

Ensuring National Security through Reconciliation and Sustainable Development: Global Perspective

Prof James Clad, Former USA Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

I'm honoured to have been invited to give one of the opening addresses to this Symposium. I congratulate KDU on its initiative, and for the wide range of papers and scholars represented here.

"National Reconciliation," the theme addressed here, is an enormously difficult to objective to attain and, then, to sustain. In earlier iterations of my career, notably as a war correspondent but also as a scholar and defence official, I have seen too many reconciliation efforts fail or, after initial success, succumb to later pressures and unravel hard won gains.



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Malaysia spent years abating the CPM insurgency. Indonesia's experience with Aceh stands in contrast to its more problematic history with East Timor. Myanmar's many experiences with separatist insurgencies show that national reconciliation is an ongoing, fraught affair. .

Lest we forget, European reconciliation has taken a sometimes tortured path, as with the IRA in Ireland or the Basque separatists in Spain. In the USA, 150 years since the civil war we have not erased the memories; even in distant New Zealand, national reconciliation remained on the New Zealand political agenda, as dispossession by the Maori from their ancestral lands became a fresh issue again beginning 30 years ago.

My remaining remarks centre on the experience in Sri Lanka, where much attention has been focused on the reconciliation efforts after the defeat of the LTTE in 2009. Domestic policy

determinants will matter most of all in assuring lasting reconciliation, of course, but the regional and even global setting will also have a lot of impact on the success, or otherwise, of reconciliation efforts. Neighbouring countries, the global context of support, or otherwise, for insurrections; global Diasporas – all can affect the outcome of reconciliation policies, no matter how well conceived.

How favorable are regional and global trends for Sri Lanka's reconciliation efforts? Broadly, I believe they are favorable, but they shouldn't be taken for granted.

In India, Sri Lanka has a well disposed government in Delhi where the influence of the Gandhi family (permanently alienated in 1991 by the LTTE's assassination of Rajiv Gandhi) and the dislike of the senior defence establishment of the same group (as a result of experience in the IPKF) have enabled Colombo to retain Indian support. The preoccupation in Delhi with the outcome of the post American phase of the struggle in Afghanistan also means there is less interest in Sri Lanka – so long as there is not a perception that Chinese influence has become too prominent here.

This could change quickly if India's electoral map should change abruptly. The BJP for reasons of 'Hindutva' follows events in Sri Lanka and might lend less automatic support to Colombo, especially if a coalition party from Tamil Nadu had sway in a new government in Delhi after the next general elections, which the BJP seems likely, on present trends, to win.

Beyond that, China's steady albeit still modest presence in the Indian Ocean provides Colombo with flexibility. That is not simply a 'Chinese characteristic' however; other players, large or small, help give 'balance' to the region, whether the US, or ASEAN states, or Japan.

Globally, the entwined and (for the LTTE) wholly negative association of extremist Tamil politics with the worldwide correctives against terrorism after 2001 also favours the prospects of Sri Lanka's reconciliation effort.

All in all, the trends seem positive – although there are risks as well. The strategic "re-set" to America's post-Afghan and post-Iraq phase also points to more freedom of manoeuvre for Colombo. In an environment in which US defence and security supremacy is no longer so absolute, the need for a more adroit US approach will become more evident. The American strong card has always been found in playing the offshore balancer in a multilateral context, not the most readily obvious attribute of Asia's strongest two powers, India and China.

With the reaffirmation of maritime offshore role, Sri Lanka's position will have its own logic. With offshore balancing more prevalent, and less logistic servicing rationale more evident in USN Indian Ocean operations, the regional security picture will change in Sri Lanka's favour. If Sri Lanka can leverage more effectively its equidistant maritime position – and, in particular, work out how to use Hambantota and Trincomalee to best advantage, it will have more reason to accelerate its which the country's place in the new efficiencies of Indian Ocean maritime transport can enmesh with renewed interest in hydrocarbon development not only adjacent to Sri Lanka itself but also in the wider Bay of Bengal. This implies a reduction of Sri Lanka's profile as a "single issue" country in the West (as a result of the bitter civil war after 1983) and a more well rounded place in American and western strategic perceptions.