

A Brief History Of Use Of Soft Power As An Advocacy Tool Of The Tamil Genocide Victims - A Democratic Non-Violent Weapon Of The Tamil Struggle For Justice

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Abstract: Soft power encompasses the work of governments and non-governmental actors and citizens and includes economic, political, and cultural institutions and values. Soft power matters. It is an important influence in international relations, global cultures and political economy. Soft power overlaps but is not coterminous with, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and cultural relations. Soft power takes place in a fast-changing global context. In Sri Lanka after the end of the civil war in 2009, there is a move to use soft power by many Tamil groups notably from the Tamil diaspora across Europe and America. This includes involving India, USA, Canada, UK, European Union etc. It is in this context the Tamils should understand the nuances of the use of soft power and exercise it to achieve their goals in the absence of a military solution to this problem.

Key words: Diaspora, lobbying, networking, policy, security

Sri Lanka's main strength is on the internal front, its main vulnerability is external. The success of the anti-Lankan lobbying by the Tamil Diaspora resides in the social character and insertion of that Diaspora. It is not that the Sri Lankan Sinhala Diaspora has no sophisticated strata drawn from the professional elite. It is that this component is either alienated by national dynamics or the dynamics within the Sinhala Diaspora, and is thus demotivated or de-mobilized, while their Tamil counterparts are motivated by the bitter experiences that drove them from their original homeland.¹

The success of the Sri Lankan state in the internal front was achieved in May 2009, since January 2010 Sri Lanka is at the receiving end with the verdict of the Permanent People's Tribunal held in Dublin. The 'War without Witness', took a complete 360 degree turn. The Sri Lankan state is yet to come out of its war euphoria, the triumphalism which started in May 2009 continues unabated under the present repressive regime. The perceived enemies of the chauvinistic Sinhalese and its state has widened, after the Tamils, it is the turn of the Muslims to be at the receiving end.

History has taught us that triumphalism and humiliation of Germany after the I World War made Germany stronger and pushed the World to another World War. Today the Tamils living in the North and East of Sri Lanka are subjected to more humiliation when compared to the pre 2009 era wherein they are not allowed to even commemorate their dead ones.

The Tamil Diaspora is a diverse ethnic group. Amongst it, the majority are strongly connected to their kith and kin in the island of Sri Lanka. Arguably, the Tamil Diaspora is also a very powerful body. It reflects the aspirations and the grievances of the Tamil people in the island of Sri Lanka who continue to live under severe suppression, in an open prison. Considering the Sri Lankan state's oppression of the Tamil people on the ground, the interaction between them and the Tamil Diaspora, though invisible, is very efficient and effective.

Since May 2009's Tamil genocide, the role of the Tamil Diaspora has reshaped to rebuild the lives, and social, economic, cultural and political structures of their beloved ones.ⁱⁱ

In this painful journey, wisely the Diaspora has treaded the path of peace and democracy in the post May 2009 period. This does not mean we need to be ashamed of the armed resistance that took place for 30 years. In any major revolution or movement for self determination, armed struggles have played a major role be it the American Revolution or the Indian freedom struggle. The armed struggle in Sri Lanka was only an interim phase.

Tamils should expose to the world that in the early 1980s they had no other choice to resist the onslaught of the mighty Sri Lankan state. Tamils also need to expose the fact that they were exploited for the geo political needs of India, which armed and trained different militant groups and changed tracks after its needs were fulfilled with the signing of the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan accord.

During the non violent pre-armed struggle period for justice from 1948 to the early 1980s the Tamil Diaspora was virtually nonexistent. Today, the Tamil Diaspora is torch bearers of the struggle as those living in the North East cannot even dream of raising their voices. The Tamil Diaspora has given a new dimension to this struggle for justice as it has evolved democratically and has diversified with the participation of many groups that advocate the Tamil cause.

One of the attribute of soft power is the ability to convey a message to a targeted audience in a convincing manner through an appropriate instrument of dissemination suited to the targeted audience. All media—the print media, radio, TV, audio and video cassettes, films and the Internet— are weapons of soft power.

Camilla Orjuela observed that diasporas turn to producing films, music, cultural events and news outlets; the aim of which is to shape knowledge, discourses and directly effectively influence the conflict and its resolution within the homeland.ⁱⁱⁱ

The softpower of the Tamil Diaspora scores over the Srilankan state's soft power with its effective presence and course correction after May 2009.

Our policy-makers neither understand the concept and value of 'soft power' nor the limits of their own 'hard power'. They do not know that even the USA, the state which posses more hard power or kinetic power than everyone else on the planet, has an acute awareness of soft power, and that the key to American leadership is the combination of the two. Our leaders also do not understand that 'soft power' is the power of voluntary attraction and emulation, not of coercive compliance, and thus it resides in the eye of the beholder, in the eyes of others, of the world's public, not in one own eyes when one gazes narcissistically in the mirror. Worse still, the Sri Lankan leaders do not understand the limits of their state's own hard power, in relation to both the soft power of other communities (Tamils, Muslims, Christians) and the hard power of other states (India, the USA). In short they do not understand the balance of power outside their shores. They do not grasp the larger reality in its tangible and intangible dimensions.^{iv}

It is, in any case, highly improbable that China would bruise its relations with India over anything but its own core interests within its own sphere of influence. The rules that the competing and co-operating Asian Big Powers play by is that neither China nor India will step on each other's toes within their respective spheres of influence. Sri Lanka just isn't important enough for China to do so.^v

Regional instability has broader security and economic implications for the international community. The case of the Tamils demonstrates that intra-state conflict has significant global reach. Moreover, the end of armed hostilities does not in itself end political turmoil. The principle of self-determination forms the most pragmatic basis of reconciling group identity within the community of nations. Western foreign policy should not insist that decentralised models of governance emerge from within the state itself. Rather, the recognition of a right to self-determination is a first step in state-formation. The political recognition of the Tamil claim to self-determination thus portends to resolve civil strife within Sri Lanka and augurs well for the global project of liberal democracy.^{vi}

The resolution on Sri Lanka at the recently held UNHRC sessions in Geneva has caused Sri Lanka to reassess the effectiveness of its investment in the deployment of diplomatic capital – its soft power. A direct consequence of this assessment has been to summon Heads of Sri Lankan Mission for a briefing by the President who emphasized the need to focus on Public Diplomacy and to realign its missions abroad. This has resulted in opening new diplomatic missions in Africa and South America while closing established missions in parts of Europe. While realignment of missions in keeping with evolving global trends would be beneficial, awareness of developments in the ‘near abroad’, namely developments in the Indian Ocean itself and in the countries in the Indian Ocean Rim, would complement the benefits because of their potential to affect Sri Lanka’s national interests.^{vii}

It is here that we need to be keen observers, analyze the emerging situation and exploit it to our strength.

Genocide of Tamils was a word hardly uttered by the Human Rights groups, today things have changed.

In an interview to TamilNet on October 2012, Alan Keenan said “I hope there will be, an independent investigation into the incidents leading up to the end of the war, and preferably also post-war, the question of genocide should be included among those issues.”^{viii}

The US State Committee report for the first time uses the term Tamils as victims, the Human Rights Watch report titled, “We Will Teach You a Lesson”, Sexual Violence against Tamils by Sri Lankan Security Forces which documents the rape of 75 Tamils in prisons of Sri Lanka.

Tamil civil society submissions at the recently held ‘Exploring peaceful options’ meeting, convened by the GTF and facilitated by Berghof foundation, said “The demands have to concentrate more on matters practically facilitating ground realities such as an interim international takeover of the situation, complete removal of occupying Sinhala ethnic military and other SL security forces as the SL military now functions in police uniform, ban on colonisation and guarantee to the territorial integrity of Eezham Tamils, and free access to the diaspora to reach out to its people in the island.” This has to be marketed as a first step and clubbed with the boycott CHOGM campaign.

The role of Tamil diaspora using soft power techniques

The support of Labour MPs and more recently of the Conservatives in UK, the support of the Canadian politicians cutting across parties, the politicians in Australia, South Africa, Norway, Malaysia. Human rights activists like Yasmeen Sooka, the Elders, former UN staffers Gordon Weiss author of ‘The Cage’ and Benjamin Dix’s ‘The Vanni’, journalist Frances Harrison, the author of ‘Still Counting the Dead’, Callum Macrae’s ‘Killing Field’ series have contributed a great deal towards seeking justice to the victims.

Norwegian filmmaker Beate Arnstad has contributed a great deal with her two award winning documentaries titled, ‘My daughter the terrorist’ and ‘Silenced Voices’, how many of us have arranged public screenings of

these films for non-Tamils in our neighbourhood, is a question for each one of us to ask. It is here that we need to emulate them and support them, along with using these powerful tools as our soft power.

The presence of the Tamil groups at the UNHRC needs to be re-strategized, a unified command with a common minimum programme needs to be worked out. A team of well educated and experienced Tamils need to be trained as ambassadors of the community and they in turn should be voicing the concerns of the Tamils world over. All resources need to be pooled together and project to the outer world that the Tamils can unite for a greater cause.

The strengthening of ties with progressive forces in Tamilnadu

India is the major player in any solution that would dawn the Tamils, since 1987, the foreign policy of the Indian state has been pro-Sri Lankan state abandoning the Tamils. It is a well known fact that India played a major role in the victory of the Sri Lankan armed forces, but since March 2012, the pressure from the demonstrators in cutting across party lines has forced India to abandon the Sri Lankan state at the UNHRC twice. Today there is a harbinger of hope with the students' movement shaping up, forcing the Union government to take serious note of it. This hard power tactics of public demonstrations and agitations in Tamilnadu has to be suitably complimented by the soft power of the diaspora.

The hard power tactics of public demonstrations and agitations in Tamilnadu has to be suitably complimented by the soft power of the Diaspora. The Diaspora groups need to identify politicians, political parties, student leaders, activists, academics, artists, musicians, actors, personalities from the film and sports world, form coalitions with them and use their expertise and networks to carry forward the struggle and counter the propaganda of the Sri Lankan state. The key to unlock the Indian doors in New Delhi is Tamilnadu.

The SL military has to be completely removed or strictly put under barracks during the interim period. Paramilitary groups have to be completely disarmed. A situation has to be created for the free travel and interaction of the diaspora with the Tamils in the island. Palaali and Trincomalee airports have to be opened for this purpose.

Conclusion

In each and every country where there is substantial number of Tamil Diaspora, we need to develop a strategy to get the wider community to get interested in the situation in Sri Lanka and convince them by joining their struggles in human rights issues.

TGTE should adopt a policy to advocate Independent International Inquiry and the Right to Self – Determination; this call will gain momentum and support among all Nations, we need to awaken the general public and move away from being only Tamil centric.

A proactive situation has to be slowly built with support from all corners, so that eventually the final goal will be reached. That means our enemies enemy is our friend, we need to get the Sinhala activists and the Sinhala opponents to the current regime to work with Tamils. This will also bring together, Muslims and Upcountry Tamils.

“To be successful, the Tamil struggle for rights and justice cannot depend primarily on international support. Tamil politicians and civil society will have to engage more directly in political debates beyond devolution and the north and east and build alliances with southern civil society organisations and parties interested in promoting democratic reforms.”^{xix} We need to be cautious with this proposition as the past history shows that the Sinhala nation has stood by regimes that progressively intensified persecution and genocide of the Tamil nation.

Let us tread cautiously using soft power as our future strategy. Advocacy and constant repeating of our victimization and genocide at the International forums are the only way out in our long journey.

ⁱ Dayan Jayatilleka: Eelam war and the external battlefield, Sunday Island, 20 July 2008

ⁱⁱ Nirmanusan Balasundaram, Is the Tamil Diaspora Against Unity in Sri Lanka?

<http://groundviews.org/2013/05/04/is-the-tamil-diaspora-against-unity-in-sri-lanka/> 4 May, 2013

ⁱⁱⁱ Orjuela, Camilla 2008. Distant Warriors, Distant Peace Workers? Multiple Diaspora Roles in Sri Lanka's Violent Conflict, in: Global Networks, 8, 4, 436-452

^{iv} **Dr. Dayan Jayatilleka**, The Garrison State delusion, **Strategic misconceptions and foreign policy misconceptions**

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^v ibid

^{vi} **Samuel Thampapillai and Mario Emmanuel**, Beyond War: The Globalization of Tamil Nationalism, The Sydney Globalist, August 2010

^{vii} Neville Ladduwahetty, US-India-China and the Indian ocean: impact on Sri Lanka, The Island, July 12, 2012

^{viii} <http://wavesunceasing.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/negotiating-tamil-sovereignty-with-the-powers-what-the-diaspora-diplomats-can-do/>

^{ix} ICG Report, November 2012

