ESSAY

Analysing the Sri Lankan civil war through the lens of conflict resolution theory [version 2; peer review: 2 approved with reservations]

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Abstract

The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict can be identified as a landmark event in recent history, reflecting a visible social disunion between the majority and minority ethnic communities. Sri Lanka witnessed a major turnover of events, from circumscribed ethnic clashes to a full-scale civil war. The ripple effects of the Sri Lankan civil war crossed borders and drew global attention. The crisis involved successive governments in power in Colombo and Tamil separatist group, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), paving way for the deadliest social unrest in Sri Lankan history. To mediate the conflict and bring adversaries to negotiation, neutral third parties were involved. Norway played a significant role as a third-party mediator who applied various means for mitigating Sri Lanka's conflict. However, the complicated ethnocentric politics of Sri Lanka and their inconsistent outlook towards the peace process restricted the scope for a successful conflict resolution. This paper highlights both conditions for success and failure of conflict resolution, and the use of third-party intervention as a crucial toolkit. This research also points out the equation between mediators and adversaries, and how their behavioural patterns affect conflict resolution processes. The unpredictable nature of adversary behaviour exposes a variety of challenges that the mediators are often unprepared for. The Sri Lankan peace process uncovered the powerlessness of non-coercive third-party mediation. This study holds potential to drive future researchers closer to exploring means to minimize the impacts of such limitations on forthcoming reconciliations.

Keywords

Conflict Resolution, Sri Lanka, Civil War, Third-party intervention, Mediation, Peace Process, International Community
Introduction

Conflicts can be understood as the phenomenon of clash of interests. The root cause may vary from personal to political or between families and communities. Understanding the causes and consequences of conflicts is considered integral in studying the evolution of social sciences, as energies released from conflicts help to evolve societies. To begin with, one needs to understand at the first place why do conflicts happen? Conflict can arise from power struggles, discrimination against a group or community, or favouritism shown by a non-neutral state. Struggle over access to state power and political exclusion act as an active agent that leads to conflicts. It is argued that when states fail to become a neutral institution and promote political exclusion, it holds high potential for generating conflict. Having said that, it is equally significant to understand motives behind raging any conflict. The very first thing that results out of exclusion or discrimination are resentment and grievances. A community, dissatisfied with state mechanisms, caused by political exclusion and disadvantages, demand secession from the existing state and establish new state order, identifying their ethnic identity and culture. The denial of autonomy and legitimate rights often act as the fundamental cause why groups rebel against the one in power, especially when shown disregard towards equal representation. The most motivated groups that show readiness for rebellion are the downgraded, excluded and underrepresented groups of the society, who are discriminated against others, usually the majority, and are dominated by a particular ethnic elite. When groups are successfully able to mobilize forces for rebellion, with the help of both organizational capacity and motivation, it prepares the path for an outbreak of a civil war. Along with multiethnic demography or aggrieved state subjects, it is often insurgency that acts as the main driving force for most civil violence. Insurgents are small armed groups, skilled in guerrilla warfare, that gathers influence by harnessing grievances and motivations. It has also been pointed out that societal discriminations, along the lines of cultural differences, as well as economic and political inequalities result in broader grievances that eventually shapes up a civil conflict. While on the other side of the spectrum, some argue that only grievances and capacity to build rebel organization is not enough for wars to break out. When leaders on both sides of the conflict fail to reach a mutually beneficial settlement, that is when precisely wars are most likely to occur. Conflict can also be driven by certain economic conditions, such as low income, slow growth or economic collapse, as the impact of unequal distribution of resources can raise the chances of conflict outbreaks. When conflicts take place over ethnonational self-determination, regional autonomy for a particular ethnic group, and ethnic discrimination, it is known as ‘ethnic conflict’.

Conflicts can cause devastation at unprecedented levels by crippling societies, widening societal and economic gaps and sometimes economic collapse. The impacts of conflicts are co-related with low human development as conflicts can cause loss of life and properties, economic failures in terms of low investments, diversion of government resources from health and education to conflict management, which in turn results slow growth and less productivity. The cost of conflicts on human lives are unimaginable and therefore conflict resolution is the ultimate requisite for a conflict-ridden society.

Conflict resolution is essentially a process in which institutions and policy options negotiate the needs of parties involved in the dispute. Therefore, an effective negotiation establishes the basis of a successful conflict resolution. The above stated definition is an ideal situation of conflict resolution, which for various reasons differ from the ground reality. Resolution to conflicts is not only subjected to academic theories but also by inputs from field applications and practical understandings. Conflict resolvers or peace facilitators envision a harmonious world, where clashes can be avoided with the help of dialogues and mediations, and willingness to cooperate from the parties involved. The groundwork of conflict resolution, laid out

2 Ibid., p. 92
3 Ibid., pp. 94–95
4 James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War”, American Political Science Review, Vol. 97 (1), 2003, p. 75. DOI: 10.1017/s0003055403000534
5 Ibid., p. 79
8 Ibid., p. 32
between 1946–1969, was aimed at future reconciliations.\footnote{Louis Kriesberg, “The Evolution of Conflict Resolution,” in The Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution, ed. Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremenyuk and I. William Zartman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009): 5} One of the first conflict resolution conferences was held in Switzerland in 1946 to bring together people from different regions, living in conflict. The initiative was taken to mediate the conflicts and reach a mutual understanding through negotiation. Unbiased and correct analyses of conflicts are one of the key elements for a successful resolution. Correct analyses of conflicts help in determining appropriate actions or strategies to be applied for maximum effectiveness. Practices of conflict resolution has evolved over time and focus on generating solutions are designed to benefit both sides.\footnote{Ibid. 5} The chapter throws light on third-party intervention, a widely used tools in conflict resolution theory, that is generally applied by a neutral third party. This research paper aims to identify whether third-party intervention, which is considered as a crucial tool for successful conflict resolution, can always yield the desired results. To reach a definite answer to this question, this paper navigated through all possibilities to understand the challenges of third-party intervention in the Sri Lankan peace process. Norway played a significant role of a mediator in the Sri Lankan peace process by establishing channels of communication and dialogues with the disputants. The Norwegian role as a third-party actor is discussed in greater detail in the chapter.

Sri Lanka, a nation crippled by ethnic conflict for several decades, largely witnessed the use of third-party intervention as an indispensable toolkit in its peace process. The study of peace process in Sri Lanka brings forth a multitude of challenges and limitations while operationalizing conflict resolution. As we will study later in the chapter, third-party interventions or external engagements bear the potential to yield positive outcomes. However, in the Sri Lankan case, the limitations and complications were far too overwhelming for peace custodians to reach any settlement that benefitted both sides. This study attempts to assess the hypothesis that, having applied the most sought-after tool in conflict resolution amidst the presence of neutral parties and adequate foreign aids, the Sri Lankan peace process had limitless opportunities for a successful outcome. Having said that, it is equally important to understand the shortcomings and challenges that the process faced, and draw lessons that can be applied in future reconciliations.

The methodology for this study involved analysing the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict through the lens of conflict resolution theory, focusing on the tool of third-party intervention. ‘Third-party intervention’ was used as one of the tools of conflict resolution practices, involving external actors and their contribution towards the peace process. The paper pinpoints the conditions of a successful conflict resolution and identifies the gaps and absence of such conditions in the case of the Sri Lankan conflict. The existing literature helped in a larger way to substantiate the argument. Apart from traditional practices, the paper also sheds light on contemporary analyses of conflict resolution theory in order to understand different approaches of the theory and its application in the Sri Lankan model.

**Understanding conflict resolution**

Conflict resolution involves negotiation, mostly engineered by a neutral actor, aiming for lasting peace that benefit both disputants and mitigates conflict. The traditional and contemporary approaches of conflict resolution highlights the evolution of the theory from a compromised decision making to a more problem-solving approach.

Traditional models of conflict resolution consist of power bargaining, dispute settlement, mediation, and negotiation. Analysts have defined power bargaining as coercive decision-making in order to arrive at a dispute settlement.\footnote{John Burton, op. cit., p. 125} Having said that, conflict resolution has evolved from enforced or compromised decisions to a more problem-solving approach. The concept of mediation in conflict resolution has evolved from seeking reasonable compromises to facilitation. Facilitation helps warring parties agree to a common understanding, re-defining relationship, clarify individual goals and discover options which meet individual needs. Negotiation techniques suggest that in order to reach an effective understanding, accommodating interests of both sides in a dispute is essential for bringing stability. Traditional conflict resolution aims at restoring interests, which ultimately results in either winning or losing. What is left unconsidered are the non-negotiable values that reflect certain group’s identity needs. When groups refrain from socializing into behavioural practices that run counter to their natural system, such situations do not lead to healthy conflict resolution environment.\footnote{John Burton, op. cit., pp. 125–129}

The evolution of conflict resolution is not only confined to problem solving but also transforming the discourse of relationships. Contemporary analysis views conflicts through the lens of transformation. Conflict transformation necessarily reflects two important aspects, that is, positive orientation towards conflict and willingness to change. In such circumstances, conflict is no more seen as a tool for destruction but rather a facilitator of constructive change, and an opportunity to grow along with situations. A transformational approach towards conflict resolution seeks constructive changes, using the energy that conflicts generate.\footnote{John Paul Lederach and Michelle Maise, excerpt from “The Little Book of Conflict Transformation” (Good Books, 2003) http://peacebuildingforlanguagelearners.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/73426925/Lederach%20and%20Maise%20Conflict%20Transformation.pdf}

**Tools for conflict resolution:** Communication plays a significant role for any attempt of conflict resolution, irrespective of its intensity. Communication can initiate dialogues and talks as one of the key elements for conflict resolution. Adrian Guelke lists out some of the crucial stages of dialogues that can be
directional to a successful peace settlement.\textsuperscript{12} He first describes pre-talk stage as the one where parties to the conflict are initially reluctant to enter negotiations as they believe that their objectives could be achieved using other means, preferably physical means. Having said that, negotiations not only provide legitimacy to the demands to the insurgents but also give opportunity to the government to engage with the opponents at an earlier stage of a conflict. Conflicts usually represent a complicated structure that is highly unlikely to be resolved by the conflicted sides themselves. In that case, a third-party presence is well-appreciated in bridging the gap and bringing the two sides to the negotiation table. On many occasions, conflicted parties show unwillingness for a face-to-face negotiation and in situations like this the need for proximity talk arises, as explained by Guelke. In proximity talks, either the third-party or the negotiator acts as a shuttle of communication between the two delegations.\textsuperscript{13}

The most widely used tool in conflict resolution is third-party intervention. A neutral third-party intervention firstly, is a functional structure in international relations (like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), responsible for restoring international peace and security), and secondly, consciously employed by international actors, and mostly, is involved on the request of adversaries. External engagement in any conflict is considered vital as it involves fact-findings and enquiry, and it acts as a tool to break the ice with systematic communications. Third party involvement is sometimes considered as a preferred mean to settle disputes, especially when internal parties are unable to reach an understanding. Gerald Eisenkopf and André Bächtiger stress three key characteristics, of communication, punishment, and mediator interests which manipulates the third-party mediation. While explaining communication, they pointed out that the availability of information in the public domain is a tool for effective mediation.\textsuperscript{14} Information lessens uncertainty and that helps disputants to perceive the conflict transparently and put forward their bargaining terms accordingly. With regards to punishment, the authority vested in mediators to penalize adversaries in case of the violation of peace terms can influence conflict resolutions in a major way. Mediator interests also help in shaping outcomes of conflict resolution. Under an ideal situation, unbiased mediation proves most effective. However, many have argued that a mediator’s biasness can put pressure on its ally as well as extract concessions from the favoured side.\textsuperscript{15} Foreign involvement is also desirable when a third-party mediator is approached by the adversaries, which is quite relevant in the Sri Lankan case as Norway was approached by both Sri Lankan government as well the Tamil rebel organization, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).\textsuperscript{16}

Conditions for success in conflict resolution: Successful conflict resolution requires a multitude of conditions, which in coherence could lead to several positive outcomes. Emeric Rogier stresses that peace processes are most likely to yield positive outcomes when driven internationally.\textsuperscript{17} His study points out three core conditions that are absolutely necessary for successful conflict resolution, which are coherence, commitment, and consistency. Participating actors are required to synchronize their actions because lack of coherence, as Rogier puts out, can lead to detrimental effects on conflict resolution. Capabilities to reduce differences in opinion, sharing common understanding of the problems, and a shared position for the solution yields greater coherence in any decision making. When multiple actors are involved in peace settlements, optimizing differences in opinion can lead to greater coherence. Consistency is another key factor for success in peace settlements. The right policy implementations that meet the needs of the ground reality defines consistency in the process of conflict settlement. Rogier acknowledges that consistency in peace processes should not come in a pre-formatted range of options, rather conflict should be understood with respect to situation on the ground, such as the intensity of the conflict and the commitments of parties towards peace. Having said that, participating actors’ commitments towards long-standing peace settlements also enhances success in conflict resolutions. Commitments does not necessarily always refer to resources provided by negotiators, but also their willingness and dedication to end the conflict, irrespective of the means required. Apart from the conflicted parties, commitment from the mediators is arguably more crucial for successful outcomes, especially when mediators continue to pursue the peace process against all odds and not resign after initial failures.

Violence in conflict resolution: Violence acts as a major setback as it not only escalates tensions but also affects the confidence building measures, leading to disruption of faith. Authors like John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty have stressed that no peace process could yield result if parties involved are indulged in acts of violence or use forces to achieve their objectives.\textsuperscript{18} On many occasions, intra-party dynamics often alters according to the choice to resort to the use of violence. For example, if one faction of an organization chooses the route of using violent means in achieving their objective, the other faction prefers dialogues or other peaceful means. As Kristine Hoglund argues, violence can not only impact adversaries’ contributions to negotiation but also poses greater threat to external actors or custodians to negotiations.\textsuperscript{19} Violent situations can compel parties to withdraw from peace processes. Similarly, violence can also disrupt and weaken peace negotiations by driving external actors to withdraw from the process. Peace


\textsuperscript{17} Jacob Bercovich, “Third Parties in Conflict Management: The Structure and Conditions of Effective Mediation in International Relations,” International Journal 40, no.4 (Autumn, 1985): 737-739

\textsuperscript{18} Emeric Rogier, “Strategizing Conflict Resolution,” Rethinking Conflict Resolution in Africa: Lessons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Sudan. Clingendael Institute, 2004, p. 29

\textsuperscript{19} Kristine Hoglund, “Violence-Catalyst or Obstacle to Conflict Resolution: Seven Propositions Concerning the Effect of Violence on Peace Negotiations,” Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University (September 2001), p. 5

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. pp. 5–8
custodians are often targeted by adversary groups who prefer no external mediation and would rather choose violence as the only way to achieve their aim.

Violence can also be a motivator in pushing hesitant parties towards peaceful settlements. Violence in peace processes makes one realise the importance of ceasefires and peace agreements. Kristine Hoglund states that peace agreements are often viewed in different lights in varying situations. In some cases, she argued, ceasefire agreements are considered as pre-requisite for parties to begin negotiation, whereas in other cases ceasefires are often the outcomes of comprehensive peace agreements. Many have argued that ceasefires are significant beginnings in conflict resolution as it helps build trust and confidence.21 Stephen John Stedman has pointed out certain key factors that can facilitate the processes of peace implementations. First, is to identify and overcome the spoiler behaviour that either comes from a leader or the followers’ ill-intentions towards peace settlements that can be detrimental to the progress of a potential peace-making process. The second most significant point made was the demobilization of armed forces and re-integrating them into civilian life. This helps to lessen differences between the two sides and encourages them to work for self-help solutions. Stedman has also highlighted the significance of long-term peacebuilding and how reforms in the role of civil society organisations and reduction in use of force can facilitate peace implementations.22

Ethnic conflicts, however, are occasionally less responsive to mediation or negotiation, as disputed parties are expected to reach compromised understandings. As a matter of fact, the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict stands as a perfect example in this case because mediation or negotiation for both LTTE and the government meant less gains and more compromises. In some instances, resolutions are achieved through muscle power, also called ‘mediation-with-muscle’ as conceptualised by Kingsley M. De Silva while stating the concept as one of the structural approaches to conflict resolution. Such a practice eventually does more damage than good. Mediation-with-muscle does not necessarily mean problem solving, rather it reflects enforced decisions on the weaker side.23 The Indian peacekeeping mission in Sri Lanka, through its Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF), can be viewed as one such muscle-mediation, which in place of monitoring peace and ceasefire, resorted to violence as an action against LTTE. The dismissal of IPKF’s further presence in Sri Lanka and invitation of Sri Lankan President Premadasa for IPKF to leave their country, indicated the country’s unwantedness towards India’s role and proved the ineffectiveness of mediation-with-muscle.24 For example, the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, by LTTE suicide bombers in May 1991, can be viewed as a cost of muscle-mediation.

Failure of conflict resolution: Conflict resolution can result in failure owing to a multitude of reasons. As we studied earlier, a successful peace process can be achieved when shown consistency in peace efforts by both adversaries and mediators, with a regular communication throughout and all groups being cohesive in actions. Having said that, when participating parties fail to work in coherence and show a lack of commitment in their efforts to bring peace, all attempts with conflict resolution starts to take the downward slope. However, use of violent means in achieving objectives dampen the spirit of any peace process and lead to the failure of negotiation. When adversaries use violence despite being in peace agreements, it not only leads to the failure of the peace arrangement but also exhausts faith within each other and reduces scopes for future reconciliations. On certain occasion, the nature of external mediation can also influence the success rate of conflict resolution. Mediators’ imposition of authority on disputants can be hazardous for the peace process. For instance, India’s ‘unilateral’ decision to send the Indian peacekeeping force (IPKF) to monitor the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Agreement turned out to be a massacre. The word ‘unilateral’ was deliberately used as IPKF was part of the 1987 Peace Accord, which was neither participated with nor approved by LTTE. In that case, India’s use of good offices for peace in Sri Lanka in the future went into vain as the LTTE and the greater Tamil community further viewed India’s participation as biased towards the Sri Lankan government. The following section of the article attempts to discuss the Sri Lankan civil war as a case study and analyse the effects and consequences of external mediation in the conflict.

Sri Lankan civil war: Conflict between government and rebel forces

The Sri Lankan ethnic crisis was a political problem which required a political solution, rather than military, despite the amount of government’s military strength went behind the crisis or the sophisticated nature of weaponry used by Tamil rebels.25 The Tamil militants were well-trained and highly skilled and educated Tamil youths, who were deprived of their rights and privileges after the Sinhalese government took over after the Sri Lankan independence from the British in 1948.

The birth of Tamil militancy can be traced roughly between 1973 to 1977, at the time when Sri Lanka’s northern provinces

21 Kristine Hoglund, op. cit.
started to witness political violence between Tamil radicals and Sri Lankan government. In 1975, the youth wing of the premier democratic Tamil party (the Tamil United Liberation Front) officially identified themselves as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). LTTE steered the mass movement, demanding an autonomous Tamil state, Eelam, in Sri Lanka. LTTE emerged as the strongest Tamil nationalist group, among other Tamil radical groups, and was known for their violent war tactics. The Tamil militant gained momentum from 1983 onwards. LTTE used guerrilla warfare as their methods of attack and trained young recruits in the southern states of India. After establishing hegemony in Jaffna in 1987, LTTE began its systematic attacks on their political oppositions, including rival Tamil nationalist groups.26 LTTE made use of the lull periods of negotiations to eliminate its rival Tamil groups and re-arm themselves. LTTE’s confrontation against the Sri Lankan armed forces, in keeping them from overrunning LTTE’s stronghold in Jaffna, its administrative capital in Killinochi and main base in Kokkadicholai, in Batticaloa district, witnessed the use of improvised armour supported by artillery and extensive siegeworks, coupled with high concentration of anti-aircraft weapons. In fact, LTTE was one of the first terrorists’ group who possessed air assets, including aircrafts and an airstrip which also provided surveillance and self-protection means.27 So much so that with air raids in April 2007, the LTTE attacked an air force base and an oil facilities in Colombo which caused blackout in the Sri Lankan capital city, impacting business and economy.28

LTTE was largely responsible for radicalizing a big section of the Tamil diaspora, who came together to form a political and cultural community through Computer Mediated Communication.29 Tamil diaspora, known to be one of the largest diasporic communities in the world, had funded LTTE operations. The LTTE went to every length to achieve their Eelam dream, starting from violent attacks on Sri Lankan armed forces, political opponents, kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and forced child recruitment from local Tamil civilians. As M. Sarvananthan called it, the LTTE garnered support through persecution rather than persuasion. The violent methods of LTTE operations met with brutal consequences at the hands of Sri Lankan armed forces.30 The escalation of the ethnic conflict into a full-scale civil war witnessed large scale sufferings and losses. In this situation, conflict resolution seemed the only possibility that could have delivered a political solution to the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis. Amidst growing antagonism between the government forces and rebels, both sides reached out to a third-party, Norway, for mediation which the latter accepted.

### Third party intervention in Sri Lanka

It is rather interesting to understand in the first place why Norway was chosen as a mediator in the far-flung conflict of Sri Lanka, far away from the subregion of Scandinavia? Norway is a small state, with no colonial past and good domestic record of gender equality. Norway, a champion of decolonization in Africa and Asia, was one of the first countries to set up peace institute with public fundings. As author J.S. Moolakkattu pointed out that Scandinavian countries in general are identified as ‘norm entrepreneurs’ in areas related to peaceful conflict resolution or sustainable development, it therefore makes sense to demonstrate what is called Norway’s niche diplomacy in this context. Norway’s considerable allocation of funds for foreign aid indicated its willingness of assistance. Its mediation efforts in the Middle East (The Oslo Accords), in the past, earned recognition at the world stage. It has also been pointed out that Norway’s covert channels and unofficial facilitations were widely regarded as accomplishing and therefore resulted in increase in demand for Norway’s mediation in other conflicted parts of the world. The author continues to claim that Norway has shown sympathy towards the victims of personal, structural as well cultural violence in most of its humanitarian missions. The success story of Norway’s previous experience as a peace broker in Colombia, where a Norwegian United Nations official helped in cementing a peace deal between the army and guerrillas, have made it more approachable for countries to look up to Norway’s mediation efforts in solving their crisis.31

Alongwith other Scandinavian countries, Norway continued to monitor the conflict situation in Sri Lanka. As part of its peace-making initiatives, Norway offered to play the role of a third-party mediator. From an earlier stage, Norway had started promoting peace initiatives for the Sri Lankan conflict and established contacts with the LTTE. Norway was also part of the proposed monitoring committee that was supposed to be set up followed by the Cessation of Hostilities Agreements, an understanding between LTTE and Sri Lankan President Kumaratunga in 1995, which was later aborted. The Norwegian efforts, for peace facilitation, officially gained momentum when Ranil Wickremesinghe of United National Party became the Prime Minister in 2001. Soon after joining office, Wickremesinghe wrote to the Norwegian Prime Minister to resume the stalled peace process. Similar request was also made by LTTE chief Prabhakaran, followed by which the Ceasefire Agreement of February 2002 came into effect.32

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32 Ibid., p. 390–391
Norway also engaged with New Delhi in terms of information sharing after the former announced its active participation as a third-party mediator. Norway’s assistance towards Sri Lanka as a peace facilitator was welcomed by the larger international community as Norway has a reputation of cementing peace deals. In New Delhi, Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, said that if both the disputants were serious about reaching a resolution, Norway would willingly take up the role, and if not, then Norway had no role to play in Sri Lanka. Having said that, there have been several theories regarding Norway’s motivation in its involvement in Sri Lanka. Firstly, Norway’s interest in oil and fisheries resources of Sri Lanka. Norwegian NGOs’ developmental programs for the fishing community in Jaffna required a good measure of political stability of the region. Secondly, the influence of Tamil expatriate community in Norway, who continued to support the LTTE, had high level contacts with Norwegian political parties and administration. Lastly, in a bid to reinforce its role as an international peacemaker, Norway perhaps considered its role in Sri Lanka as an indispensable one. In addition to that, requests from both Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to resume its role as a facilitator apparently provided impetus to Norway’s role as a third-party mediator.

In comparison to Norway, India, on the other hand, had strategic concerns tied to the Sri Lankan conflict. India’s involvement in the neighbouring Sri Lankan conflict was unavoidable due to two significant factors. First, geo-political factor, which arose with Sri Lanka’s growing Western-tilted foreign policy. Fearing Indian intervention amidst conflict, Colombo began involving external powers like United States of America, Britain as well as anti-India nations such as China and Pakistan, churning national security concerns for India. The second factor being domestic politics, in which southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu pressurized New Delhi to act on the atrocities that targeted Tamils in Sri Lanka. Tamils of both Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka share culture, language as well as ancestral linkages and therefore are sympathetic towards the Tamil plight in Sri Lanka in general. With a growing unrest brewing at home, New Delhi’s unresponsive approach towards the Sri Lankan conflict could have resulted in a resurgence of Tamil separatism in the country. Therefore, it is apparent that the motives of both India and Norway are strikingly different in terms of their intervention in Sri Lanka. Norway merely wished to mediate the conflict by acting as a channel of communication whereas, India, prime concern was regional security and stability.

India and Norway’s intervention in Sri Lanka were not only different in terms of motives but also in nature. While Indian involvement is largely seen as an armed intervention, Norway’s on the other hand was an unarmed mediation, that mainly involved negotiations and dialogues. As part of the 1987 Peace Accord, signed between Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene, India deployed its IPKF in Sri Lanka, mainly to supervise ceasefires and disarm the LTTE. Not being a signatory to the peace accord, LTTE resisted being disarmed and fought the IPKF. Soon, India’s peacekeeping mission (also known as Operation Pawan) emerged as a violent intervention, and the IPKF was no longer welcomed in the island country. Sri Lankan government’s request to India to withdraw its IPKF forces, following its violence against LTTE, turned out to be the darkest episode in India’s regional policy. Also, the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, by LTTE suicide bombers in May 1991, altered the course of India’s diplomatic involvement in the conflict and thereby maintaining an arm’s length approach, as it could no longer keep its diplomatic contacts with the LTTE.

Norway’s mediation, on the other hand, involved multiple rounds of peace talks and development conferences, attended by around 20 donor countries who showed willingness to participate in the mediation process. With the help of the Norwegian effort, the Sri Lankan government agreed to accept a model that devolved state power, which the LTTE too agreed upon. In correspondence to that, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) was created to monitor the ceasefire, with Norway as the neutral observer.

The international community not only initiated conflict resolution but, at the same time, assisted Sri Lanka in several rehabilitation projects. Japan, a significant donor country for Sri Lanka, had sent representatives to meet LTTE leadership for discussions over reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Vanni region, a stronghold of the LTTE in northern Sri Lanka. Even before the February 2002 ceasefire agreement was signed, Japan, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) had rolled out funding for initiating peace processes in the country. All the official development assistance (ODA) to Sri Lanka was channelled through their Ministry of Defence in Colombo, which was highly objected by the LTTE who later demanded direct access to foreign funds.

33 M.K. Narayan Swamy, “Norway has to recalibrate Sri Lanka peace process”, The Tiger Vanquished: LTTE’s Story, New Delhi, 2010, p. 27
34 John Stephen Moolakkattu, op. cit. 391–392
Challenges faced by international actors

LTTE’s demand for the right to direct access to the foreign funds came as a major challenge for international donors. Granting them such access would have compromised Sri Lanka’s quest for maintaining a unitary system of government. Sri Lankan government’s denial of direct access of funds to LTTE and the latter’s insecurity towards the aiding institutions clearly portrayed the lack of mutual trust and absence of internal coordination.

After the 9/11 attack, the Sri Lankan government received added support from the international community to ban LTTE’s overseas communication and funding from the Tamil diaspora. In April 2003, Washington D.C., who by then was actively engaged in the Sri Lankan peace process, proposed a pre-donor meeting to be held in the United States. LTTE was not welcomed in said meeting since the USA had already listed the group as a terrorist outfit post 9/11. The humiliated LTTE reacted by withdrawing their participation from the Tokyo donor conference, scheduled in June 2003, which was aimed at the distribution of aid in Sri Lanka. The international community, including the European Union (EU), tried hard to materialize the peace negotiations through the formation of the Sri Lanka Donor Co-chairs Group, chairing Norway, USA, the EU, and Japan. In the meantime, the devastating tsunami of December 2004 changed the course of the peace process. Soon the issue of the peace process became intertwined with tsunami aid, deepening mistrust between the two sides as one side accused the other of partial re-distribution of the foreign aid.

In response to the disastrous tsunami of 2004, a Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) was established in June 2005. The P-TOMS delegated each party their share of responsibility for the post-tsunami reconstruction, allowing some sense of social voice to LTTE. Feeling threatened, the Sinhalese hardliners protested P-TOMS. They claimed that the body was created to ‘deterioralize’ the Sinhalese Buddhist nation. Followed by that, the Sri Lankan supreme court declared certain features of the P-TOMS was unconstitutional. Very soon the tsunami aid was linked to political objectives and contradicted humanitarian principles, which erased the hope of bringing the communities together.

Alongside this, LTTE’s refusal to denounce weapons despite the ceasefire, coupled with Sinhala hardliners’ mistrust over the Norwegian peace process, came as a major setback for the mediators. The Buddhist Sinhalese stuck to their demand for a Sinhala majority federal structure. LTTE’s attack on the Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga in 1999, violated ceasefire terms and exposed the group’s reluctance to negotiate.

According to SLMM reports, LTTE was responsible for the violation of the 2002 ceasefire agreement and held responsible for child recruitment, using civilians as human shields, abductions and harassments, extortions, and restriction of movement. Abducting members of Eelam People’s Democratic Party (EPDP) and Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (Varathar) (EPRLF (V)) were incidents of major breaches of trust.

Failure of conflict resolution

Where Norway’s distinguished efforts, as a sole facilitator, to resolve the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict were well appreciated globally, domestic situations on the other hand continued to deteriorate in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan internal state of affairs did not appear conducive for any peaceful settlement, owing to LTTE’s obstination on Tamil Eelam and Sri Lankan government’s stubbornness towards military solution. Besides, LTTE’s major mistakes by assassinating Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadigamar in August 2005 added fuel to the fire. Both these incidents not only unleashed fresh political violence in the country but also destroyed LTTE’s goodwill in India.

Norway faced heavy criticism in tackling the LTTE, so much so, that in one of its private meetings in New Delhi, India criticized Norway for being too ‘LTTE friendly’. India by then hardened its position towards the Tigers’ cause, and apparently did not oppose Sri Lankan government’s decision for a military offense. Norway was subjected to a great deal of reproval over its connection with the LTTE. It is indeed crucial to mention here that owing to such close connection between Norway and the LTTE, it was Norway who requested the Sri Lankan government to give a safe passage to LTTE’s Anton Balasingham for his renal treatment in Europe. Norway was not only accused of funding the LTTE, but also for being soft on the LTTE when it boycotted negotiations and the Tokyo donors’ conference in 2003. It is also alleged that Norway was ignoring LTTE’s misdeeds, such as child recruitment, and failed to address the group’s attacks on political opponents in the process of conflict resolution. Reports emerged of LTTE...
being covertly funded by both India and LTTE, in response to which Colombo issued notice to peace brokers that either they be against the Tamil organization or they make an exit from Sri Lanka. Another advantage was given to the LTTE, as part of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement, was to carry out ‘political work’ in government areas, against which Colombo got no reciprocity at the other end.\footnote{M.R. Narayan Swamy, “Sri Lanka and the Peace Makers: A Story of Norway and India,” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Issue Brief, no. 178 (December 2011): 3–4.}

Despite receiving funds from Norway, LTTE refused to completely accept the peace process engineered by Oslo. LTTE apparently seemed an enthusiast for peace while signing the 2002 pact, but as soon as they realized that the terms of the process were undermining their interests, LTTE backtrack.\footnote{Ibid.}

While Norway was accused of being ignorant to LTTE’s misdeeds, it was highlighted by author Narayan Swamy that Norway did consider the group’s killings in the process but interestingly LTTE bothered less about the West as they knew that no Western power could take action against them. In this context, Gerald Eisenkopf and André Bächtiger’s theory of conditions for successful conflict resolution finds legitimacy where they explained how mediators’ authority to punish adversaries can influence the outcome of conflict resolution. Having said that, Norway had limited influence over designing the peace process as the process continued to reshape with successive governments in Sri Lanka and renewed demands. Moreover, Norway was invited to be a non-coercive facilitator, who could only act within the confines of what was acceptable to the parties.\footnote{Alan Bullion, “India’s Regional Role Challenged by Chinese Presence in Sri Lanka,” Indian Journal of Asian Affairs 22, no. 1/2 (June–December 2009): 54–55.}

Regarding Eisenkopf and Bächtiger’s concept of communication as another element of successful peace process, a major drawback to Norwegian efforts happened with the death of Anton Balasingham in December 2002, a man who had a lot of influence on LTTE chief Prabhakaran. Balasingham was one of the notable channels of communication Norway had established in its process.

LTTE’s narrow accountability led to the breach of commitments it made while signing the 2002 ceasefire pact and its drastic measures in assassinating Sri Lankan ministers changed the global outlook towards the group. Travel ban was issued on LTTE members. Funding from the Tamil diaspora in North America, Western Europe, Australia, India, and Singapore were blocked, hindering the group’s operations. Security situations in Sri Lanka continued to deteriorate and, responding to the widespread violence, the Rajapaksa government opted for a military solution. Considering LTTE’s reluctance to negotiate, Rajapaksa’s decision for military oppression received a nod from the international community while India also backed Sri Lanka’s decision on taking military action. Countries like China, Pakistan, and Iran also supported Rajapaksa’s military intervention. LTTE tried to utilize the influence of the Tamil diaspora to voice against the military oppression, which went in vain.\footnote{M.R. Narayan Swamy, “Sri Lanka and the Peace Makers A Story of Norway and India,” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Issue Brief, no. 178 (December 2011): 3–4.} Rajapaksa’s military assault, with Chinese fighter bombs and other weaponry, proved fatal for LTTE in the final phase of the Eelam war, only to find the LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran lying dead in the jungles of northern Sri Lanka in May 2009.\footnote{Ibid.}

The reasons behind systematic failures of conflict resolution in Sri Lanka can be summed up in the following way. Firstly, there was an absolute lack of any internal consensus in post-independence Sri Lanka about minority representation in the country’s political structure. The majority Sinhalese, empowered with the transfer of power, failed to outline rights and representation for the ethnic minorities or religious groups in the country. An intentional political and economic under-representation of Tamil minorities in mainstream Sri Lanka unfortunately gave rise to class stratification and lowered the chances of social integration. Such is the structural feature of Sri Lankan society, dominated by ethno-centric politics. Even though Norway was successful in holding talks with Colombo and LTTE in adverse circumstances, it failed to bring any structural change or persuade either party for any significant shift in their positions.\footnote{Ibid.} The second most significant reason was the readiness to use force rather than dialogue. It was seemingly easier for Colombo to eliminate the Tamil uprising by use of force rather than leaving a scope for reconciliation. Third was the lack of trust between LTTE echelons and the Sri Lankan government over the incoming of international aid. The Western logic that aid can be a replacement of politics was also debunked in the Sri Lankan case.\footnote{Ibid.}

The constant changing nature of the peace process over the course of time is believed to have an adverse impact on its outcome. Starting with the internal split in LTTE, in which ideological differences between Karuna (a LTTE loyalist) and the leader Prabhakaran allegedly broke the group’s spirit. Anton Balasingham’s death also knocked back Norway’s communication with LTTE in a major way, as Balasingham was the man who helped Solheim to keep LTTE glued to the peace process.\footnote{Ibid.} And lastly, constant regime changes in Sri Lanka and their differing outlook towards Norway’s role and being sceptic over Oslo’s impartial nature of facilitation initiated the downward slide of the peace process.\footnote{Ibid.}

The final analysis suggests that had LTTE stuck together as one separatist organization, driven towards the cause of Tamil
identity and channelizing their fight in a more action-oriented fashion with less violence involved, the peace process could have had a better opportunity to succeed. The last leg of LTTE’s fight emerged more as a competition between factions, rather than a social cause for their people. While traditional approach of conflict resolution in Sri Lanka rooted for negotiation through compromise, conflict transformation too failed to deliver a pragmatic solution for the country’s structural problem. Rather it makes more sense to say that the contemporary problem-solving approach of conflict resolution had more chances to yield positive outcomes had there been adequate considerations by adversaries. While the 1987 peace accord was more of a compromised effort, which excluded the Tamil separatist group while penning down the agreement, Norway-mediated 2002 CFA on the other hand had a more inclusive approach. So much so that the Norwegian Special Envoy, Erik Solheim, faced several criticisms for being too accommodative to LTTE’s demands. Despite application of most available tools of conflict resolution, Sri Lankan peace process was quite a complicated situation for a third-party to manoeuvre, without making any meaningful structural change in the Sri Lankan society.

Conclusion
The research question that has been raised earlier was ‘can third-party intervention, a significant model in the conflict resolution theory, yield desired outcomes under challenging circumstances?’ The answer to this question largely depends upon the prevailing situation that requires conflict management, the intent of parties involved and their level of cooperation for a successful negotiation and conducive circumstances for lasting peace. In the Sri Lankan context, third-party intervention was used in the application of conflict resolution, participated by a notable peace maker, backed by other influential powers. Violent turning points in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, including assassination of leaders and breach of peace pacts and ceasefire, turned the regional conflict a global matter, that drew attention from various parts of the world. Countries poured in developmental aid thinking it could restore order in the country. However, none of it could deliver a desired outcome as parties involved refused to budge from their estranged positions and a significant lack of trust prevailed, not only amongst the disputants but also towards third-party mediators.

Third-party intervention is largely believed to be the most used tool in conflict resolution, which in the past has generated positive outcomes out of some of the most complicated conflicts. However, India’s IPKF deployment in Sri Lanka, as part of New Delhi’s involvement in the conflict, had not only failed in its purpose of restoring peace, but rather it drove India farther from future peace initiatives. In addition to that, LTTE’s attempts to re-arm the organization while being in ceasefire was a major setback for the peace process. It gave impetus to the Sri Lankan government to show reluctance to negotiate and, with external assistance, the power equilibrium of the Sri Lankan conflict changed.

Another significant aspect of third-party intervention in Sri Lanka was Norway’s role in ceasefire agreement and peace talks which again failed to materialize due to lack of cooperation between adversaries. Countries, financial institutions, and regional organizations too came forward with funding, reconciliation plans and mediation processes. Mediators tried every possible means to make the peace process work. However, it was rarely seen that peace custodians came up with an approach that promised to solve what the Sri Lankan society was suffering. It is understandably not an easy task to fundamentally correct the wrongs that were taking place in Sri Lanka at that time, but a system with inclusive approach towards the minority ethnic groups could have suggested changes, which interestingly was disapproved by every successive governments in Colombo, irrespective of their willingness for peace. Moreover, it would take a lot for any Sri Lankan government to bring about a structural change in their society, without upsetting the majority Sinhalese community.

LTTE’s spree of assassinations projected their desperateness and made them walk the quickest road from being a separatist group to a terrorist organisation. The Rajapaksa government too had ignored calls for ceasefires at the time when the civilians were getting caught in the crossfires. Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights made statements that during the last phase of the war, both LTTE and Sri Lankan army grossly disregarded the value of lives of the civilians. The army’s indiscriminate firing and LTTE’s forceful holding of civilians and using them as human shields drew massive criticism from the international community. LTTE’s determination over Eelam and rejection of the three autonomy plans offered by Chandrika Kumaratunga in 1995, 1997, and 2000 emphasized the group’s reluctance for ensuring peace. LTTE’s increased inclination towards forceful attainment of objective apparently had compelled the Sri Lankan government to bank on external powers who promised military support. The Sri Lankan government also tapped into the fragile crack of LTTE after the group’s internal fallout as it was easier to break what was already broken. Therefore, the course of ongoing actions left no space for any peaceful settlement and the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka died with the death of their supreme leader, Prabhakaran.

Lessons learned from the Sri Lankan case projects that not everytime third-party intervention can yield positive outcome owing a number of factors. Lower accountability, unpredictable adversary behaviour, mediator’s limited authority and lack of trust and commitments are some of the most noticeable reasons for mediationfailouts. LTTE’s low accountability, their desperateness towards achieving Eelam and inconsiderate behaviour towards local Tamil community as well Sri Lankan government’s accusation of mediators are some of the most apparent reasons that demotivated facilitator’s interests in mediating the conflict. Although Norwegian diplomacy withstood personal attacks and other accusations, it nevertheless carried on with its duties towards peace making. However, Colombo’s refusal to budge from its position and give any concessions to LTTE raised questions about its real intent for a lasting peace. Also, Norway’s limited authority and the non-coercive nature

Alan Bullion, op. cit., 54.
of its intervention had left very little power at the hands of the mediator to design the endgame, resulting in the failure of the peace process and the fateful plight of remaining Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Discrimination against Tamils in Sri Lanka was never a hushed issue. Infact, some leaders in Sri Lanka never shied away from expressing their biasness towards majority Sinhalese. For instance, winning the 2019 Presidential election, wartime defence chief Gotabaya Rajapaksa clarified to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his visit to Sri Lanka in June 2019, that giving political powers to Tamils was not Gotabaya’s priority, as power devolution to Tamils meant going against the Sinhalese. Therefore, the failure of conflict resolution in Sri Lankan had not only meant military defeat of LTTE, it rather meant defeat of the Tamil community at large whose fights for assimilation are on till this day.

Data availability
No data are associated with this article.

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In this article, the author attempts to address the question of why some third-party mediation efforts fail, whereas others succeed. Using Sri Lanka as a case study, the author discusses the role that Norway and India played in resolving the civil war between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. While the paper has the potential to contribute to our understanding of the role that third-party mediators play in civil wars, there are some issues with the literature, theory, and case study that detract from the paper’s potential contribution.

In terms of the research question, it would be helpful if the author identified the question at the start of the paper. It is not until midway through the fourth paragraph that the author states that “this research paper aims to identify whether third-party intervention...can always yield the desired result.” Stating the research question at the beginning of the paper would help orient the reader to the focus and contribution of the manuscript.

In terms of the literature, it would be helpful if the author engaged more with the research on why civil wars start and how they end. At several points in the paper, the author argues that conflicts are a “clash of interest” (page 1) that start “when two players fight for a similar interest” (page 3), and that “contradictions in ideologies and values have contributed to a surge in violent uprising.” While interests are certainly part of the reason why civil wars break out, we know from a vast literature that conflicts of interests alone are not enough to instigate violence – i.e., grievances are ubiquitous, but violence is not. Instead, actors also need to have the resources and ability to mobilize and act on those grievances. For example, see Cederman et al. 2010, Fearon and Laitin 2003, Fearon 1995, Denny and Walter 2014.1,2,3 Moreover, while most civil wars have an ethnic component (Denny and Walter 2014), most ethnic groups do not rebel (Birnir et al. 2018).4,5

In addition, while the author discusses the conflict resolution literature more broadly (page 5), since the argument focuses on how and why third-party mediation attempts succeed or fail, it would be helpful to narrow the literature review to these studies specifically. Virginia Page Fortna’s work is relevant here, as is the recent review of the peacekeeping literature by Barbara Walter,
Lise Morje Howard, and Virginia Page Fortna in the British Journal of Political Science.\(^6\)

In terms of the theory, it seems like the author is arguing that the Sri Lankan peace process failed because of “limitations and challenges” (page 3) and a failure of third-party intervention, but it is not clear what these limitations or challenges are and why the Norway intervention failed. On page 8, the author states that there were three reasons why conflict resolution in Sri Lanka failed – a lack of internal consensus about minority representation, the readiness to use force, and lack of trust between the LTTE and the government. On page 9, the author states that the failure of the peace process stems from a lack of “internal cooperation and coordination.” These reasons, however, are internal to the main actors in the conflict (the LTTE and the government) and the relationship between them, and do not seem to be related to what the Norwegian mediation team did or did not do.

The author does state, on page 9, that there are three characteristics for successful third-party mediations – communication, punishment, and mediator interests. But it is not clear that these factors are assessed in the case study. Since the author's argument seems to focus on understanding when and why third-party mediations succeed or fail, it would be helpful to pinpoint these reasons in the theory section and then assess whether they were or were not present in the Sri Lankan case.

In terms of the case study, the author spends a considerable amount of time describing the evolution of the conflict and the LTTE, but much of this is not relevant to testing the role of the Norwegian mediation in the conflict. It would be helpful to discuss how and why the Norwegians got involved in mediating the civil war in the first place, as well as how they attempted to communicate, punish, and address mediator interests (if these are the main factors used to assess third-party interventions) in the conflict.

Also, it would be helpful to clarify why the author is comparing the Norwegian mediation efforts to the Indian peacekeeping intervention, as they are not similar in their goals, actors, actions, etc.

Further, several claims are made without supporting evidence and references. For example, in the third paragraph, the author states that the Sri Lanka civil war “is one of those events whose imprints are still evidence to this day through the social divide in Sri Lankan society.” While I agree with this statement, it should be supported with reference to studies that have found that this divide exists. Otherwise, this is simply the author's opinion, and should be stated as such. This is just one example of many throughout the paper. For instance, on pages 5-6, the author states that India's peacekeeping mission “damaged their reputation” (why and how?). On page 6, the author notes that the civil war in Sri Lanka was “one of the deadliest wars in the history of mankind...”. It would be helpful to provide sources to support these assertions.

In terms of some minor points, the author might consider changing some of the tone of the language in the paper. For example, the author states on page 3 that “the peace process in Sri Lanka is a comprehensive study of conflict resolution in a violent society....” This seems to imply that Sri Lankan society (civil society, average people) were themselves violent. That's certainly not the case. There were many Tamils and Tamil organizations who used nonviolence to press their demands to the Sinhalese government, and not all Sinhalese were engaged in violence against Tamils.

It's not clear to me what the author means by stating that UNESCO, the European coal and steel
community, and the World Bank are “notable examples” of conflict resolution. Does the author mean that these are organizations that engage in conflict resolution? Or that these entities themselves were formed through conflict resolution? I’m not sure how they are relevant.

The author uses Tiananmen Square as an example of a protest that was prevented from turning into a civil war. However, it is not clear that this protest movement would have turned violent if not for the repressive response of the Chinese government. Indeed, there are many protests movements that never use violence; see Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan’s work, for example. Further, the author refers to the government’s response as “muscle mediation” (page 4). A more appropriate term here would be repression (see Davenport 2007, for example). Moreover, it’s not clear whether this example is appropriate, since the focus of the study is on the role that third-party mediators play in civil wars, and not whether government repression squashes or incites civil wars.

References

Is the topic of the essay discussed accurately in the context of the current literature?
Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Partly

Is the argument persuasive and supported by appropriate evidence?
No

Does the essay contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Conflict studies - civil war, terrorism, ethnic conflict, nonviolence, Sri Lanka
I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 18 May 2022

Sonia Dey, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India

Dear Reviewer, thank you for your time for reviewing my article and for suggesting some very relevant points which I addressed in my updated version.

To begin with, I have restructured my introduction and placed the research question at the beginning, after a brief introduction of the topic. With respect to your suggestion on a detailed discussions on civil wars, the new version discusses the causes and consequences of conflicts at a greater length, referring to some of the works cited by you. Norway’s interests and motivations in the Sri Lankan conflict and the limitations it faced being a non-coercive facilitator has been dealt with in the updated version. A comparative study between the Norwegian and Indian interventions has been made in order to understand the differing nature and motivations of the mediators, and how it affected the outcome. Lastly, with regard to 'muscle mediation', I refer to Kingsley M. De Silva's work "Conflict in South Asia" (International Journal on Group Rights, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1994), pp. 247-267 (21 pages) in which he identifies 'mediation with muscle' as another approach of conflict resolution theory and how it was applied by India in the Sri Lankan case. Similarly, in my discussion, over understanding conflict resolution, I attempted to highlight this concept as one of the approaches of conflict resolution.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

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The discussion on conflict types, and then conflict resolution, needs to be more analytical and rigorous in order to make a contribution to understanding the field. At present, it is a little superficial. More pinpointing is required to show exactly what gaps in the literature are being addressed in this paper, and how it adds to conflict resolution theory. There are many Sri Lankan scholars whose work is relevant here, but who are not referenced enough.

The comparisons with Tiananmen Square are not very helpful, as that was not a civil war. The
paper should be more narrowly focused around external third party intervention, and then explore that in more depth. Norway as a mediator should be introduced earlier in the paper. The overview paragraphs of Sri Lanka's civil war take too much word count that would be better used analysing the details of external third-party intervention.

The Indian peacekeeping mission was not really an example of conflict resolution - it should not be presented as analogous to the Norwegian efforts. Claims such as “The Sri Lankan civil war was one of the deadliest wars in the history of mankind” need to be qualified and checked for accuracy. The factor of motivation of external third parties is not explored in this paper, despite being very relevant. (compare the motives for intervention between the Norwegians and Indians, for example. Or, the use of armed and unarmed interventions). The issue of LTTE accessing funds from mediators is very interesting - it would be good to read more about this. There are is also no mention of how the Norwegians were sometimes accused of being pro-LTTE, and of giving equal decision-making power to the government and to a terrorist group.

Overall, too many disparate elements are addressed in this 10-page analysis. A reduced set of variables to analyse would give deeper and more insightful conclusions. If the paper focusses on third parties, then we don't need an overview of internal splits in the LTTE, or the use of foreign weaponry, etc. A more specific use of the case study approach in analysing third party intervention would allow the paper to be more carefully tailored and structured, and then explore a smaller range of issues, but in more detail. Very relevant factors are only introduced in the conclusion paragraph (“the intent of the parties involved and their level of cooperation”), but these factors are not explored enough. The termination of the war, and the failures of conflict resolution efforts, are not the same thing. Looking backwards with hindsight, allows us to retroactively analyse the Sri Lankan conflict, but we should be wary of making conclusions like “The failure of the Sri Lankan peace process, therefore, proves that the ultimate pre-requisite in a conflict situation is internal cooperation and coordination” - this does not necessarily hold true in a causal logic.

I suggest a smaller range of issues be explored, and in more depth, around third party interveners for conflict resolution, and then the 10-page document can be positioned to make a concrete addition to theory, instead of trying to address so many different factors.

**Is the topic of the essay discussed accurately in the context of the current literature?**
Partly

**Is the work clearly and cogently presented?**
Partly

**Is the argument persuasive and supported by appropriate evidence?**
Partly

**Does the essay contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?**
Partly

**Competing Interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of
expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 18 May 2022

Sonia Dey, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India

Dear Reviewer, I appreciate you taking your time out to review my work and suggesting meaningful changes. To begin with, as per your suggestion, I discussed conflict and conflict resolution more analytically in this version. I tried to introduce Norway's role as a third-party mediator at the beginning and discussed its role in the Sri Lankan peace process at a greater length, including pinpointing challenges Norway faced as a facilitator. I omitted the mention of Tiananmen Square from my discussion and replaced it with a better logical alternative. I also redefined the role of IPKF and represented it as analogous to Norwegian efforts. In this updated version of my article, I included my argument as to how Norway's unarmed mediation and India's armed intervention both met with similar consequences, which finally led to the failure of conflict resolution in Sri Lanka.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.