Post war civil-military relations in the north of Sri Lanka: a way forward for peace

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Abstract— Civil-military relationship in post war northern Sri Lanka is a prerequisite towards sustainable peace. The empirical information so far has not provided evidence for such a harmony. Therefore, there is a need for an investigation to find reasons and suggest a mechanism to improve the necessary conditions for Sri Lanka to achieve a normal civil military relationship in the region, which builds confidence among conflicted parties. The study intends to identify the root causes for the failure in civil military relations. With that we formulate a conceptualized framework from which ideological inputs can be connected to suggest a smooth civil-military relationship in the northern region.

I. INTRODUCTION

Civil-military relations need to be considered contextually, because the relationship is determined with respect to the intensity of challenges towards national defence. If there are no challenges on national security and territorial integrity of a country, the need for an enlarged military force is less and therefore, the relationship becomes normal as the involvement of military in such a society becomes limited. In a situation where there are threats on national security and the integrity of a country, there is a need for a greater involvement of military. As a result the normal civil-military relations become endangered to the degree in which the threat is nurtured within the civilian community.

In the context of Sri Lanka, national security and the territorial integrity have been challenged by the separatist movement and the size of the military also has been increased in response to the extended threat (Jayawardena, 2011). In the post war period, even though the LTTE was exterminated militarily, the country is still facing challenges on its national security and the territorial integrity as the separatist movement has not yet been diffused. For that reason, civil-military relations, particularly in the Northern Province, so far have not reached to normalcy. This study explores theories and concepts of civil-military relations, along with empirical information related to post war north, with the aim of examining the complexities and the obstacles for sustainable peace.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF CIVIL- MILITARY RELATIONS

To some degree, the earlier writings on the world of military have demonized it as an institution that is not sufficiently capable of cooperating with other civil societies, but rather have a propensity to turn against them. Political philosophers like Machiavelli, Voltaire and Samuel Adams have respectively construed that "a military man cannot be a good man", military is "the manifestation of brute force in rationalized form" and military "is always dangerous to the liberties of the people" (Karabelias, 1998). With the end of the Second World War, the states abandoned their expansion projects, and the new world order altered the conventional role assigned to military, which was widely recognized as machine that exerted in their physical extension. Historically disparaged views on military as a 'brute force' also began to change as the political science scholarship recognized it in place of a special interest group that can be employed for positive socio-political changes within a state (See: Janowitz, 1964; Johnson, 1964; and Karabelias, 1998).

After the Second World War, along with the expansion of democracy, the role of the military became more rationalized as it was assigned to become the guardian of democratic state of affairs than defending any absolute power - monarchy. In many industrially developed countries, military apparatus played a dual role firstly as a weapon industry and secondly as a determinant of the power among the states' political economy relationships (Jayawardena, 2011). Many scholarly efforts have been taken to locate the military in relation to the civilian authority of the society through macro and abstract level considerations. Particularly the seminal work of Huntington (1957), concentrated on the differences between the values of Civil and Military worlds, liberal civilian control over the military and military professionalism. While Janowitz (1960), with reflecting on Huntington's work, focused on the conservativeness of the military, civilization of the military and the militarization of the civilian world; flowed by the scholarly attempts to classify civil–military relations into broader categories (See: Finer, 1962 and Janowitz; 1964; Alagappa, 2001).

As internal wars turned out to be more common after the Second World War, the studies on civil – military relations were correspondingly moved from the western orientation towards peripheral states, those remained as fragile democracies and indeed had some actual or creeping military coup d'états. These conflicts are interconnected with inter and intra ethnic political economic relationships and therefore, civil-military relations became a vital aspect both during and aftermath conflicts.

Furthermore, these internal wars, or more commonly known as civil wars in political science literature, were brought into termination not only through military means but also through a significant number of peace processes. Post-war democratization of the war-ravaged states and societies has been the predominant goal of the peace processes; and the armed forces' relation with civil society has also been widely discussed both in relation to top level and grassroots level dimensions. Particularly, the discourse on civil–military relations has been embedded within the grey area of 'Security Sector Reforms (SSR)', which also discusses about the democratization of armed groups, police, justice system and other security related apparatuses of a post-war state (See: OECD, 2007).

Under these circumstances both developed and developing countries encountered various challenges on the course of civil-military relations. Particularly the re –engineering of civil – military relations has been a new phenomenon and a challenge for the countries engulfed by civil wars. As numbers on internal wars illustrate, the percentage of their termination by means of military solutions is higher than negotiated settlements; and only 20% of internal wars ended through negotiated settlements during the time of 1940 to 1995 (Walter, 1999). From 1946 to 2004, 119 out of 363 terminations, which is 33% of internal wars ended with one-sided victory (Wallensteen, 2007); besides many ended with outright military victories by the states due to the power asymmetry between governments and non-state actors (King, 2007).

Sri Lanka, as one of the recently joined members to this account of outright victories, terminated its internal war in May 2009 with defeating the ruthless terrorist organization - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). Since then the crucial post-war period has been endured with a number of issues, in which some of them hauled international attention. The Sri Lankan post-war situation, however cannot be comprehended either in relation to democratic peacemaking or even as a form of punitive peace that comes under victor's justice. Sri Lanka is a classic example for a win – lose post – war scenario, but all win-lose situations do not endorse harsh peacemaking i.e. post-war Nigeria under General Yakubu Gowon (See: Atofarati, 1992). It is quite incompatible to compare the Sri Lankan post-war situation with the normative standards of contemporary peacemaking in Civil wars that

ended up with peace agreements. We propose that civil - military relations in northern region, as a vital of post war situation, needs to be studied carefully. In the context of Sri Lanka the case was quite different and unique from other domestic conflicts (See: Jayawardena, 2011; 2012) therefore, we intend to suggest a different model for Sri Lanka in order to transform civil-military relations from a contending condition to normalcy.

III. METHODOLOGY

As a part of an ongoing study, the research team has been dealing with several fundamental research questions such as 'How the presence of the armed forces in north is viewed by the different stakeholders in the region? What those views reveal about the relationship between civil and military sectors as a whole? How the knowledge emanating from such views could be used for proposing a smooth transformative model for Civil–Military relations in the post - war northern region of Sri Lanka?'

This initial exploratory study was headed for the gathering of data from key informants in the region that include; spontaneous interviews with military commanders, and group discussions with senior and middle - ranking officers, those who carry out civil affairs and various post war recovery projects related to civilian life. On the other hand, interviews with the regions' government agents/ district secretaries, group discussions and interviews with civil society representatives and civilians were carried out to get a hold from the civilian sector towards the study. The consolidated information through interviews remains largely qualitative; and secondary quantitative data were collected through various documents from military and local government bodies. The research demands a line of descriptive analysis in order to make sense of what is going on in the northern region with respect to the civil and military relationship.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Civil Affairs Conducted by the Military
Within the large military mechanism on the ground, there are appointed officers from higher level to lower level towards look after the civilian matters. The civil military relationship of North has been understood in line with the CIMIC doctrine (Civil-Military Cooperation). In all five districts throughout the last four years, the armed forces especially the Sri Lanka Army has been ardent in their full strength on areas such as: resettlement of 0.4 million of people, around 11000 rehabilitation of ex–combatants, demining, infrastructure development like building houses, roads; supply of electricity, water, irrigation facilities and the helping hand for other mega projects, providing socio- economic services while coordinating with civilian administrative mechanisms (Ministerial, GA, AGA and GS levels), running welfare programs, helping police to run law and order in the region, disaster management and other emergency tasks.

Despite the military's large supportive role in the post war reconstruction and recovery, the civil military relations have not been able to substantially transform from conflict to the normalcy as arguments remain with the view that military's presence should be continued until achieving a threat free society. It emphasizes the following points such as; separatism is still active in the region, resettlements is not fully completed yet, the civilian sector cannot handle the development in the north as the impacts of war remain, the civilian administrative mechanism as well as the public need the military's support and the impact of secessionist thinking can extrapolate to the other people in other regions.

B. Civilian Sector and their Perspectives

We can summarize some of our observations as follows. The civilian sector has not yet completely become free from the secessionist thinking and there is also a fear psychosis on the presence of military in the region. People expressed that they are doubtful of their future; and wish to have a normal life like the people in south; therefore, military presence and its intervention should be limited in the region.

Despite these views, civilians particularly the individuals attached to the civilian administration, however appreciated the military's contribution towards socioeconomic and infrastructure development in the region. But the ordinary people are scared of military and people are highly dependent on their political leaders' line of thinking; despite the fact that most of them are poverty trapped people and go after whatever the welfare that comes to their door-steps. Particularly, most of the politically motivated people are the decedents of the political leaders and they are with the view towards separatism even after the defeat of the LTTE. Some of them even represent the views of the Diaspora and international pressure groups towards separatism.

Moreover, the educated youth and the academia looks like a social category that barely engages with the military and its civil affairs activities. Several religious leaders are very influential in the civilian - political life and they are with the view that civilian affairs must be free from military involvement. Among the groups on the ground, the Non – Governmental Organizations (NGO) representative that we met expressed that the military has a good relationship with people at the grass root level and they involve in many development areas where NGOs could also jump in. Therefore, they perceive several restrictions on NGO activities.

B. Contending Views

For the duration of the last four years of the post – war period (2009-2013), there have been several competing arguments on the presence of the armed forces predominantly in the northern region of the island. One set of arguments insisted that there is no need for military presence in the north; and some reasoned for a limited presence of military with a condensed scrutiny on civilian life. On the contrary, an argument was also towards the other side that the military's presence cannot be substantially reduced for the reason that the secessionist thinking of the people in the region, spearheaded by their pressure groups (Diaspora and other interested parties), have not so far been defused. The necessary condition for the demilitarization has been haggled by this line of thinking upon the guaranteeing of a region that is free from separatist attitudes.

C. Transformation towards Normalcy

As a reflection from our initial exploratory intervention in the course of this status quo, we discuss that civil–military relations as a whole and its transformation needs to be comprehended by taking the aforementioned discourses into the account.

Considering the theoretical background on civil military relations; the following conceptualised models on civil-military relations are going to be the working models of our further study on this matter. The figure 1 indicates the social transformation process. Out of a large number of social transformation episodes here it is given 3 scenarios of social transformation process. The first scenario is the conflicting scenario, where conflict cycle experiences militancy. Under such scenario civil military relations are not healthy. The details of such a scenario are given in the figure 2. If the conflicting scenario is properly treated with the ideological inputs depicted in the figure 4 with positive reinforcements of the factors in relation with epistemology, ontology and ethnology the social transformation can be converted to normalcy as shown in figure 3. Under such a situation, the civil military relations become healthy.
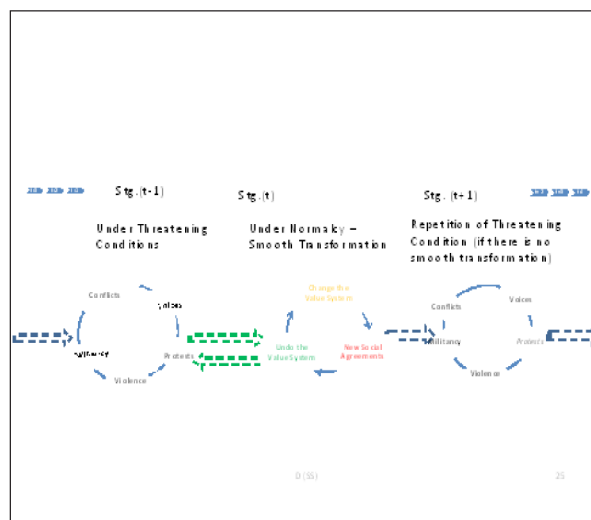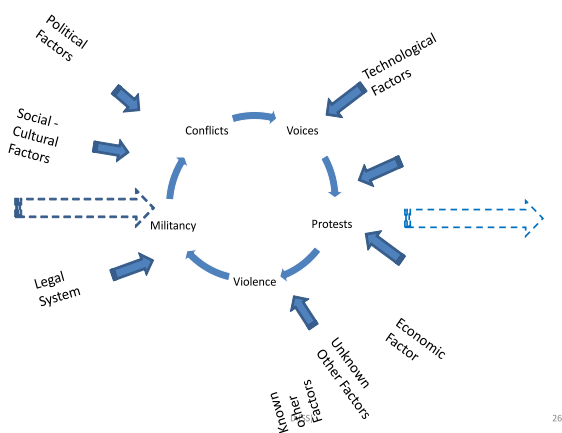

Fig 1. Social Transformation Process

Fig 2. Conflicting Cycle Leading to Threat on National Security of a Country

Fig 3. Smooth Social System with a normalcy that guarantee the national security of a country

Fig 4. Conceptualized Civil – Military Relationship for Social Transformation

V. CONCLUSION

Role of military in a country in the context of domestic conflicts depend on the historical transformation of the respective society that associate with inter and intra political economy relationships. The civil-military relations in a contemporary democratic society are intertwined with the threat on national security. Therefore, in order to transform a disturbed civil military relationship to a normalcy, there is a need of guaranteeing the national security of the country. Sri Lanka's national security has been threatening since long period of time. The post war era has brought a conducive environment for Sri Lanka to lead the country towards normalcy and sustainable peace with healthy civil-military relations. The empirical evidences that prevail in the country have so far not witnessing such civil-military relations or peace in the country. Therefore, giving consideration to the separatist movements that placed national security of Sri Lanka under threat, the conceptualized civil military relation model need to be verified with the empirical information coming from the stakeholders of the north and east issue.

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