

On Sinhalese Nationalists, Tamil Diaspora and the War Crimes Saga

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A couple of days ago I was watching a political talk show in the Derana TV Channel attended by prominent nationalists including Professor Nalin de Silva of the Sinhalatva School of thinking. One needs no special introduction to this nationalist ideologue cum academic. The focus of discussion was Report by the UN Experts Panel baptized by the government as the “Darusman Report”. I was curious when Nalin de Silva said something along following lines “There was no war in this country and whatever the pundits (*pandiyo*) say this is not the Post War period. In fact this is pre-war period and there will be a real war within next six to seven months!” then came the thunderbolt if ever there was one as Nalin de Silva went on to explain that this report would be a preliminary towards a more damning report which would be taken as justification for NATO to do a Libya or for that matter Serbia, in Sri Lanka! And that the USA and the UK are hatching this plot with Ban Ki Moon doing the fronting. While Nalin de Silva would await this scenario to unfold as a doomsday prophet would an apocalypse, his analysis clothes the age old nationalist paranoia about the Christian West and its evil machinations against the local religions and customs. But will these Cassandras prove to be correct?

UN Report was the outcome of combination of factors. According to various analysts Prabhakaran and the LTTE depended on Tamil Diaspora for succor during Ealam War iv more than in any of the previous instances. However despite Diaspora activists wreaking havoc in London to secure a truce, and it is debatable whether it was due to concern for Tamil civilians trapped between or survival of Prabhakaran and top rung leaders of the LTTE or both, they failed miserably in spite of a hurried visit by David Miliband along with Bernard Kouchner to Sri Lanka. GOSL held its ground in face of massive international pressure mainly because India was supportive of the war effort and by extension this meant keeping USA at bay despite several last ditch covert attempts to save LTTE from total destruction, no doubt propelled by domestic political compulsions in the form Tamil Diaspora support for many an influential Democratic politicians in New England

including the present Secretary of State. The post war period saw the excessive triumphalism in the part of the government and closer ties with enemies of the West like Iran, Libya and Myanmar and this period also shown GOSL inching ever closer to China with massive investments including a brand new harbor that was being built under Chinese patronage. Not only was India sidelined, but the ever surging nationalist sentiment meant solutions to ethnic problem was getting delayed. Indeed there were many issues; there was a massive security blanket over North and East that hampered freedom of movement and posed a psychological threat, there was sluggish resettlement of the IDP s, there were alleged disappearances, there was no progressive dismantling of High Security Zones in the North and giving back houses to rightful owner and in some instances alleged insensitivity towards Tamil culture and their holy sites etc. Of course one cannot expect changes to happen overnight especially when the violent path advocated by the LTTE is etched deep in to the Tamil psyche and there may still be hardcore cadres or fifth columnists on the loose with plans for resurrection of the evil. And then video footage began to surface with alleged executions and other alleged ghastly crimes. In the meantime Tamil Diaspora was pressurizing British Coalition Government while USA is to go to the Presidential and Congressional elections in 2012. And on top of that Ban Ki Moon is to seek reelection in the same year where he will need the endorsement of USA and its allies. So it won't take rocket science to ascertain that the Obama Administration which put human rights at least stated on top of its agenda and Her Majesty's Government ostensibly precipitated the chain of events that led to appointment of the experts panel in last July, to corral in the rowdy kid on one hand and to appease Tamil Diaspora on the other.

The nationalist response was so far more disciplined than anticipated. The UPFA May Day rally was meticulously organized to shun any Anti west or anti American sentiments and focusing solely on the joker in the pack, in this case UNSG save for usual histrionics by NFF lead by Wimal Weerawansa. So will the NATO invade our country within next six to seven months and does a gun fight at the OK Corral to capture Mahinda Rajapakse and drag him to the altar of (skewed) justice? This might be the dream of Diaspora activists but unless and until the present government becomes willing marionettes in the machinations of the global power struggle for supremacy between Russia, China and USA with Rajapakse doing a Chavez by becoming part of the New World Order depicted in the now famous NFF poster and even then choose to completely sideline India, we can dismiss such notion as outlandish. The Serbian and Libyan interventions occurred while the massacres were ongoing and there were many other reasons involved. And also Sri Lanka is, at least on the face of it, a functioning democracy and going by the amount of US public and political unpopularity with Libyan intervention such incursion to Sri Lanka is unimaginable given also US proclivity to cultivate India as the most important ally to counter the threat of China it would not take any action without tacit approval of India in this theatre. Consequently we can also dismiss a sanctions regime as envisaged by some of the Diaspora activists.

However this does not mean that the government should not take progressive measures to help genuine reconciliation and usher in the spirit of democracy. The stifling of press, undue interference in the Judiciary should stop and while this is highly unlikely, anti democratic clauses in the 18th amendment should be repealed reducing the already inflated power distance between the ruler and the ruled. As an initial move the government had extended the LLRC hearings. The legitimate grievances of the Tamil people should be attended to with some form of devolution of at least some aspects power without being condescending about it. Such a conciliatory approach would go a long way to make this country a true miracle of Asia.