Impact of Internal Ethnic Conflicts on the Region

The focus of this paper is primarily on the impact of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflicts on the South Asian region, especially on India. The paper will also examine certain issues pertaining to security which have a bearing on some aspects of internal ethnic conflict in India. The geopolitical implications of the issues are relevant to the subject of the International Peace Academy Workshop, the "Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace." More significantly, they draw attention to the deliberations of the Regional Colloquium on Disarmament and Arms Control, which the International Peace Academy sponsored and held in New Delhi, India from 12th to 17th February 1978.

In its discussion of the fourth topic on the agenda, the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, the Colloquium appeared to have achieved a consensus on eight issues. Among them was the decision to recommend to the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament a broader interpretation of the concept of the "Zone of Peace" than that conceived in the 1971 UN General Assembly declaration, along with a new phraseology. The Colloquium "felt that in addition to the exclusion of the rivalry and confrontation of super powers from the area, including reduction of their forces, some measures should also be evolved in order to contain or reduce regional sources of tension and facilitate cooperation among countries in the region."

Specifically, it was suggested that the Colloquium "should emphasize the desirability of regional states agreeing on:

* The views expressed in this paper, unless otherwise acknowledged, are those of the writer and are in no way representative of the Marga Institute.
a. Statements of principle, such as respecting one another’s territorial integrity and sovereignty;

b. Commitment to resolving their differences peacefully through negotiations;

c. Setting up of mechanisms (bilateral and multilateral) for consultation when problems arise; and

d. Refraining from further arms build-up in order not to aggravate the conditions in the region.2

The 42 participants in the Colloquium from 18 countries were there as individuals. Although their views were not representative either of the organizations or institutions to which they belonged or of their respective countries’ policies, the conclusions of the Colloquium express the general yearnings of the people of the countries of the South Asian region for peace, mutual respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity and the desire to resolve inter-country differences peacefully through negotiation. In that sense the relevant conclusions of the 1978 Colloquium could be regarded as a framework of reference in the present discussion.

Respect for each other’s territorial integrity and national sovereignty have characterized the foreign policies and neighborhood relations of India and Sri Lanka since they achieved independence in 1947 and 1948 respectively. However, ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka had their repercussions in India, particularly in the Tamil-speaking south, and the pan-Draavidian tendencies that manifested themselves in the South of India since the early fifties have had a reaction in Sri Lanka.

Dravidian Movement

Initially, in the South of India the Dravida Kazhagam, which later became the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) reflected a growing consciousness of identity based on language and ethnicity, both Tamil. In the early fifties the factor of ethnicity influenced the Congress Party in Madras, but soon the DK gathered enough clout and by 1967 it became the ruling party in the region. Prime Minister Nehru was obliged to recognize the emergent power of linguistic nationalism and the State Reorganisation
Commission which he appointed resulted among other things in the creation of the State of Tamilnadu. Its original goal had been the creation of Dravidastan, which ostensibly would have comprised not only the 45 million Tamil-speaking population of the State of Tamilnadu, but also the one million Tamils of Kerala, half a million in Pondicherry and about an equal number in the rest of India including Mysore and Andhra, making a total of about 50 million persons.

The South’s opposition to Hindi as the official language and the civil unrest it caused, the separatist thrust of the DMK-led agitation and the provocative gestures such as the threat to burn the national flag led to firm intervention by the Central Government and the passing of the Prevention of Insults to the National Honour Act in 1957 and in March 1963 to the 16th Amendment to the Indian Constitution, which banned the advocacy of secession and secessionist parties. The Indian Government contained the language agitation by adopting a three-language formula and recognizing Tamil as an official regional language in Tamilnadu.

In Sri Lanka, it was the Federal Party which gave leadership to the movement for pan-Tamil unity. It was formed in 1949 by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam who broke away from the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress in protest against that party’s acquiescence with the Citizenship legislation which had the effect of disenfranchising most of the Indian Tamil state population. The Federal Party (llankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi) became the chief spokesman for the Tamil minority and appeared to be concerned solely with protecting and promoting the interests of the Tamil Community.

“The party’s justification for existence rests on the assumption of the primacy of communal identification and solidarity in politics and the belief that the common political interests of all members of the community, by virtue of their ethnic bond, outweigh political interests which internally divide the community.”

3

Concept of Separate Nation

It is significant to note that about the same time that the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was transforming the politics of the south of India with ethnic sentiment and a separatist thrust, across the Palk Strait the Federal Party was campaigning on the basis that the Tamils of Sri Lanka constitute a separate and distinct nation. The FP’s first convention held in 1951 declared that
the Tamil-speaking people of Ceylon constitute a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood, firstly that of a historical past in this island at least as ancient and as glorious as that of the Sinhalese, secondly, by the fact of their being a linguistic entity entirely different from that of the Sinhalese, and finally by reason of their territorial habitation of definite areas which constitute over one-third of this Island.4

Five years later, in 1956, with the political rout of the United National Party at the general election and the coming to power of a resurgent Sinhalese political force, the People's Front led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and the enactment of the Sinhala Only Official Language legislation, the FP at its convention adopted a resolution which set out its demands as follows:

1. The adoption of a federal constitution and the creation of "one or more Tamil linguistic state or states ..... enjoying the widest autonomous and residuary powers consistent with the unity and external security of Ceylon”,

2. recognition for Tamil of “absolute parity of status with Sinhalese as an official language,”

3. amendment of the relevant laws to grant citizenship on the basis of residence in the Island, and

4. “The immediate cessation of colonisation of the traditionally Tamil-speaking areas with Sinhalese people”5

While in 1951 the FP sought "the creation of two separate linguistic provinces under the Central Government with a separate legislature for each, and these two provincial legislatures to be entrusted with the administration of certain internal affairs relating to education, health, agriculture, industries, law and order and similar subjects", with the enactment of the Sinhala Only official language legislation in 1956 the FP attitude hardened. The then president of the party, Vanniasingam, told the party's annual convention: "As a result of the passing of the Sinhala Only Act it has become necessary for us to eschew government service and find other avenues of employment in the near future. We must make our economy completely independent of employment under Government"6
Public demonstration of opposition to the language legislation by Tamils led to violence and communal disturbances both in 1956 and 1958. The latter was the first major communal riot in the country since independence. Undeterred, the FP in its election manifesto of 1960 claimed that it “is the only party that is working for the unity of the Tamil-speaking people without distinction of caste, creed or geography” and declared that “a truly united and consolidated Tamil-speaking people alone can make their views effective”.

While in India the Central Government contained the separatist agitation and the pan-Dravidian sentiment, on the one hand by granting certain concessions in respect of language and the creation of the linguistic State of Tamilnadu, and on the other, by legislation which strengthened the role of the Centre, in Sri Lanka the FP chanced its hand by resorting to direct action. It took the form of a full-scale satyagraha and civil disobedience movement in the Tamil-speaking areas of the north and east. The FP also established a postal service and issued its own stamps.

The Government of Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike responded by clamping an emergency, arresting the FP leaders and proscribing the FP on the ground that “the Federal leaders have challenged the lawfully established government of this country with a view to establishing a separate state.” The FP, however, had stated in its 1960 election manifesto that a separate Tamil state would be “suicidal to the interests of the people of Ceylon as a whole” and that its objective was “a reasonable share of the governmental power for the Tamil-speaking people in their traditional homelands and even here in respect of subjects which are of local importance.”

**Apprehension among Sinhalese**

Nevertheless, the pan-Dravidian movement in the South of India led to apprehension among many Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, who feared that in a Dravidastan that might materialize the Sinhalese would be reduced to a minority. In 1965 during the anti-Hindi agitation in Madras Chelvanayakam had expressed solidarity with the general secretary of the DMK in Madras professing an “identity between your great struggle and the resistance we are putting up here in Ceylon.” Earlier, in 1962, the Government banned an organization called the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of Ceylon which had appeared among the Indian Tamil estate workers.
Pointed expression was given to the fears among the Sinhalese by Mrs Bandaranaike in 1965, when out of office as Prime Minister she wrote that the DMK objective was to establish an independent Tamil state with the aid of the Dravidian-speaking peoples of India, Ceylon and Malaya. She also alleged that a close link existed between the DMK and the FP leaders.⁹

Although there were no overt political links between the FP and the DMK there were cultural ties between the two groups which were sought to be promoted by periodical cultural events. The establishment in 1966 of a Conference of the International Association for Tamil Research provided an important vehicle for the regionalization of Tamil politics in that these meetings of Tamil scholars invariably included public gatherings of a political character. In January 1974 the LATR Conference was held in Jaffna and its finale was a largely-attended public meeting at which was present a youth leader from Tamilnadu who had been refused a visa by the Government, and who the police feared would make a seditious speech. The police intervened to prevent him speaking and to disperse the crowd. In the resulting stampede nine persons were electrocuted, providing political capital for the Tamil cause.

Already in May 1972, one week before the republican Constitution of Sri Lanka was promulgated, the Tamil movement had witnessed a coalescing of the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress and the Ceylon Workers Congress under the banner of the Tamil United Front, still confined to the goal of autonomy within a Sri Lankan polity. Meanwhile, radicalization of politics was taking place under pressure from a left-oriented Tamil Students Federation. Eventually in May 1976 the TUF at its convention held at Vaddukoddai adopted a resolution demanding the creation of an independent sovereign state of Tamil Eelam. The TUF converted itself into the Tamil United Liberation Front and utilized the 1977 general election to obtain a mandate for its objective.

Psychology of Violence

The psychology of violence as being both morally justifiable and tactically inevitable in a "liberation struggle" has been an integral aspect of the politics of Tamil separatism. As far back as 1964 the then FP secretary said in Parliament that they "will rather choose to have a division of this country even at the cost of several lives ..."¹⁰ Since then the rhetoric of separatism has been more strident. In 1972 the Tamil MPs
who supported the newly promulgated Republican Constitution were publicly threatened with liquidation. The pattern of violence has become bolder over the years, its appeal has drawn more adherents, has seen careful planning and preparation, even professionalism, and its course has been marked by ruthless execution of its strategies.

The first phase of planned violence in the early seventies was directed against Tamil politicians who sought to cooperate with the Government of the day. There were bomb attacks on them and some were killed. Then violence was directed against the policemen who were investigating those crimes. Several of the victims were Tamil policemen. Then followed destruction of state property, robbery of banks and other establishments of the State. Policemen investigating those crimes were also subjected to violence. In some instances they were killed brutally. When the state strengthened its security measures and moved in more men in order to deal with the threat to law and order it resulted in confrontations between the servicemen and the militants. Seldom was it open combat, the militants resorting to guerrilla activity.

There are reportedly some 30 groups of young militants, but the most effective and the better organized among them are the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) earlier styled Tamil New Tigers (TNT), People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamileelam (PLOT), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS). They have now formed an alliance known as the Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF).

Youth militancy among the Tamils, particularly those in the north and the east of the country, is rooted partly in the grievances of the Tamil community pertaining to the status of the Tamil language; university admission policy which is perceived as being discriminatory towards Tamils; disabilities in gaining employment in the public sector, and State-aided colonization of what are claimed to be traditional Tamil homelands. Youth militancy is also a reaction to organized communal violence directed against Tamils by racist mobs in 1956, 1958, 1961, July-August 1977, 1981 and again on a bigger and more disastrous scale in July 1983. The horrible events of 1983 recalled memories of earlier communal disturbances and were sufficient grounds to instil in Tamil youth that it is only through violent struggle that they could secure their political objectives and that their future lies in the creation of a separate state. However, it is important to note that there is no overt conflict between the mass of the Sinhalese and Tamils as persons. A third of the
Tamil population live among the Sinhalese people and do not experience hostility. During the several communal disturbances many Sinhalese homes sheltered the victims, fed and clothed and gave them succour until the State was in a position to take over that responsibility. It is the politics of ethnicity that has sought to heighten communal consciousness, exaggerate differences and create wider cleavages in order to serve narrow ends.

**Military Training in India**

The cadres of youth now engaged in militant activity on Sri Lankan soil have mostly been trained in camps in Tamilnadu, some of which have been in existence from about November 1982, some since early 1983 and others from 1984. Military training of such cadres has also allegedly been provided in eight locations in north India. The training in both sets of camps has reportedly been in military subjects, weapon-handling, guerilla warfare, explosives, manufacture of bombs and in field communications.

In addition, since 1978-79 a branch of the UK-based Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) has been functioning in Madras together with an affiliate called the General Union of Eelam Students (GUES). The latter consists mainly of undergraduates, law students and lecturers in Madras. One of its functions is to organize anti-Sri Lankan demonstrations in Madras and Tamilnadu in general.

A highly organized Eelam information centre operates in Madras and is linked by a hotline to London and Toronto. Additionally, expatriate Tamils the world over, especially in the UK, US, Canada, West Germany and Australia provide funds not only for the media and promotional campaigns but also reportedly for the purchase of arms and ammunition.

PLOT leader Uma Maheswaran was reportedly in the first batch of Tamil militants to be trained in Lebanon in 1978. He is also said to maintain liaison with the People’s Liberation Front for Palestine (PLFP) led by George Habash. Maheswaran is also reported as having said about direct help by foreign governments, particularly India: “Our independence has to be achieved by our own people. We are not dependent on the others. They (India) are allowing us to operate from here, that is good enough.”

It is clear therefore that the Sri Lankan Tamil cause has received popular sympathy in Tamilnadu. Politically, the DMK president, Karu-
nanidhi has identified himself and his party closely with it, thereby embar­rassing the Tamilnadu government of M.G. Ramachandran, who has been accused even by some of his party officials of not doing enough for the rebel Tamils. However, it is known that he had a hand in the freeing of both Maheswaran and Prabhakaran of criminal charges, and that he has allowed the rebel groups to operate freely from Tamilnadu. He is also reported to have pressurized the Indian Government to issue temporary Indian passports to some of the rebel leaders. The Indian Government has been embarrassed by the existence of military training camps on its soil. The sanctuary afforded in Tamilnadu to the militants and their increasing cadres, the collection of arms and ammunition and the facility with which illegal crossings are made to and from Sri Lanka both before and after guerilla activity makes a mockery of India's neighborhood policy, its traditional friendship with Lanka and its own attitude to separatist movements within its borders that challenge the unitary character of the Indian state.

**Indian Government Reaction**

However, the Indian Government's reaction to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has different dimensions. Different governments reacted differently. When the communal disturbances of July-August 1977 occurred there was much agitation in Tamilnadu and Pondicherry and Prime Minister Moraji Desai was under pressure to send an official delegation to Colombo to study the situation. Instead, on the invitation of the then Sri Lankan Prime Minister, J.R. Jayewardene, an Indian emissary acceptable to Sri Lanka, S.A. Chidambaram, arrived and on his return reported to the Indian Prime Minister that the disturbances were an internal matter and were not indicative of hostility to India or to Indians. He gave similar assurances to the Chief Ministers of Tamilnadu and Pondicherry.

But the disturbances of July 1983 evoked a different response from Indira Gandhi's Government, partly because of the sense of outrage they caused and the scale of criminality that had been committed, and partly because of the strong pressure from Tamilnadu to intervene, as well as the pleas from persons and organizations in Sri Lanka itself, who urged immediate action to prevent an escalation of violence, to assist the victims and to help restore normalcy.

The situation was succinctly summed up in an "Indian Express" leader page article titled "The Sri Lankan tragedy". The relevant extract
Developments in Sri Lanka were bound to have an impact on India in general and in Tamil Nadu in particular. Emotions ran high in Tamil Nadu as reports of violence reached there from Colombo and elsewhere in Sri Lanka. The DMK and the AIADMK began competing with each other in championing the cause of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Compulsions of domestic policies would not leave Mrs Gandhi behind. She herself took up the Tamil cause in a public meeting in Madras. As events unfolded, Tamil Nadu’s concern became Indian concern. Parliament also became agitated. The Government, too, began thinking about its response to what turned out to be the most important foreign policy challenge since 1971.

“The first debate on Sri Lanka in the Lok Sabha was fairly emotional and we could hear voices of people such as Dr Subramaniam Swamy who spoke about India keeping ready an expeditionary force to evacuate Indians from Sri Lanka. The DMK would like the Indian Army to be sent to Sri Lanka to save the lives and property of Tamils. There were other voices, too, such as of Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr Chandrajit Yadar who sounded a note of caution. The second debate in the Lok Sabha was restrained.”

“Mrs Gandhi’s Government was in a dilemma. It had public opinion to tackle at home, particularly in Tamil Nadu. It could not be impervious to what was happening in Sri Lanka. It was worried that Tamil refugees might start arriving in India as had happened from East Pakistan in 1971. New Delhi had to take into account relations with Sri Lanka. It was also watching what Sri Lanka might do internationally. Out of these elements a policy was to be fashioned.”

Later in the same article, the following passage occurs: “What surprised New Delhi was the UPI report from Colombo that the Sri Lanka Government had sought pledges of military assistance from the United States, Britain, Bangladesh and Pakistan. A section of the Colombo press sought to project India as a possible invader. Even if the UPI story had been denied and its correspondent thrown out of Sri Lanka, New Delhi believed there was substance in the UPI story. This led India to resort to hectic diplomatic activity and contacts with foreign governments as well as with Sri Lanka. Colombo and other governments were told that India was directly concerned at the developments in Sri Lanka and what was happening to Indian nationals and people of Indian origin could not but be a matter of serious concern to it. At the same time, Sri Lanka’s fears of an Indian invasion were imaginary. New Delhi made it clear to a large number of other countries including those named in the
UPI report that while India did not want to interfere in Sri Lanka's internal affairs, it would not like any other country to send its troops to Sri Lanka either. New Delhi in fact quietly and firmly declared a "hands off Sri Lanka" policy."

"India's direct concern over Sri Lankan development was made known twice to President Jayewardene by Mrs Gandhi herself on the telephone. She telephoned first when violence on the Island was at its peak. This was followed by Mr P.V. Narasimha Rao's dash to Colombo and talks with President Jayewardene. Her second telephone conversation took place amidst reports that Sri Lanka might seek foreign assistance. The Prime Minister cautioned Mr Jayewardene against any such move. In turn the President has sent his brother (H.W. Jayewardene, Q.C.) to allay Indian apprehensions on this account."

"While India made it clear to Sri Lanka it would not relish the induction of foreign troops into the region, it also threw gentle feelers that Colombo was welcome to talk to New Delhi in case it required only assistance from India. The ball was left in Mr Jayewardene's court. He had not accepted any assistance from India except in relief supplies and ships to move displaced Tamils from Colombo to Jaffna in the north."

**Planned Invasion of Sri Lanka Alleged**

Although the "Indian Express" journalist says that "Sri Lanka's fears of an Indian invasion were imaginary," another Indian journal, "INDIA 2000", carried an article some weeks later by an Indian journalist, Tarun J. Tejpal on "The Planned Invasion of Sri Lanka".

The article alleged that in the last week of July 1983 a secret meeting comprising the Prime Minister and her top advisers was convened to chalk out a possible invasion of Sri Lanka. "Ambiguity on post-invasion functions and locus standi resulted in the plan being temporarily put in abeyance."

According to the article, a top secret airborne invasion of Sri Lanka was being planned in the first fortnight of August 1983. The 50th independent Para-Brigade stationed in Agra was to spearhead the attack and bear the onus of capturing the crucial airstrips of Jaffna, Trincomalee and Colombo to render simple landings of troop-laden aircraft and back-up supplies. An amphibious operation was also to be mounted alongside and ships and landing craft were to be used to land infantry and an Armoured Corps element.
The article further alleges that 700-odd paratroopers were to leave Agra for Trivandrum in batches by airbus for the purpose of the operation. Then, in the second half of September the back-up team with supplies and heavy equipment boarded three trains for Trivandrum, where they were transported to the cantonment and confined there. The article ends with the statement that “the assault force stewed in expectation in Agra while the back-up force waited in Trivandrum for the green signal that never came.”

Although there has been no official denial of this report, reference to which was also made in section of the Sri Lanka press, the Indian Government acted positively in two directions to allay fears of any military intervention. Firstly, on 9th August 1983 President Jayewardene told a meeting of his United National Party members of Parliament that he had been assured by the Indian Government that the 5000-strong “sacrifice marchers” led by Tamilnadu Kamaraj Congress (TNKC) President Nedumaran, who had left Madurai on 7th August for Rameswaram en route to Talaimannar in north east Sri Lanka, would be stopped at the Indian shores.

The assurance came in the face of a growing demand and public demonstrations in Tamilnadu that India should intervene in Sri Lanka just as it did in Bangladesh in 1971 by despatching the army. Also, that it should send a team of judges and jurists to the Island to inquire into and report on the situation in order to mobilize militant world opinion against the Sri Lankan Government “for its blatant violation of the Tamils’ human rights.”

The second positive feature of the Indian Government’s reaction was its restraint in dealing with the issue. Mrs Gandhi had on 31st July 1983 told an all-party delegation from Tamilnadu to Delhi that her government viewed the Sri Lankan crisis as a national problem and not as one confined to Tamilnadu. In the Lok Sabha DMK members walked out for the second day on 9th August 1983 protesting against what they alleged was the Government’s refusal to condemn the killing of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Buta Singa assured members that the Government was seriously concerned over the matter and the House had already discussed it. Speaker Balram Jakhar said he was willing to allow a resolution provided all the parties were agreed on such a measure.
Indian Doctrine of Regional Security

More significant was the emergence of what has been described as an “Indian doctrine of regional security.” Inaugurating the South Asian Regional Cooperation conference in New Delhi on 1st August 1983, Mrs Gandhi said although it was not India’s policy to interfere in the affairs of others, “it would be idle to pretend that we are not affected by what happens elsewhere.”

She referred to the multi-racial and multi-religious character of the region and implied that spillover effects were inevitable. “Even as we meet here, there are disturbing developments in our neighbourhood.”

Drawing attention to India’s gigantic size and problems, “she said the country had no intention of taking on any more problems.”

She also made it clear that, “the regional grouping that brings us together is not aimed at anyone else. Nor are we moved by any ideological or military considerations. Our cooperation in no way limits each country’s freedom of judgment.”

It is worthy of note that although the Sri Lankan Government officially denied UPI correspondent Stewart Slavins report that it had sought military assistance from the US, UK, Pakistan and Bangladesh, India felt there was substance in it and the External Affairs Ministry politely warned foreign missions in New Delhi that “any armed interference in Sri Lanka would be considered as a move hostile towards India.”

The US Embassy assured the Indian Foreign Office that no request for help had been received from Sri Lanka and that Washington did not wish to get involved in the Sri Lanka situation. Britain gave a similar assurance. The Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and Bangladesh who were in Delhi at the time assured their Indian counterpart that even if their governments received such a request they had no desire to get involved in the ethnic conflict.

Besides, public opinion in Bangladesh and Pakistan was reported to have reacted adversely to the killing of Tamils in Sri Lanka “because among the victims were many Muslims.” Bangladesh Martial Law Administrator Lt. General Ershad cancelled his scheduled state visit to Colombo and in a cable to President Jayewardene protested against the killing of Tamil Muslims.

The Indian regional security doctrine has been explained as follows: “India has no intention of intervening in internal conflicts of a South Asian country and it strongly opposes 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."\(^{18}\)

A further dimension of this doctrine is that the exclusion of India from requests for assistance would be construed as an anti-Indian move on the part of the Government concerned. The formula reportedly states: "If a South Asian country genuinely needs external help to deal with a serious internal conflict situation or with an intolerable threat to a government legitimately established it should ask help from a number of neighboring countries including India."\(^{19}\)

It is the strategic aspect of regional security to which the Eelam militants drew attention when they urged India to intervene in the Sri Lankan situation. "A separate state of Eelam is absolutely necessary for the security of India and in the interest of peace in the Indian Ocean", secretary-general of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Front, Eelavendan, was reported as having said in Madras on 8th August 1983.\(^{20}\) He together with the leaders of the Eelam Tamil Association in London, Boston, New York and California had come to Madras to mobilize public opinion.

According to Eelavendan, the key to peace in the Indian Ocean is Trincomalee and if the Sri Lanka Government had its way it would allow the US to set up a base there. Once that happened the Soviet Union would step up its fight for supremacy in the Ocean and India would inevitably be drawn into it. He contended that super power conflict in the area could be avoided if a separate state of Eelam was set up.

The argument of secession is completely unacceptable to India, for it is contrary both to its domestic policy as clearly demonstrated in the issues pertaining to Kashmir, Punjab and Assam, and to its neighborhood policy. This attitude derives not from any idealism or moral posture but from its own pragmatic interest, because secession anywhere around India would have serious consequences for Indian democracy.

The major thrust of India’s neighborhood policy has been to stabilize governments because instability in the neighbourhood has adverse implications for India and drives that neighbor away from her. That is why she discourages extremist movements in neighboring countries. India’s main objective in relation to her neighbors is to form a multi-lateral security community in the region with consensus on security issues and a common approach.\(^{21}\)

Thus, the security concerns of all countries in the region are necessarily linked, in the Indian policy perception. Any foreign presence in the
region threatens the Indian position. For this reason, India has been perturbed about certain other developments in Sri Lanka which have security implications. The decisions to grant the Voice of America station in the Island expanded facilities could result in a further strengthening of the UK-US strategic communications network linking West Asia with East Asia and the Pacific.

The second matter is the grant of foreign military sales credit to Sri Lanka, which puts her in the same category as Pakistan, which fact worries the Indian decision-makers. The Trincomalee oil tanks deal, the presence of a British-origin SAS military training unit and the establishment of an Israel Interests Section in the Island are all sensitive matters in the Indian foreign policy perception. These measures are open to interpretation by India on the one hand as a dilution of Sri Lanka's position on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace proposal, which she jointly sponsored in the UN in 1971, and on the other, as a weakening of her stance on Non-Alignment.

India's Meditation Role

When the initial pressures for armed intervention by India had abated, Mrs Gandhi sought actively to get the Sri Lanka Government to work towards a political solution of the ethnic conflict by outlining a framework for discussion, which came to be called Annexure C. Her emissary shuttled to and from Colombo and an All-Party Conference including representatives of the various ethnic and religious groups was indication of a willingness on the part of those concerned to consider the feasibility of a political solution.

The sequence of events in Punjab and the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi, allegedly at the hands of Sikh extremists, and the subsequent revelations of alleged terrorist linkages of Sikhs in some neighboring countries and in the UK, US and Canada would appear to have influenced the Indian Government's attitude in general towards ethnic movements which resort to violence to achieve their ends. India has witnessed organizations such as Dal Khalsa, originally formed with the objective of creating an independent Sikh State, and the Babbar Khalsa, originally taking the Zionist struggle as its model, being transformed into movements which give primacy to violence as a strategy "Only terror will help us to achieve Khalistan," Jaswant Singh Thakedar, leader of the UK branch of Dal Khalsa, is reported as having said. The outlawing of the
organization by the Indian Government in May 1982 did not deter it from its activities of hijacking and murder. The Babbar Khalsa is also alleged to be committed to violence to achieve its ends.23

Thus, if India's stance towards the Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka and the catena of escalating violence in the Island appeared to be ambiguous under Mrs Gandhi, with the accession of Rajiv Gandhi to power, his resounding victory at the general election and the absence of any marked post-election change in the political power spectrum in Tamilnadu, India's resoluteness in its role of mediation was becoming clearly discernible.

In November 1984 Sri Lanka introduced new institutional structures as well as new policies in order to counter mounting militancy on the part of the separatists. The creation of a Surveillance Zone covering the north and the northwestern offshore areas and a Prohibited Zone brought in their wake other problems. Not only was the movement of militants between the two countries affected but also those of smugglers, bona fide fishermen and the transport of refugees from Sri Lanka to India. This last category included fisherfolk and their families who had lost their livelihood with the imposition of the new restrictions.

The militants alleged that the Sri Lanka army excesses had led to the increasing exodus of refugees. In February 1985 alone an estimated 15,000 had arrived in India in addition to the 50,000 who had fled there after July 1983. It costs the Central Government Rs. 1,100 per family to maintain the refugees, thus putting a severe strain on the Indian economy as well as the Tamilnadu government which has to provide the refugees with temporary shelter and food.24

In April 1985 India's Minister of State for External Affairs told Parliament that the Government was in touch with the Sri Lanka Government exploring "all possibilities that would defuse the situation and facilitate an enduring settlement" of the Tamil problem. The shuttle diplomacy of the Indian Foreign Secretary had paved the way for bringing to the negotiating table not only the representatives of the Sri Lanka Government and the leadership of the Tamil United Liberation Front but also of an alliance of the several militant separatist groups. A 90-day ceasefire and a progressive relaxation of some of the restrictions which the Sri Lanka Government had introduced since November 1984 were pre-conditions to the Thimpu Conference which India arranged in July this year. Two rounds of negotiations were held at Thimpu and thereafter negotiations have continued in New Delhi between the Indian Prime Minister and the representatives of the Sri Lanka Government.
India has ethnic or religious affinities with segments of its neighboring countries and historically these linkages have witnessed an ebb and flow. Internal ethnic conflict in the neighborhood has found an echo in the relevant part of the Indian sub-continent. When the ethnic or religious groups also assumed a political identity and events in their own countries reached a crisis situation adverse to them many members of such groups have sought a temporary home in India. Thus India has provided a refuge to Tibetans, Nepalis, Bangladeshis and Tamils from Sri Lanka. India's official position has been that it does not endorse the politics of the refugee groups, but acts host on humanitarian grounds. It adopted a similar stance on the presence of Sri Lankan Tamils on its soil and took up the position that the separatist military training camps which allegedly were operating in India were functioning clandestinely.

In the Sri Lankan perception, the Indian Government's attitude has now changed markedly. Evidence of it was provided not only by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi crucial mediation role but also by his categorical statement that India does not support the Tamil Eelamists' claim for a separate state and that any political solution that is reached must be within the framework of Sri Lanka's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The deportation orders issued on the three Tamil ideologues in July this year, although relaxed subsequently in respect of two of them, is indicative of the kind of pressure India could bring to bear in the event of intransigence on the part of the separatists. Further, the seizure by the Indian Customs of a shipment of arms and ammunition allegedly consigned to separatists in Tamilnadu, and the clearance given to a chartered aircraft carrying arms and ammunition for the Sri Lankan Government to make an unscheduled fuelling stop at an Indian airport enroute to the Island, suggest how India would exercise its options.

If one may at this stage allude to the framework of reference provided by the New Delhi Colloquim of February 1978, to which attention was drawn at the outset of this paper, it is significant that the present trend of events, is in keeping with the Colloquium's framework of recommended measures for peace-keeping and peace-making in the region. In the present instance, the peaceful resolution through negotiation that is being attempted is not directly the settling of differences between neighbors, but the active mediation of a bigger neighbor in the resolution of internal conflict within the small neighboring country. Such mediation, however, respects each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Further, although no mechanism, either bilateral or multilateral, for consultation when problems between neighbors arise has been set up
the ad hoc "good offices" role of India is on the one hand in its tradition of long-standing cultural ties and friendship with its small southern neighbor.

On the other hand, and more important geopolitically, India's mediation role is consistent with its regional security doctrine, namely that it views with disfavor the induction of foreign troops in a conflict situation in any South Asian country, and that for its part it is prepared to assist the troubled country to resolve its problems. India's position on this issue has the effect of preventing aggravation of the military situation in the region by averting a foreign power presence.

Still another dimension of internal ethnic conflict in the region is the attitude of both India and Sri Lanka to the linkages of the separatist movements in their countries with international terrorism. It is the common realization of the growing threat to both countries that has made their leaders alert the international community on the urgency for concreted strategies of action against global terrorism. If the alert is not heeded peace in the Indian Ocean region will face a threat as menacing as the super-power military rivalries, for it could permanently destabilize not only the seven nations of South Asia but also several others of the 44 littoral states of the region.

Notes

2. Ibid p 24.
12. Ibid, p 92
21. Professor S.D. Muni, Dept. of Political Science, Baranas Hindu University, Varanasi in a lecture on "India’s Neighbourhood Policy"; at the Marga Institute, Colombo, 9th July 1985.
22. Prof Muni in a lecture on "An Indian Perspective on Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Issue", Marga Institute, 6th July 1984.
24. INDIA TODAY quoted in LANKA GUARDIAN, 1st April 1985, p 5.
ANNEX 1

U.N. General Assembly Resolution
2832 (XXVI). Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace

The General Assembly

Conscious of the determination of the peoples of the littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean to preserve their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to resolve their political, economic and social problems under conditions of peace and tranquillity,

Recalling the Declaration of the Third Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Lusaka from 8 to 10 September 1970, calling upon all States to consider and respect the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace from which great Power rivalries and competition as well as bases conceived in the context of such rivalries and competition should be excluded, and declaring that the area should also be free of nuclear weapons,

Convinced of the desirability of ensuring the maintenance of such conditions in the Indian Ocean area by means other than military alliances, as such alliances entail financial and other obligations that call for the diversion of the limited resources of the States of the area from the more compelling and productive task of economic and social reconstruction and could further involve them in the rivalries of power blocs in a manner prejudicial to their independence and freedom of action, thereby increasing international tensions.

Concerned at recent developments that portend the extension of the arms race into the Indian Ocean area, thereby posing a serious threat to the maintenance of such conditions in the area,

Convinced that the establishment of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean would contribute towards arresting such developments, relaxing international tensions and strengthening international peace and security.

Convinced further that the establishment of a zone of peace in an extensive geographical area in one region could have a beneficial influence on the establishment of permanent universal peace based on equal rights and justice for all, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations,
1. Solemnly declares that the Indian Ocean, within limits to be determined, together with the air space above and the ocean floor subjacent thereto, is hereby designated for all time as a zone of peace;

2. Calls upon the great Powers, in conformity with this Declaration, to enter into immediate consultations with the littoral States of the Indian Ocean with a view to:
   (a) Halting the further escalation and expansion of their military presence in the Indian Ocean;
   (b) Eliminating from the Indian Ocean all bases, military installations and logistical supply facilities, the disposition of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction and any manifestation of great Power military presence in the Indian Ocean conceived in the context of great Power rivalry;

3. Calls upon the littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean, the permanent members of the Security Council and other major maritime users of the Indian Ocean, in pursuit of the objective of establishing a system of universal collective security without military alliances and strengthening international security through regional and other cooperation, to enter into consultations with a view to the implementation of this Declaration and such action as may be necessary to ensure that:
   (a) Warships and military aircraft may not use the Indian Ocean for any threat or use of force against sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of any littoral or hinterland State of the Indian Ocean in contravention of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations;
   (b) Subject to the foregoing and to the norms and principles of international law, the right to free and unimpeded use of the zone by the vessels of all nations is unaffected;
   (c) Appropriate arrangements are made to give effect to any international agreement that may ultimately be reached for the maintenance of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace;

4. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh session on the progress that has been made with regard to the implementation of this Declaration;

5. Decides to include in the provisional agenda of its twenty-seventh session an item entitled "Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace".

2022nd plenary meeting,
16 December 1971.
ANNEX 2

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