

Promoting National Reconciliation: A way forward to Inclusive National Security

S Satheesmohan

Department of Strategic Studies, Faculty of Defence and Strategic Studies, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University
satheesmohan66@yahoo.com

Abstract - since the protracted armed conflict ended in 2009, a fresh approach in rebuilding civil peace was demanded by all communities in Sri Lanka. Strengthening of national security was regarded as one of the paramount issues in the post-conflict political landscape. The value of ending an armed conflict in a way, gave an opportunity and time to focus more on sustainable peace and also to successfully deal with the consequences of the peace building process simultaneously. Are the parties involved, genuinely committed on this effort is a question before us? It is understood that the level of professionalism involved in this process determines the success and sustainability of the effort of the parties involved. Since a six year period have already passed, one might argue whether the commitments and the political will initiated by the parties were capable enough to restore the democratic values of the country. The problem before the country is to bridge the two communities who fought a civil war for a long time. Some argue that the efforts by the government side have a political wrapping on issues like ethnic harmony and democracy. Rebuilding the socio - political fabric of Tamil and Sinhala communities into a mainstream Sri Lankan National Identity prevails as a significant challenge before the country. Against this backdrop, the research is committed to focus on two significant aspects. The first aspect is to study on a kind of a national reconciliation process which will be imperative for a united Sri Lanka where the civil peace could be fully commissioned. The second aspect is to build a model containing inclusive national security landscape. In this connection, the vital model of an inclusive security landscape could be the extend scope of civil – military sharing and caring equilibrium. The study is therefore specifically based on the theory of civil - military relations in security aspect. The author will use a right mix of quantitative and qualitative methods and primary and secondary data will be processed in this regard.

Keywords— Civil Peace, National Reconciliation, Inclusive National Security

I. INTRODUCTION

His Excellency the President Maithripala Sirisena addressing to the nation on 67th Independence

anniversary celebration held at the parliament ground, Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte stated that “to end the war against terror, our heroic troops were able with their guns to silence the guns of terrorism. However, the biggest challenges we face today, is that of bringing together the minds of the people of the North and South, and through a process of reconciliation bring about co-existence and national understanding, and thus take our great Motherland forward as a land rich in human affection and understanding”. (President, 2015). It is significant to note the statement of the president that promoting reconciliation seems inevitable in a post-conflict phase whilst re-connecting the North and South. The statement further emphasises that the collective effort in strengthening national reconciliation is therefore necessary for national unity and will be a foundation for lasting peace in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is one of the few countries that successfully ended a long run armed conflict by defeating a terrorist organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). After the conflict was over, the country had faced numerous challenges in terms of post-conflict recovery and nation-building. While, some critiques suggest that post-conflict nation-building is a failure which did not build the hearts and minds of the grassroots who were really affected by the dispute. At present the government is trying to address the issues by understanding the grievances of all relevant stakeholders. However past few years after the conflict certainly has presented many opportunities to enhance peace and social order. On the other hand preventing the reoccurrence of another armed conflict is a key issue in the post-conflict setting.

Meanwhile, the commitments are in order to develop Sri Lanka a better nation for every citizen to live. While addressing some of the potential challenges faced by the country in connection to practice of good governance and rule of law in the post-conflict setting, it is equally required the promotion of reconciliation between communities. It is essential to strengthen the national unity and integrity of the country. With these objectives in mind the researcher analyses the necessity of promoting national reconciliation in the post-conflict era.

II. PROMOTING NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

The term 'reconciliation' is widely used in the field of conflict resolution. Reconciliation can be described as a process to achieve some kind of positive solutions to the disputes. Lederach introduces the concept of "reconciliation-as-encounter," the need to provide space and opportunity for encounters between conflicting parties at various levels to articulate past pain (acknowledgement) and envision an interdependent (shared) future. Lederach (1997). According to him, the underlying challenges of reconciliation, that is, the paradoxes of truth, mercy, peace, and justice are also explained. With this background, the process of reconciliation is associated with socio, economic, and political elements. When the reconciliation programme is fully commissioned these aspects should be genuinely addressed in order to resolve the conflict and achieve sustainable peace.

The applicability of the reconciliation is different from conflict to post-conflict setting. In a conflict setting, it is practised as a tool to settle the continued disputes and reach a solution. It is used in a post-conflict phase as a tool to bring the conflicting parties and community into normalcy. Further, the success of reconciliation in reaching solutions is experienced more in a post-conflict phase than a conflict setting.

Meanwhile, the national reconciliation is expected to strengthen national identity despite differentiations. The aim of the national reconciliation is therefore unifying the citizen of the country towards a nation identity by seeking a collective approach. It is simple in a way, citizens of the country could feel safe if they are united and treated equally. At the same time, if the process of the national reconciliation is a burden among the citizens of the country it will not deliver the expected outcome of the programme.

When the national reconciliation is discussed, there is a need for a political, social and economical inclusiveness. The implementation of national reconciliation is therefore need a holistic approach to deal each of these phases carefully. Political reconciliation is a tool to resolve the political disparities among the diverse communities which had undergone a protracted conflict. Also, the socio, economic reconciliation is a key to address the socio, economic and psychological concerns such as social justice, dignity and right to life of the conflicted community in a country.

The promoting national reconciliation is therefore the promotion of political and socio and economic reconciliation collectively. Once the political and socio,

economical grievances is addressed in a great extent, there would be a window of opportunity to promote national reconciliation naturally.

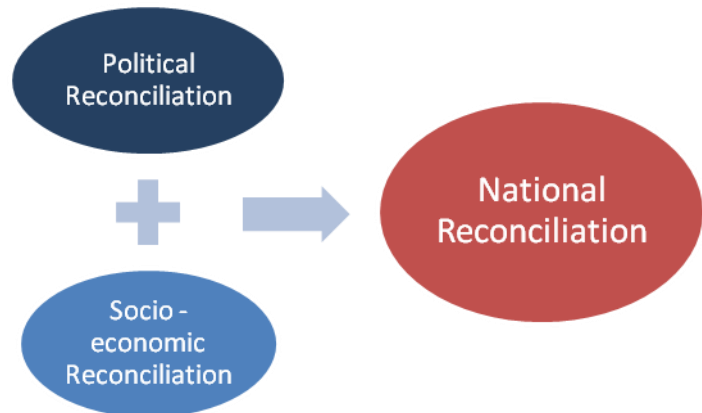


Figure 1 collective approach of the political and socio and economical aspects into national reconciliation.

The post-conflict Sri Lanka is faced with two major phases. Durable peace and economic prosperity is one phase. Promoting a national (Sri Lankan) identity is another. Though the conflict ended in a military way, it is given a great opportunity to the involved stakeholders to deal the post-conflict phase very effectively and prevent a reoccurrence of an armed conflict in the future.

But the challenges before the country are about putting the genuine commitments of the involved parties. Some of the gray areas are remaining significant in the post-conflict phase such as political settlement, demilitarisation of the conflict torn, resettlement of the IDPs, and justice for political detainees are also connected to reconciliation and sustainable peace in Sri Lanka. In this background, the promotion of national reconciliation with genuine and open commitments is therefore a key to achieve both durable peace and national identity.

III. NATIONAL SECURITY AND RECONCILIATION

National security means security to the citizens of the state. In this nature, the state is primarily responsible to provide security to its citizen and control the territorial integrity of the state. Since the cold-war era ended in 90s, the tendency of armed conflicts is either internal (civil conflicts) or internationalised internal conflicts. The nature of internal conflicts is fought out of various reasons; such as ideology, ethnicity, natural recourse, interest of the neighbouring countries, greed and grievances are the common factors. All these factors have clearly demonstrated that the internal conflicts or civil conflicts are severely challenged to the sovereignty (security) of the state.

When the state lost its control over sovereignty and territorial integrity due to an emergence of new non-state actors that is a potential threat to the state and citizen. Sri Lanka is a classic example of having an internal civil conflict where the state lost control over north and east of the country for a long term period. The long run civil conflict in Sri Lanka was not only divested the economy and the people of the country but it significantly widespread an ethnic deviation among the multi-ethnic oriented society.

Post-conflict political and social transformation in Sri Lanka requests a progressive reconciliation to heal the wounds of the conflict. It also requests to win the hearts and minds of the people who have gone through the severe experience of the civil conflict. Though the reconciliation is believed a key to address the victim perspective of the conflict but the national reconciliation is therefore critical to unify the divided community into a national mainstream or a Sri Lankan identity. But in Sri Lanka the process of reconciliation is seemed highly politicised and needs a great paradigm shift. Therefore, it is required a political transformation and broad commitments in dealing with the issues effectively.

IV. A MODEL FOR INCLUSIVE NATIONAL SECURITY

National security is considered as utmost national priorities while dealing with reconciliation in the post-conflict setting. Sri Lanka is no more except to this natural phenomenon. While promoting national reconciliation as priority but the national security is placed a whole picture of country's security, peace and development. Therefore, it is necessity to leave an equal space for security, peace and development in the post-conflict Sri Lanka. Peace and development cannot be achieved without security and security cannot be possible without peace and development.

In this broad background, a model for inclusive national security is critical for sustainable peace and development in Sri Lanka. The model for an inclusive national security is therefore proposing the equal share of national reconciliation and national security to promote peace and security in Sri Lanka. Once the Sri Lankan identity is promoted by an effective political and socio-economical transformation, the common Sri Lankan national identity is therefore natural in a divided society. Also this phenomenon could be very effective to protect the country from diverse threats coming internal and external elements.

The necessity for strengthening of national security based on civil-military knowledge sharing is crucial in the post

conflict Sri Lanka. Also, it could be far effective going beyond the traditional military practices to protect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Though the Sri Lankan long history of divisive politics and ethnic nationalism which has experienced in limiting the progress of the political settlement for various reasons, but the promoting Sri Lankan identity via a progressive national reconciliation could be a way forward to share the civil-military knowledge to strengthen national security, development and peace nexus.

The issue in Sri Lanka is the lack of coordination in terms civil-military knowledge sharing. Therefore, the model is believed to bridge a knowledge culture to strengthen the national security of Sri Lanka based on civil - military sharing and caring equilibrium.

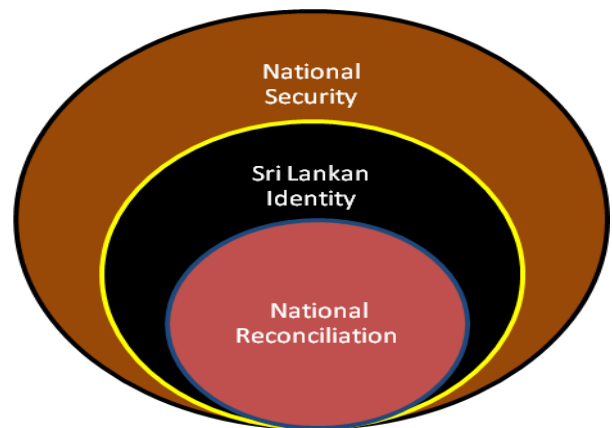


Figure 2 is explaining the relationship between national reconciliation and national security where the common Sri Lankan identity can play an effective role in connecting civil-military sharing and caring equilibrium for sustainable peace and security of the country.

V. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITY

Sri Lankan civil conflict was ended in May 2009 in a military way. Though the brutal terrorism is no longer in place but the question for sustainable peace and political settlement to the ethnic struggle is remained significant in the post-conflict phase in Sri Lanka. The way civil-conflict ended is not widely acknowledged by the entire community of the island nation. Right after the conflict ended there has been two major phenomena based on the result of the conflict; the victorious aspect and defeated aspect. This divisive mentality is somehow limited the real achievement for sustainable peace and political settlement of the country in the post-conflict phase. Since the government changed in January 2015, the political hope and a genuine initiative is in place to promote national reconciliation and sustainable peace.

The challenge for sustainable peace is multiple. There should be a political optimism in dealing its post-conflict phase genuinely. But the challenge is how to deal with it? In this background, the national reconciliation is imperative to admire the mistakes done from each side and way forward. The political inclusiveness is therefore necessity for a Sri Lankan identity in a multi-ethnic society that to deal a successful post-conflict phase.

VI. CONCLUSION

The government initiative in promoting national reconciliation is noteworthy. It is believed that the national reconciliation could be a stable platform for sustainable peace and security in the post-conflict phase. Also, the reconciliation has witnessed across the globe with political transformation and a way forward to achieve peace and ethnic harmony in a divided ethnic phase. Sri Lanka is faced a post-conflict era and therefore need for a progressive political transformation for sustainable peace and security.

Against this background, the study is argued the rationale for promoting national reconciliation and the need for genuine commitments to achieve its objective. The study is also believed that the result of promoting national reconciliation could be very effective to strengthen national security in line with civil-military sharing and caring equilibration as an inclusive nature. Therefore, the model for inclusive national security is discussed the necessity for promoting national (Sri Lankan) identity as significant to strengthen national security.

REFERENCES

Fernando Nilan, "In Sri Lanka an opportunity for national reconciliation", *The Diplomat*, Wednesday 14th January 2015, <<http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/in-sri-lanka-an-opportunity-for-national-reconciliation/>>, Accessed on 01/05/2015

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, "Sri Lanka's National Security", Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka, Wednesday 9th August, 2015, <http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=Sri_Lanka_National_Security_20140819_02>, Accessed on 20/08/2015

Hariharan .R, "Sri Lanka Security Perspectives: September 2015", *Colombo Telegraph*, Sunday 4th October 2015, <<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/sri-lanka-security-perspectives-september-2015/>>, Accessed on 05/10/2015

Hussin Izeth "Reconciliation versus Geneva 2015", *Colombo Telegraph*, Monday 19th October 2015,

<<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/reconciliation-versus-geneva-2015/>>, Accessed on 21/10/2015

Imtiyaz Razak, "Sri Lanka's struggle in the post-war period", *Colombo Telegraph*, Wednesday 7th October 2015,

< <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/sri-lanka-struggle-in-the-post-war-period/>>, Accessed on 07/10/2015

Izeth, Hussain "An approach to Reconciliation, *Colombo Telegraph*, Saturday 24th October 2015, <<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/an-approach-to-reconciliation/>>, Accessed on 25/10/2015

Jayatileka Dayan, "Geneva 2009- 2015 & the struggle ahead", *Colombo Telegraph*, Tuesday 13th October 2015, <<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/geneva-2009-2015-the-struggle-ahead/>>, Accessed on 15/10/2015

Lederach JP (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, United States Institute of Peace: USA.

Neha, Sinha "Sri Lanka: Hope for minorities?", *The Diplomat*, Tuesday 3rd February 2015, <<http://thediplomat.com/2015/02/sri-lanka-hope-for-minorities/>> , Accessed on 05/05/2015

Perera Jehan, "Government Takes change by co-sponsoring Geneva resolution", *Colombo Telegraph*, Monday 5th October 2015, <<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/government-takes-change-by-co-sponsoring-geneva-resolution/>>, Accessed on 07/10/2015

"Path to reconciliation: consulting the victims", *Colombo Gazette*, Sunday 1st November 2015, <<http://colombogazette.com/2015/11/01/path-to-reconciliation-consulting-the-victims/>>, Accessed on 01/11/2015

"Post war development not for all", *Colombo Gazette*, Sunday 2nd August 2015, <<http://colombogazette.com/2015/08/02/post-war-development-not-for-all/>>, Accessed on 03/08/2015

"President Maithripala Srisena's Address to the Nation at the 67th Independence Day Celebration" *The Official Government News Portal*, Sri Lanka, Thursday 5th February 2015,

< <http://news.lk/features/item/6044-president-maithripala-sirisena-s-address-to-the-nation-at-the-67th->

independence-day-celebrations>, Accessed on 05/06/2015

“Reconciliation to play a key role at polls”, Colombo Gazette, Sunday 12th July 2015, <<http://colombogazette.com/2015/07/12/reconciliation-to-play-a-key-role-at-polls/>>, Accessed on 06/07/2015

“Reconciliation and Challenges of Resettlement”, Daily Mirror, Thursday, 29th October 2015, <<http://www.dailymirror.lk/92997/reconciliation-and-challenges-of-resettlement>>, Accessed on 30/10/2015
<<http://www.dailymirror.lk/90267/reconciliation-cannot-take-place-when-truth-is-suppressed>> Assessed on 07/10/2015

“Sri Lanka: True Picture of National Harmony, Reconciliation and Human Rights”, The Department of Government Information, Sri Lanka, June 2015, <[http://www.dgi.gov.lk/images/pdf/Sri%20Lanka_True%20Picture%20of%20National%20Harmony%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.dgi.gov.lk/images/pdf/Sri%20Lanka_True%20Picture%20of%20National%20Harmony%20(1).pdf)>, Accessed on 01/09/2015

“Wigneswaran gives reconciliation a boost”, Colombo Gazette, Sunday 11th October 2015, <<http://colombogazette.com/2015/10/11/wigneswaran-gives-reconciliation-a-boost/>> Accessed on 12/10/2015

“Why reconciliation is must for SDGs”, Daily Mirror, Friday 2nd October 2015, <<http://www.dailymirror.lk/89649/why-reconciliation-is-must-for-sdgs>> Accessed on 03/10/2015

BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHORS



Author is a lecturer at the Department of Strategic Studies, Faculty of Defence and Strategic Studies, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University. He earned his B.A (Hons) in Philosophy from University of Peradeniya and M.A in International Peace Studies from the United Nations mandated University for Peace. His research interested is Post-Conflict State-building, Reconciliation and National Security nexus.