if hostility and violence were to end in Sri Lanka it was to be through the courtesy of India. The question was, when such an end was to appear—a question which is wide open even after the agreement. What then India has attempted to achieve in the meantime? Analysts have put forward very many motivations that include absorption of Indian-Tamil pressures, diversion of attention from domestic problems, enhancement of Indian image as a peacemaker, ensuring Jayewardene's survival in the face of mounting Tamil rebellion and Sinhala backlash, containment of the possibility of an anti-Tamil government in Colombo, etc. These are all logical and perhaps valid interpretation of the event and Indian motivations. Our objective here is to comprehend the motivations from another self-explanatory aspect namely security and strategic interests of New Delhi. India's security and strategic gains from the agreement are clearly indicated by the provisions of the agreement, its annexures and the exchange of letters. Referring to the security concerns of India that have been taken care of through his letter to Jayewardene Rajiv said,

Apart from the Agreement which looks to the Tamils, interests in Sri Lanka, we also had exchange of letters between President Jayewardene and myself. It is in the exchange of these letters that we have seen to the security problem in our region This exchange of letters ensures that forces prejudicial to India's interest will not be present on Sri Lankan soil. It also ensures that Sri Lankan ports, including Trincomalee, will not be given for military use if this is prejudicial to India's interests. It also ensures that any broadcasting facilities that are set up in Sri Lanka will not be used for military or intelligence purposes.³⁸

38. *ibid.*

Addressing the joint press conference in Colombo with the President of Sri Lanka, the Indian Prime Minister maintained that the agreement has to be seen in the broader perspective of the contribution that India can make to stability in this part of the world.³⁹ What in effect has turned out is that India has not merely extracted concessions and commitment from Colombo that amount to compromising of Sri Lankan independence in the areas of defense and foreign affairs,⁴⁰ but has also taken the advantage of the troubled waters in Sri Lanka to pull Sri Lanka closely into its security orbit. By this India appears to have successfully stepped ahead in taking care of its age-old concern of extension of its security perimeter.

India's defense and security strategy is essentially based on a concept inherited from the British colonial period. The imperial strategic doctrine applied to British Indian empire perceived the defence and security of India rested on three pillars;

- a) safeguarding of the north-west frontier of India through which successive invading armies had made inroads into Indian territory ;
- b) preventing the area around the Indian subcontinent from falling under the control of foreign power ; and
- c) command of the Indian Ocean and its environs.⁴¹

Stated in simple terms, a continental concept of security shaped the British Indian security designs under which any threat to any of the 'buffer states' within the perimeter defined above was to be considered as a threat to India. The underlying logic of the whole system was to prevent and/or contain any threat to India beyond its own borders.⁴²

39. Joint Press Conference in Colombo, *op. cit.*

40. *The Time*, 10 August 1987, p. 7

41. Shelton Kodikara, *Strategic Factors in Inter-state Relations in South Asia*, Heritage, New Delhi, 1987. p. 13.

42. For more details on this see *ibid*, pp. 13-16.

An integrated conception of Indian defence and strategy has been regarded as one of the pride heritages of Indian colonial past;⁴³ and post-independence Indian political leaders and thinkers have carefully nurtured the concept over the years. Nehruvian vision of India was a 'closer union', confederation of independent states with common defence and economic possibility.⁴⁴ India's interest in territorial inviolability of her small neighbours has thus its origin in Indian version of Monroe Doctrine which was reportedly being

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proclaimed by Nehru in the early fifties⁴⁵ and was spelt out during his daughter in what came to be widely known as the India Doctrine.⁴⁶ Explaining the doctrine Bhabani Sen Gupta writes,

India has no intention of intervening in internal conflicts of a South Asian country and it strongly opposes any intervention by any country in the internal affairs of any other. India will not tolerate external intervention in a conflict situation in any South Asian country if the intervention has any implicit or explicit anti-Indian implication. No South Asian government must therefore ask for external military assistance with an anti Indian bias from any country.

43. See for example, K.M. Pannikar, *Problems of Indian Defence* (Bombay 1960), p. 23. quoted in Shelton Kodikara, *op. cit.*

44. Quoted in S.D. Muni "South Asia" in Mohammed Ayoob (ed.) *Conflict and Intervention in the Third World*, Croom Helm, London 1980 p. 48.

45. Shelton Kodikara, *op. cit.* p. 18.

46. Bhabani Sen Gupta, "The Indian Doctrine", *India Today*, 31 August 1983.

If a South Asian country genuinely needs to deal with a serious internal conflict situation or with an intolerable threat to a government legitimately established it should ask help from neighbouring countries including India. The exclusion of India from such a contingency will be considered to be an anti-Indian move on the part of the Government concerned.⁴⁷

The doctrine, it is claimed, emerged from a series of conversations between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and leaders of the opposition so that it reflects an Indian national consensus. Press reports that Sri Lanka had sought military assistance from US, UK, Pakistan and even Bangladesh—something denied by Sri Lanka and the four and discarded convincingly by analysts—apparently determined the timing of re-iteration of the doctrine. A slightly moderate version of the doctrine is presented by Pran Chopra who writes about a SAARC route to security,⁴⁸ building his premise upon a unity of South Asian strategic and defence entity which, if anything, renders small peripheral states of South Asia into a virtual buffer status. Either way, the doctrine asserts India's right to be asked for assistance by any South Asian country to deal with an internal conflict situation. It also stresses that assistance in contingencies should be regional rather than individual.

Looking at the agreement, particularly the provisions laid down in the letters exchanged, India has made sure that Sri Lanka renders itself responsive to India's political and security concerns. Under the provisions of the letters India has emerged as the arbiter in respect of i) relevance and employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel, ii) availability of Trincomalee or any other ports in Sri Lanka for military use by any country, iii) work of restoring and operating the Trincomalee Oil Tank farm and iv) operation of foreign broadcasting organisations in Sri Lanka. To ensure that these are not prejudicial to India's interest or to Indo-Sri Lanka

47. *ibid.*

48. Pran Chopra, "From Mistrust to Cooperation" in Pran Chopra (ed.) *op. cit.* pp. 13-17.

relations India may, by implications have its exclusive monopoly in these respects and/or eliminate involvement of any other country. It appears, therefore, that the agreement has in effect achieved for India more than what the so-called India Doctrine had visualized. For, the doctrine asserts that India's participation be ensured in a contingency of a request for regional assistance programme rather than individual, whereas applied in case of Sri Lanka the doctrine has ensured that it is India and only India which can be involved in any such contingency. Rajiv had thus reasons enough when he said,

This agreement is a major landmark in these four decades of India's freedom. I am told that no such agreement has been signed by any country in the world, at least in this century. It is an agreement which does not have a parallel in the world...⁴⁹

It is indeed an agreement which appears to have put India a significant step ahead in its dreams-come-true as far as its regional aspirations are concerned.

II. Prospect of Peace in Sri Lanka and Implications

Addressing the Sri Lankan TV Rajiv Gandhi said, "an agreement is not the conclusion of a journey but a new beginning."⁵⁰ There can be few better ways to describe the aftermath of the agreement. Contrary to the claims of both President Jayewardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi the agreement, nearly 10 weeks after its signing has by no indication established peace in Sri Lanka or any part thereof. Nor is there any reasonable ground to believe that any such prospect is visible. If cessation or reduction of hostilities and violence is taken as an indicator the post-agreement period, if anything, has worsened the situation. It would indeed be difficult to identify any other segment in Sri Lankan recent history when situation had been so violent as the few weeks after the signing of the agreement. Con-

49. Rajiv Gandhi's address in Madras, *op. cit.*

50. Rajiv Gandhi's TV Address in Colombo, *op. cit.*

sider the attempts on life of both the signatories to the agreement, massive Sinhala protests and violences all over the island, unprecedented atrocities and mass killings by Tamils including nearly 200 dead in a single day and counter-offensive by the Indian peace keeping force. Add to these the casualties of the members of the Indian contingent and continued fighting of Tamils, the only reasonable conclusion that emerges is that instead of solving the crisis, the agreement has added new dimensions to it.

The first major problem in implementation of the agreement is that it relies heavily upon the acceptance of the agreement by the Tamils who have conspicuously not been a party to the agreement. Elaborating the agreement in his address to the nation Jayewardene said,

The accord has three or four aspects. One aspect has to be administered by the Government of India. The other aspect by the Government of Sri Lanka, and the third aspect by the terrorists.⁵¹

Scope of doubts about the part to be administered by India and Sri Lanka apart, there has so far been hardly any indication that the terrorists would cooperate. On the contrary, indications are clear that they all but welcomed the agreement. The LTTE leader Prabhakaran is reported to have told a Jaffna rally that he was forced to toe New Delhi's line and wanted to avoid a confrontation with the Indian army. He also added that he was still committed to a separate Tamil state without which there would be no lasting peace.⁵² Sinasubramaniam Kanagaratnam, a Prabhakaran deputy said,

circumstances have forced us to lay down our arms. But remember that we haven't signed any pact, either with the Indians or with the Sri Lankan Government. The war has ended, but the struggle will continue.⁵³

51. Jayewardene's address to the Nation on 6 August 1987, *Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement*, *op. cit.*

52. *Far Eastern Economic Review*. (Hong Kong), 13 August 1987, p. 8.

53. *Asiaweek* (Hong Kong), 16 August 1987, p. 8.

The fact that the much publicised surrender of arms was little more than a tokenism was thus not surprising. The rebel groups have one added reason for not surrendering all of their arms. That reason are the continued in-fighting among themselves and mutual distrust they nurture about each other. Of all, the Tigers have reasons to be cautious. In course of fratricidal war over the years they have killed thousands from rival groups to emerge as the most powerful. Fearing, therefore, that these groups will seek revenge they have no intention of giving up all their weapons. One young fighter said that they may hold on to at least 50% of them.⁵⁴ Disarming of the militants despite the latest offensive of the Indian Peace Keeping Force with all its reinforcements⁵⁵ would therefore not certainly be easy. Death toll of Indian troops rose to 167 by end-October and the number of wounded 619 and 38 were reported missing in action.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, a fierce and bloody battle is raging in the Northern Sri Lanka. Agreeably, the fight could have been ended by Indian troops with much lesser loss of lives and time but for the risk to civilians on the one hand and the already declining morale of the Indian troops.⁵⁷ Thousands of civilian population, mostly Hindu Tamils were thrown once again on the verge of starvation being cut off food supplies in the besetted Batticaloa district. Ironically enough, as protests mounted in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu sponsored by the opposition and ruling parties alike (the latter it may be remembered, represented the Tamils in the talks that resulted in the agreement) India faced the need for a fresh air-dropping of relief which was however, silently contained this time.

Indian defence and foreign policy strategists must have anticipated that their troops would have to face one day the Tamil guerillas whom they themselves provided shelter and training and arms and plans. The question that certainly haunts everybody is how strong the Indian

54. *ibid.*

55. The size of the Indian Peace Keeping Force has increased to about 20,000 by mid-October. See *Bangladesh Observer*, 24 October 1987.

56. *Bangladesh Observer*, 28 October 1987.

57. *Bangladesh Observer*, 16 October 1987.

public opinion is to continue to acclaim the return of their troops in flag-stripped bags from across the border and how long the campaign for establishing peace with horror is likely to continue. Even if India really means business and can successfully contain the domestic Tamil

Even in a small hypothetical situation of total implementation of the agreement, there will continue to be a multi-dimensional distrust syndrome which has over the years been ingrained in the multi-racial nation—distrust within the Tamils, distrust between Tamils and Sinhalese and Tamils and Muslims.

lobby to cut off all assistance to the rebels whereby pacification of the LTTE may be expected at least temporarily, the militants will remain restive politically. Signs of such restiveness are already in place viewed in the context of their bargaining for privileges including their representation in the proposed interim council. Over and above, even in a hypothetical situation of total implementation of the agreement, there will continue to be a multi-dimensional distrust syndrome which has over the years been ingrained in the multi-racial nation—distrust within the Tamils, distrust between Tamils and Sinhalese, and Tamils and Muslims. And if Rajiv Gandhi was right when he said, "It is a unity of hearts which guarantees the unity of a nation",⁵⁸ that unity in Sri Lanka may be far off, at least not to be achieved under an agreement imposed from above. The extent of mistrust by all indications, particularly under a military option, if anything, is likely to increase. The Sinhalese attitude toward the Tamils was vividly expressed by one Sri Lankan Army officer who commanded troops in Jaffna. At the peak moment of Indian forces operations he was reported as saying, "they (the Indian forces) are giving the bastards (the Tamil militants) the worth".⁵⁹ Thus it appears quite likely that in the increasingly vexed situation the Indian forces may become too entangled to be able to totally withdraw in the near future.

58. Rajiv Gandhi's TV address in Colombo, *op cit*.

59. *Bangladesh Observer*, 16 October 1987.

The second critical point is the prospect of peace under the agreement in the proposed merger between Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka into a semi-autonomous - but not independent - Tamil "homehand". The fact that there is a big question mark concerning the validity of the idea itself was clear even in the statement of Jayewardene himself when he said,

We have ... suggested that the North and East should form one unit, should have one provincial council, should have one governor and one chief minister elected by the people. But this is purely temporary, not for ever. Temporary until the Eastern province by a referendum which I will have to nominate within one year of the election of the provincial council, by a referendum and a single majority vote to decide whether they should continue the joinder or they separate. I have no fear of the result of the referendum because we all of us can work against the joinder and *I intend to ask all those who are against a joinder to come with me and work in the Eastern province that the joinder should not be made permanent*. Therefore what are we quarreling about? Why are we killing each other in the South? And why are we destroying our property for no reason whatsoever when within one year people of the East, persuaded by all of us, can decide against a joinder?⁶⁰ (emphasis added).

Although the immediate motive of such explanation by Jayewardene was to appease the violent Sinhalese who took to the streets and ran rampant over the agreement, there is little doubt that the statement quoted above reflects Jayewardene's and for that matter the best of a Sinhalese mind vis-a-vis the merger. Rajiv Gandhi for his part

60, Jayewardene's Address to the Nation on 6 August 1987. *op. cit.*

laid great emphasis on the aspect as a rationale for the whole agreement. He said that the agreement,

secures everything that the Sri Lankan Tamils had demanded short of breaking Sri Lanka's unity.....Under the agreement, approximately one-third of Sri Lankan territory will be made into a single province where the Tamils will have a clear majority. They will have regional autonomy comparable to State Government in India. This represents an immense advance over what had been set out for the Tamils in Annexure 'C' in 1983. It represents major concessions by the Sri Lankan Government to the Tamil demands and to Tamil sentiment.⁶¹

The obvious and difficult question centres round the apparent gap between the two perceptions. If Rajiv is as serious about the merger as indicated—which he perhaps cannot help but be, considering the merger as the most vital carrot for the Tamils—it may be difficult for India and Tamils to allow a situation where merger is ruled out by a referendum as indicated by Jayewardene. A possible scenario that may be foreseen is the postponement of such a referendum which is provided for in the agreement,⁶² and in effect extension of Indian Peace Keeping Forces' stay in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is not militarily strong enough to drive the Indian forces out. Nor will the Sri Lanka Government have the courage in the context of the vexed situation—continued Tamil violence in the face of strong Sinhalese protests not merely against the agreement but also as a potential threat to the government—to ask the Indian forces out in an immediate future.

It is possible in the light of what has been presented above to distribute some of the provisions of the agreement from the point of view of their status of implementation as shown below:

61. Rajiv Gandhi's address in Madras. *op. cit.*

62. *The Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, op. cit.* p. 6

Provisions of the Agreement

Already Implemented	Likely to be Implemented	Difficult to foresee Implementation
i. Withdrawal of Sri Lankan army and security forces	i. Elections to the Provincial Council observed by Indians	i. Merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces
ii. India to provide military assistance	ii. Postponement of the referendum	ii. Referendum
iii. Indian Navy and Coast Guard to cooperate with Sri Lankan Navy	iii. India and Sri Lanka to cooperate in ensuring physical security of all communities in North and East	iii. Cessation of hostilities
iv. Indian Peace Keeping contingent to be invited to Sri Lanka	iv. Tamil and English to become official languages	iv. Surrender of all arms by Tamils
	v. India and Sri Lanka to reach understanding about the relevance and employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel in Sri Lanka.	v. General amnesty and rehabilitation
	vi. Trincomalee or any other ports in Sri Lanka not to be made available for military use by any country in a manner prejudicial to India's interests	vi. Non-use of Indian territory for activities prejudicial to Sri Lankan interests
	vii. Joint Indo-Sri Lankan venture to restore and operate Trincomalee Oil Tank firm	vii. Two-way repatriation of refugees.
	viii. Review of Sri Lanka's agreement with foreign broadcasting organisations	viii. India to deport all Sri Lankan citizens who are found to be engaging in terrorist activities or advocating separatism or secessionism
	ix. India to provide training facilities and military supplies for Sri Lankan security forces	ix. Home Guards to be disbanded
	x. Indo-Sri Lankan joint consultative mechanism to review matters of common concerns	
	xi. Emergency to be lifted.	

III. Looking Beyond

Asked whether the agreement meant a Finlandization of Sri Lanka, Jayewardene replied, "We are free and we will remain friends of India." Whatever way one looks at the agreement there is no denying that it has effected substantial curtailment of Sri Lankan foreign and defence policy jurisdiction which now appears to be pegged out to the South Block in New Delhi. Geopolitics had pushed Sri Lanka into an unequal bargain and ultimately it apparently had little option but to accept an unequal treaty. In a wider perspective, the agreement, as already indicated, has established the India doctrine and that too with more than tacit blessings of the great powers. A qualitative change in inter-state relations in the region is visible which has led to a new wave of mistrust about Indian intentions in the region in general and vis-a-vis small neighbours in particular. Analysts view India to have successfully exploited the troubled situation in Sri Lanka in furtherance of her hegemonistic designs in South Asia.⁶³ India's highhandedness towards its smaller neighbours in pursuing its regional interests was the focus of a *New York Times* article.⁶⁴ The disturbing part of the agreement according to most analysts is the presence and role of the Indian troops in Sri Lanka which is viewed as a dangerous precedent. India is viewed to have pushed Colombo to the extent that it had no choice but to go along with Indian wishes.⁶⁵ Nations of the region have reasons to be weary about the precedent established by the accord of external intervention in the internal matter of a nation-state and thus a resumption of a colonial practice of chieftian bargains to decide the fate of outfields and communities by pursuit of power rather than free consent of the relevant people or communities to the deals.⁶⁶

63. Fahmida Ashraf, "Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Agreement", *The Muslim* (Islamabad), 6 August 1987.

64. Quoted in *The Muslim*, 14 August 1987.

65. *The Muslim*, 05 August 1987.

66. *The Holiday*, 14 August 1987.

Justified or not, India by dint of this agreement appears to have emerged as an interventionist regional power. It is difficult, true, to attribute interventionism to any act without bringing in moral judgments about right or wrong, about intervener and intervened, about justice and injustice, etc. Contemporary history is replete with evidences to demonstrate how difficult it is to define the nature of intervention. The problem is not merely of determining whether or not a

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specific event is to be judged as intervention but also to discover the moral justification or the real motive or the 'real cause' of the event. In some contemporary cases it is spread of communism, in others it is protection of the same. Sometimes it is for bringing justice, order, peace and normalcy or for ending conflict. On each occasion the key words are interpreted with a lot of 'investigator bias' keeping in view national interests or subjective conditions. Nehru, a powerful critic of British imperialism for the soundest of reasons, had no qualms about taking over Hyderabad, Janagadh and Goa by *force majeure*, and after having occupied the vale of Kashmir denying the Kashmiris a promised plebiscite.⁶⁷ Thus notions of justice and morality have been largely irrelevant to decisions whether or not to engage in intervention. They have rather been part of a greater process of power projection and winning support beyond national boundaries.

Thus the agreement has established India as an interventionist regional power, if interventions may be defined following Clausewitz as the *continuation of politics by other means* in the sense that means

67. T.B. Millar, *op. cit.* p. 3.

take on a qualitative change with an element of coercion. In such perspective the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement can be generalised in a frame like this : the existence of an aggrieved or disaffected minority in country A with ethnic, religious, cultural or any other link to country B may provide an incentive for B to intervene in A. And if A and B are disparate in power possessions actual or potential-B being the advantaged, may successfully explore opportunities for favour of such intervention. In South Asia Sri Lanka is not the only A type country vis-a-vis the B-India. That is what is most disconcerting. What is needed, therefore, is for the A type countries to re-assess objectively their domestic policies so as not merely to accommodate and assuage the grievances of the minority communities geared to increasing level of integration through mutual give-and-take, but also to minimize their vulnerability to intervention in the future.