ESSAY

Analysing the Sri Lankan civil war through the lens of conflict resolution theory [version 3; peer review: 2 approved with reservations]

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Abstract
This paper offers a detailed perspective of third-party intervention as a major toolkit of conflict resolution. It assesses the efficacy of third-party intervention under certain working conditions, also at the same time pointing out circumstances that can ruin peaceful resolutions. Third party intervention was used to help resolve the decades-old Sri Lankan ethnic conflict between the government and the Tamil rebel group, LTTE. India was the first to attempt mediation through its peacekeeping forces, the use of which resulted detrimental to the mediation’s interest. Norway, who practiced a non-coercive mediation and claimed to play the role of a neutral third-party mediator, too came under the radar of criticism for biased mediation policies. This research points out what two different types of mediation can achieve from a single conflict and what are the conditions required for third party mediation to achieve success under complicated situations like the Sri Lankan case. The Sri Lankan peace process explores how mediation by force can backfire but at the same time exposes 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 future reconciliations.

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

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The hypothesis of this study is, having applied two different types of third-party mediation, that is mediation by using force as well as by dialogues, the Sri Lankan peace process could have succeeded through either of one, given the process was inclusive and democratized, and if conflict transformation was prioritized. The methodology used for this study was analyzing the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict through the lens of conflict resolution theory, focusing on the tool of third-party intervention, along with a detailed discussion on the conditions of both success and failures of external mediation. The chapter puts emphasis on third party mediation because the Sri Lankan peace process witnessed a major role played both by India and Norway as mediators rather than any internal party. Third-party interventions highlight the contributions made by external players who use means that occasionally cater to both their interests as well as the conflict’s. The paper also differentiates between traditional as well as contemporary practices of conflict resolution, in order to understand the evolution of the theory and its application in the Sri Lankan case.

Understanding conflict resolution
Conflict resolution is essentially a process in which institutions and policy options negotiate the needs of parties involved in the dispute. The groundwork of conflict resolution was laid out between 1946–1969, aimed at catering to future reconciliations. 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 greater emphases are given on generating solutions that benefit both sides. 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. 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 are essential. Non-negotiable values that reflect certain

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2 Ibid., p. 92
4 Ibid. 5
group’s identity needs should also be taken into consideration. When groups refrain from socializing into certain behavioural practices that run counter to their natural systems, such situations do not lead to healthy conflict resolution environment. Contemporary analysis views conflicts resolution through the lens of transformation, which emphasizes two important aspects, 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. A transformational approach towards conflict resolution seeks constructive changes, using the energy that conflicts generate. 

When conflicts reach a stalemate that hurts both the sides of the dispute, the need to mediation arises. Under circumstances where parties to conflicts are unable to resolve the dispute themselves, an external player then plays the role of a third-party mediator. A third-party mediator helps to change the level of fear and insecurity that surrounds commitment towards conflict resolution, while guaranteeing protection of interests of both sides, while facilitating a peace agreement. This paper presents a detailed discussion on this model of conflict resolution and outcome it derived from the Sri Lankan peace process.

Understanding third-party intervention as tool of conflict resolution

What is third-party intervention?

Third party intervention is a given term to a process of conflict resolution, in which a person or a group intervenes in an ongoing conflict, with an objective to resolve the dispute. Third party intervention can be applied under two circumstances, either it is employed consciously by international actors or on the request of adversaries. This type of external engagements involve fact-findings and enquiry, and is often considered as a preferred mean to settle disputes, especially when disputants are unable to reach an understanding. Gerald Eisenkopf and André Bächtiger stress three key characteristics, such as communication, punishment, and mediator interests, that manipulates third-party mediation. While explaining communication, they pointed out that the availability of information in the public domain is a tool for effective mediation. Information lessens uncertainty and help stakeholders to perceive conflict transparently and present their bargaining terms accordingly. With regard 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.

Who can intervene as third-party mediators?

Studies show that external actors with highly developed field mission capabilities are the one who successfully dissuade disputants from violent bargaining strategies. Mediators with greater institutional capabilities of sourcing specific and relevant information, with less variance, are likely to produce successful outcomes, as high variances can lead to uncertainty as well as erroneous predictions that often comes from a less-resourced mediator. Recent studies have revealed that International organizations (IO) and regional organizations have become relatively active in the field of conflict resolution and often appears to be well-equipped in promoting resolution to armed hostilities. In case of IO, the United Nations Department of Political Affairs plays a central role in preventing conflicts and build sustainable peace. European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Commonwealth of Nations (CON) are also some of the IOs that have been engaged in mediation since 1975. Regional organizations, such as Arab League, brokered a ceasefire in Syria in 2015 as a part of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), African Union’s Peace and Security Council (PSC) played a major role in conflict management and mediation role in the 2011 Libyan civil war, also, ASEAN’s mediation in the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute in early 2011, are some of the examples of how regional organizations have attempted mediation in conflict-stricken regions.

Individual states too can act as third-party mediators. Mediator states are often of two types; one, great power states that often belong from the wealthy countries, identified by hegemonic stability theorists, that take interest and deploy resources

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6 John Burton, op. cit., pp. 125–129


10 Magnus Lundgren, “Which type of international organizations can settle civil wars?”, The Review of International Organizations, 12 (4), 613–641

11 Doi: 10.1007/s11558-016-9253-0

12 Ibid.


15 http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2017.1360095

in system maintenance. While the other being medium and small size states that take interests in institutionalization of peace and reconciliation efforts, along with a place in global decision making. Small states often can offer peacekeeping missions to conflict zones and assist in de-escalation and trust-building measure with the help of persuasion. However, small states also occasionally lack the leverage to pressurize parties into negotiations. Whereas great powers on the other hand, can use leverage as the key factor in persuading disputants to engage into negotiations by being their guarantor of peace agreements. United States of America and Kuwait have been the primary mediators in the Gulf crisis in 2017, and both countries had adopted individual mediation approaches as big power and small power respectively.16

Lastly, states that are in the vicinity of a conflict can also play significant role in third party mediation, especially who are impacted in terms of regional instability, security and influx of migrants and therefore develop an interest in early mitigation of the crisis. As Stephen R. Leibel expressed that proximity can often breed willingness to participate or feel the need to join the war, given localized interests that stem out of ethnic groups crossing boundaries.17 Indian intervention in the Sri Lankan ethnic war, for instance, developed partly out of India’s national interest and partly due to domestic ethnic factors.

What are the different types of third-party intervention?

Third-party interventions can be of different nature as some use force, particularly in presence of a military while some offer non-coercive mediation by engaging combatants in dialogues and peacekeeping. With regard to military interventions, Iver Neumann suggested that great powers, usually rich countries with high military capabilities, often fall back on the use of force as part of mediation.18 Having said that, some realists argue that these kind of interventions by powerful states, using military forces, are often aimed at promoting their own interests.19 For example, in response to Syrian government’s use of chemical weapon, that killed over 1000 civilians in August 2013, US along with its Arab allies launched a military intervention in Syria in September 2014, fearing the Syrian chemical weapons would fall into the hands of terrorist organizations, and further be used against the United States.20 A pertinent question, in this context, is when does mediators use force as part of mediation? The answer to this question is when requests are made to states to use force on host’s territory as part of mediation, it can be held as a legitimate form of intervention as it is not prohibited in the United Nations Charter, Article 2(4), which prohibits use of force against any member state.21 Also, mediators can use force in cases of ‘humanitarian intervention’, a rationale that is linked to the soft law doctrine of Right to Protect (R2P) in which the international community has the obligation to intervene militarily to stop atrocities and offer protection, such as NATO’s air-campaign intervention in Kosovo in March 1999 to halt the humanitarian catastrophe.22

Military interventions, however, does not always guarantee success and therefore negotiations through dialogues are often encouraged that involves zero coercion. This is a type of mediation process where disputants seek assistance from individual states, groups or organizations to peacefully resolve their differences, without the use of force. This type of mediation uses persuasion rather than coercion, aiming to reach a solution that is acceptable to the both the conflicting parties, with mutual benefits.23 Another type of mediation is done through peacekeeping, often with United Nations intervention, in which UN Security Council sends peacekeeping forces to regions that face deadly conflicts. Studies show that peacekeeping interventions often help in reducing civilian and military casualties, prevent the spread and reoccurrence of violence, help disputants reach settlement and help countries maintain post-conflict peace. It reveals that higher the commitment from peacekeepers in protecting combatants, the lesser the casualties in conflicts.24 UN deployments in conflicts, such the African Union- United Nations Hybrid Operation (UNAMID) in Darfur July 2007, United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) of July 2011, United Nations Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) of July 2010 were some of the instances where non-coercive

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https://www.jstor.org/stable/23104368

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https://www.jstor.org/stable/24591054

18 Iver B. Neumann, op. cit., p. 567.


21 Ibid., p. 1.
22 Ibid., p. 2

https://www.jstor.org/stable/24557424

Doi: 10.1017/S000712342000023X
mediation and peacekeeping were used as a method of intervention to end hostilities and provide protection to civilians, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders from imminent threat of physical violence.25

When is the right time to intervene?

Some argue that key to successful conflict resolution also lies in the timing of efforts. Zartman quoted Henry Kissinger, where the latter pronounced that stalemate is the most propitious condition for settlement,26 identifying stalemate as the right timing for intervention. By timing, he means the readiness of the parties to resolve their conflict followed by a mutually hurting stalemate. When are they ready? When adversaries have limited options and their means to negotiate become costly, they grab opportunities that apparently promise to resolve their dispute and appear to be mutually beneficial.27

This concept is perceived as ripeness theory, a time when disputants find themselves locked in a conflict situation, from which they can neither escape nor can they progress towards victory. When such a deadlock becomes painful and drains both sides’ resources, they consider the time ripe for resolution. Having said that, it is equally important to identify when the time is not ripe for intervention. For instance, during an ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over territorial dispute in Nagorno Karabakh, the Iranian deputy foreign minister (with Iran being one of the mediators) said in an interview in 1992 that the situation in Azerbaijan was not ripe for mediation.28 However, critique to Zartman’s ripeness theory claims that the element of timing does not always guarantee successful results and that it can become an excuse for the failure to resolve a conflict and justification for inactions.29

In addition to the logic of timing, mediators may also intervene in conflicts when disputants are unable to negotiate and they approach a third party to become a channel of communication and help resolve the dispute. For instance, in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, upon winning election in 2001 on promise of peace, had wrote to the Prime Minister of Norway to resume the stalled peace process in the conflict-ridden country. This was followed by a similar request made by separatist group, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), chief, Velupillai Prabhakaran. Approach made by both sides of the conflict led Norway join the conflict as a third-party mediator, followed by which the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement was signed in Sri Lanka,30 the outcome of which will be discussed in detail in the latter half of the paper.

Another condition under which external players can intervene in an ongoing conflict, is when civilians face atrocities and their governments fail to offer protection. Under such circumstances, a third party or parties from the international community, can intervene citing the soft law doctrine of “Right to Protect (R2P)”.31 Conditions like these are often criticized and questions raised over the legitimacy of intervention in the name of humanitarianism.32 NATO’s humanitarian intervention in March 1999, against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), to prevent ethnic cleansing of Kosovar Albanians by Slobodan Milosević’s authoritarian regime, was questioned over the legitimacy of its use of force.33

Challenges in conflict resolution

There are certain conditions that prevent mediators from making qualifying decisions. Conditions like lack of knowledge, that is, the insufficient understanding to address the core issue of the conflict. When decision makers or mediators are inadequately informed about the root cause of the conflict, belligerents’ grievances, or incorrect predictions of the implications of mediator actions, it can often result as detrimental to the process. Some argue that power can be used to facilitate peaceful outcomes, as externally imposed power can secure parties during the process of disarmament. However, in the absence of powerful third party, belligerents often break the truce of disarmament and can attack the vulnerable side.34 The challenge, however, is that imposition of power can sometime backfire as it occasionally makes the belligerents feel less secure than more.35 Therefore, the question remains is how much power is too much power for conflict resolution? Mediators’ imposition of authority in conflict resolution can occasionally be counter productive. Despite pleading to peaceful means in mediation, coercion is often

27 Ibid., p. 225.
31 Pnina Sharvit Baruch and Brandon Weinstock, op. cit., p. 2.
34 Ian S. Spears, “Problems of Knowledge, Power and Political Will”, Believers, Skeptics and Failure in Conflict Resolution, Switzerland, 2019, pp. 94–105 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14144-8
35 Ibid., p. 106.
what states resort to as an acceptable means, especially while dealing with threats in more complicated conflicts.\textsuperscript{36} The use of power does not always guarantee peace, as once the believer of use of American power could bring peace, Aaron David Miller, renounced his position after America’s failure in the Palestinian peace process.\textsuperscript{37} India’s use of force through Indian Peacekeeping Forces (IPKF) in Sri Lanka in the 1990s, backfired and turned the peacemaking role into a bloodbath, ending India’s mediation role in the conflict.

Violence, on the other hand, acts as another major setback in conflict resolution as it not only escalates tensions but also affects the confidence building measures. 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{38} 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. Such disunity within organizations may create hindrance for mediators in offering a settlement that is acceptable to both factions. Violence, on the other hand, is another factor that not only can impact the negotiation process but also poses greater threat to mediators, as pointed out by Kristine Hoglund. Violent situations can compel mediators to withdraw from peace processes as peace custodians are often targeted by adversary groups who prefer no external mediation and would rather choose violence as the only way to reach their goal.\textsuperscript{39}

Having discussed the main facets of conflict resolution and the significance of the use of third-party intervention tool, it is indeed necessary to point out that success of mediations is subjective, and the outcomes may vary from case to case. A mediation can be considered successful when disputants accept the presence of mediators, comply to the terms of agreement and violence does not reoccur in a long time, usually 5 years from peace deals. However, the truth is after relying on both qualitative and quantitative comparative research and in-depth analyses, scholarship has come to terms with the fact that there is not golden rule for mediation.\textsuperscript{40} Case studies are the most desired ways to understand the unique patterns of mediation processes that take shape in accordance with ground realities. This paper focuses on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict as our case study, and how the conflict resolution processes unfolded and the outcomes it produced.

**Third party intervention in Sri Lanka**

Sporadic clashes between majority and minority ethnic groups eventually turned the course of fighting into a full-scale civil war. Such was the case in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, that witnessed decades-long bloodbath between the country’s government-backed armed forces and rebel group LTTE, belonging to the minority Tamil community. The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict was one of many destructive civil wars in recent history, resulting in humanitarian crises and widespread human rights abuses. Both sides of the dispute were high on mistrust and intolerance, and therefore under these circumstances, third party mediators intervened with the hope to resolve the dispute.

Norway played a significant role as a third-party mediator in the Sri Lankan conflict. 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 planned to 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 (UNP) 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.\textsuperscript{41} The Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, said that if both the disputants were serious about reaching a resolution, Norway would willingly take up the mediation role, otherwise Norway had no role to play in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{42} Having said that, there have been several theories regarding Norway’s motivation in its involvement in Sri Lanka. Firstly, 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.\textsuperscript{43} Prior to Norway, India had played a brief role as a mediator in the Sri Lankan conflict. India deployed its peacekeeping forces, following the 1987 Peace Accord, signed between Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene. The IPKF was mandated to monitor ceasefires

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 145.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., pp. 5–8.
\textsuperscript{41} John Stephen Moolakkattu., op. cit. 390–391
\textsuperscript{42} M.R. Narayan Swamy, “Norway has to recalibrate Sri Lanka peace process”, The Tiger Vanquished: LTTE’s Story, New Delhi, 2010, p. 27
\textsuperscript{43} John Stephen Moolakkattu, op. cit. 391–392
and disarm Tamil rebel groups, at the same time New Delhi tried using its good offices to negotiate between LTTE chief Prabhakaran and Sri Lankan government. That included Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi’s meeting with Prabhakaran in New Delhi, in the same year as the accord, in which the former tried to negotiate with Tamil leader to surrender arms.\(^{44}\) Similar to Norway, India too had motives behind its involvement in the conflict. First, India’s strategic and geo-political concerns over Sri Lanka’s growing West-inclined foreign policy. 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.\(^{45}\)

India and Norway’s intervention in Sri Lanka were not only different in terms of motives but also in nature. Indian involvement was largely seen as an armed intervention, with IPKF playing a significant role in attempting to disarm the rebel groups, especially LTTE and maintain peace in the Tamil-held regions of Sri Lanka’s north and east. Norway’s mediation, on the other hand, involved multiple rounds of peace talks and development conferences, attended by around donor countries who showed willingness to participate in the mediation process.\(^{46}\) 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 an observer.\(^{47}\)

Sri Lanka got assistance in rehabilitation projects too from the international community. Japan, a significant donor country, 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.\(^{48}\)

### Challenges in third-party intervention in Sri Lanka

India was the first external player to have entered the theatres of Eelam war, partly motivated to mitigate the conflict and securing Tamils rights and partly to secure its geo-strategic interests and restore regional stability. India’s first step to mediation was sending relief supplies to Sri Lanka’s beleaguered Jaffna peninsula on June 4, 1987, after reports of starvation of Tamils in the region. In response, Sri Lanka claimed violation of its sovereignty while India claimed it was an act of humanitarian intervention.\(^{49}\) The following act of mediation was signing of the 1987 Peace Accord with Sri Lankan government, which was even questioned by top officials in the Indian government. P.V. Narasimha Rao, a cabinet member in Rajiv Gandhi’s government, suggested that the accord should have been signed between Sri Lanka and the LTTE, with India being the guarantor.\(^{50}\) Some expressed that India’s agreement to a peace accord, that excluded one of the two warring parties, was a fundamental mistake.\(^{51}\) Expecting a disputant to follow the terms of an agreement they are not even party to, could be an overestimation of Rajiv Gandhi’s policies and an attempt of imposition of the Accord.\(^{52}\) So much so that some accounts state that Prabhakaran was pressurized to accept the accord and surrender arms to IPKF.\(^{53}\) It can be argued that the timing of Indian mediation in Sri Lanka was a bit premature. India should have had the patience of being approached for resolution, which was not unlikely given India’s geographic proximity and bilateral relationship with Sri Lanka and cultural connectedness of the Tamil community. India apparently tried to mediate the conflict following terms of the accord, an understanding which had even received dissent from within Jayawardene’s cabinet, with accusations of it being hurriedly signed while others remarked it as a means for India to gain control over Sri Lankan internal and foreign affairs.\(^{54}\) Therefore, the first instance of India’s intervention as a third party mediator was unwelcome whereas mediation through the accord was largely an imposition of its terms on the rebels.

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\(^{52}\) Ibid., p. 139.

\(^{53}\) Vandana Menon, Humra Laeeq and Raghav Bikhchandani, op. cit.

\(^{54}\) Roshani M. Gunewardene, op. cit., pp. 217–220.
Norway’s intervention, on the other hand, could well be seen as fitting. At the time of Norway’s intervention, Sri Lankan conflict was ripe, according to Zartman’s ripeness theory, for a negotiation as both Sri Lankan government and LTTE approached the former to intervene amidst the stalemate.\textsuperscript{55} Having said that, Norway faced heavy criticism in its mediation efforts as it was often accused of being biased towards the LTTE. Norway went soft on the LTTE when it boycotted negotiations and the Tokyo donors’ conference in 2003. Norway was accused of ignoring LTTE’s misdeeds in child recruitment and violation of the ceasefire agreement with continued attacks on political opponents, as well as granting LTTE access to government-controlled areas where no other political groups were allowed. The head of Norway-led SLMM was too accused of allegedly leaking information of national security to LTTE and prevented them from being intercepted by Sri Lankan navy.\textsuperscript{56} Norway’s biasness created a general mistrust amongst the Sinhalese towards the role of Norway as an impartial mediator as it allegedly deviated from the one of basic facets of conflict resolution, that is, impartiality. Norway was also tagged as a ‘soft-power mediator’ that could not counter or transform the dynamics of the conflict neither could it persuade Colombo or LTTE to shift from their entrenched positions.\textsuperscript{57} Eisenkopf and Bächtiger’s concept of mediator’s authority to punish, which they argued can occasionally influence conflict resolution, was apparently not applicable in case of Norway as it had limited authority over the adversaries. Norway was invited to be a non-coercive facilitator, who could only act within the confines of what was acceptable to the parties.\textsuperscript{58}

Norway’s efforts had some inherent limitations as its primary job was to bring together two parties who viewed peace differently. For the Tamil militants, justice was more important than peace, whereas for Sinhala nationalists, peace was crucial as it meant end of further violence perpetrated by LTTE. As Bercovitch pointed out, when parties have different assumptions about conflict and different goals, mediation is unlikely to be effective.\textsuperscript{59} In terms of communication, Norway was successful in developing channels to communicate with the LTTE, through one of Prabhakaran’s closest aide Anton Balasingham. Balasingham was a London-based ideologue of the group who oversaw most of the peace talks, including the one in Geneva in 2003.\textsuperscript{60} He was LTTE’s chief negotiator and his closeness with Erik Solheim, Norway’s Special Envoy to Sri Lanka, was the reason why Solheim could keep LTTE glued to the peace process.\textsuperscript{61} With Balasingham’s demise in December 2006, Norway had lost an essential channel of communication with the LTTE. This became a major drawback for Norway as it has lost an effective channel of communication with the Tigers. Finally, the European Union’s banning LTTE as a terror organization made things worse for Norway-led SLMM. Following EU’s decision, LTTE refused to accept monitors from Denmark, Finland and Sweden (EU members) claiming they could no longer be impartial in their mediation. This left SLMM with a shortage of personnel, with only Norway and Iceland on board, came as a blow to Sri Lankan peace process with limited and unarmed monitors for whom monitoring not only became difficult but also dangerous.\textsuperscript{62}

Final analysis

The final analysis to the conflict resolution process in Sri Lanka reveals that the third-party intervention was the right choice of tool, to reach a negotiation that was nearly impossible for the disputants to do themselves. India, with its geographical proximity, shared interest and cultural connectedness, had a fair chance to be an appropriate mediator, if the timing of Indian intervention was right and if New Delhi had patiently examined the consequences of the Accord. India’s enthusiasm to get into the conflict, prior to the accord, gave the impression of India’s hegemonic behaviour.\textsuperscript{63} Norway was chosen as a facilitator by Sri Lankan government in recognition of India’s dislike of any big power presence in the region.\textsuperscript{64} Norway began its role as a facilitator in an ideal situation, where both disputants in conflict approached for help. However, it did not take too long for Norway to come under the radar of criticism for being too LTTE-friendly. Norway’s close contacts with the Tamil rebel group raised questions about its neutrality. Unlike the 1987 Accord, Norway’s role as a mediator was acceptable to the LTTE as it often safeguarded the latter’s interests, so much so that personal attacks and corruption charges were made on Solheim based on his links with the LTTE.\textsuperscript{65} A significant proportion of the Sinhala political class perceived Norway’s biasness towards the LTTE, which they believed, were legitimized through the peace process, despite which the rebel group failed to act in good faith.\textsuperscript{66} Some analysts have pointed out that Sri Lanka’s fundamental problem was its domestic political structure and the peace process did little to transform these underlying structures and that a conflict management approach was adopted where a conflict

\textsuperscript{55} John Stephen Moolakkattu, op. cit., p. 390.
\textsuperscript{56} John Stephen Moolakkattu, op. cit. 394–395
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p. 34.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p. 61.
\textsuperscript{63} B. Ramesh Babu, op. cit., p. 139.
\textsuperscript{64} John Stephen Moolakkattu, op. cit., p. 394.
\textsuperscript{66} Gunnar Sør bitcoins Jonathan Goodhand, Bart Klem, Ada Elisabeth Nisen and Hilde Selbervik, op. cit., p. 7.
transformation approach was required.\textsuperscript{67} The mediators failed to address the core political issue which failed to keep the parties committed to the effort of finding a resolution. Also, lack of inclusivity generated insecurities amongst the parties, that not just affected adversary relationship but also resulted in mistrust towards the mediators.\textsuperscript{68}

India’s signing of the 1987 Peace Accord was criticized as a solution for Indo-Sri Lankan conflict rather than a Sri Lanka and LTTE conflict. India’s choice of signatory for the Accord, that being only the Sri Lankan government, indicated Rajiv Gandhi’s biasness towards Colombo.\textsuperscript{69} In case of Norway, many believed that Norwegian-led SLMM did little to reduce the scale of violations. The SLMM was even accused of proliferating micro violence, which the monitoring body had no capacity to diffuse as it was not entitled to be a court of law and punish the perpetrator. Norway’s mediation also left little room for civil society’s involvement, which can occasionally be facilitators in conflict resolution by working in war zones, monitoring negotiations, raising awareness and education as well as endorsing reconciliations.\textsuperscript{70}

In Sri Lanka, there were a few civil society organisations that were formed in response to ethnic riots and repression, such as the National Peace Council and Foundation for Co-existence, Centre for Society and Religion, Sarvodaya movement and many alike. Some of these bodies considerably had good village-level outreach and could have reflected the real public sentiments if they were included in the process. Religion based organisations too had influence over the people, such as Muslims who enjoyed strong leadership in the east through the mosque-societies as well as the Catholic Churches, who were certain of influencing adversaries with concerted efforts. Camilla Orjuela points out that the connection between civil society leaders and representatives of international community played a major role in facilitating international community’s interest in the Sri Lankan conflict, which considerably changed since December 2001 when peace advocacy was solely taken up by the mediator, leaving civic bodies at the rear.\textsuperscript{71}

More inclusion means better dissemination of information, for instance better equipped with information from the ground level to form policies that complement the ground reality as well as transparency of decision making with wider public. With availability of information in the public domain, the ownership of the process tends to expand as public feels closely associated with the process and therefore it no longer remains confined only to the realm of elite mediators and adversaries. The knowledge of the cause of the conflict and awareness of belligerent grievances as well as preparedness for the implication of mediator actions are other signs of good mediation. Not every decision made by mediators are welcomed by adversaries and with unpredictable adversary behaviour, mediators should be prepared for counterproductive outcomes and its alternative. Identifying the correct time to intervene, well-equipped with information from the grounds of conflict can also be considered a sign of mediator-preparedness, and it is better facilitated if the process is a bottom-up approach, involving people working at the grassroot level.

**Conclusion**

The research question raised in the beginning is that whether muscle power in armed mediation and peace talks in non-coercive mediation adequate to ensure successful conflict resolution. To answer this question, I will begin by saying that conflict resolution is not an ‘one-size-fits-all’ concept as uniqueness of each conflict requires a solution that complements their reality and meet the grievances. Despite the approach that mediators deem fit to apply in a conflict, the core practices of mediation should include neutrality, inclusiveness, mediator knowledge and preparedness. Sri Lankan peace process, taken as a case study, witnessed the involvement of two very different nature of mediation. However, the insufficiency I would argue, was in the lack of offering a problem-solving approach.

Sri Lankan ethnic conflict witnessed both armed mediation by India and non-coercive mediation based on dialogues, by Norway. It is important to mention that Indian intervention did not start as a forceful or coercive mediation, but it certainly ended as one. India’s mediation, that resulted out of a non-inclusive accord, was occasionally hailed by some for bringing about a cessation of hostilities\textsuperscript{72} while others criticized India’s involvement as the beginning of an unwise foreign policy.\textsuperscript{73} India began the intervention largely through dialogues, attempting to bring adversaries to the negotiating table and finding a solution while maintaining Sri Lankan unity and territorial integrity. As part of Indian intervention, the IPKF played a multidimensional role in the process, which means they played the role of peacekeeping and military projection force both at the same time. Scholars pointed out that the major flaw in Indian intervention was the obscurity in India’s politico-military aim\textsuperscript{74} exposing the lack of

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 7–8.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 8.


\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., pp. 9–10.

\textsuperscript{71} Camilla Orjuela, “Civil Society in Civil War: The Case of Sri Lanka”, Civil Wars, 7 (2), August 08, 2006, pp. 128–133.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13698280500422884

\textsuperscript{72} S.D. Muni, op. cit., p. 146.

\textsuperscript{73} B Ramesh Babu, op. cit., p. 139.

\textsuperscript{74} S.D. Muni, op. cit., p. 141.
cohesiveness in decision making. India’s premature act of intervention can also be held as a lack of knowledge of timing as well as the exclusion of adversary from the accord can be held as a sign of biasness. The lack of information flow and policy transparency from the top management to the ground forces created a sense of insecurity among the peacekeeping forces, who even questioned their role transformation. Lastly, in terms of coercion, scholars argue that coercive mediation can succeed if coercer has the ability to counter adversary’s military strategy. But in case of India, there was a real problem of precise information and knowledge of LTTE’s arsenal, which led to India’s failure in analysing its military strategies vis-à-vis the LTTE. Therefore, with LTTE’s counter strikes, the IPKF had a rapid role transformation from peacekeepers to a coercive military force.

Norway’s intervention, on the other hand, was not only timely, but it also involved persuasive policies rather than force. However, before officially approached for mediation, Norway had started to develop channels of communication with the Tamil rebel group, based on its communication-facilitation approach. So much so, that Oslo’s equation with the LTTE led to the general belief that the mediation was biased towards the LTTE and was accused of overlooking many of LTTE’s offenses during its mediation process. Norway’s mediation did result in several peace talks and the ceasefire agreement, the extent of violence was lessened from time to time but as a mediator Norway presumably failed in two areas. First, they failed to have onboard the Sinhalese-Buddhist hardliners side, who remained distrustful of Oslo’s policies, the civil society as well as other political groups and offering a conflict transformation that resonated with a wider public recommendation. And secondly, it failed to secure commitment to prevent further violence, rather Norway’s SLMM was lambasted for not having any mechanism of preventing micro cycles of violence. Norway’s biasness resulted in a distrustful faction of the Sri Lankan society that resented any further mediation by the Scandinavian country, thereby highlighting its lack of neutrality in the mediation process.

From the Sri Lankan case study, the takeaway is that mediator knowledge has the probability to work better than mediator instincts. Indian mediation started off with the instinct that the LTTE would be submissive to Indian mediation and accept the terms of the Accord without actually securing consent from the latter. Norway’s instinct, on the other hand, was since being an international mediator, with global recognition of its prior mediation experiences, it would have an easy ground between LTTE and government of Sri Lanka, given its equation with LTTE. In the process, both India and Norway had failed to address the underlying crisis of the bifurcated Sri Lankan society and the lack of knowledge of how mediation would have worked in such a divisive theatre. The basics when a third party intervenes in a conflicted-ridden society are to take into consideration the fundamentals of the conflict and to what extent can mediation accommodate the demands of either side. Even if external interventions were able to lessen the civil violence in the country and save lives, but no mediation in Sri Lanka was able to address the root cause of the conflict, neither could offer an inclusive proposition that had both Sinhalese hardliners and Tamils on board. Based on this study, it can be suggested that in such crises, inclusivity is required, taking into consideration the recommendations from the elite at the top to forces working on ground. Irrespective of the nature or type of mediation, democratization of peace processes ensure participation from all corners of the society, rather than confining it to the elitists. Broader participation also expands ownership of peacebuilding, including other groups rather than confining it to only between mediators and disputants. Misinformation and misunderstandings should be dealt with at the nip of it before they spread and create false perceptions. Lastly, to my belief Sri Lankan peace process is an appropriate case study that highlights how two different types of mediation can occasionally result in same outcome if the core of conflict resolution is not practiced. Ensuring such criteria would enable third parties to create an atmosphere that is conducive for peaceful resolution.

Data availability
No data are associated with this article.

References


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Agatha Skierkowski Hutlquist
Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, La Crosse, WI, USA

I appreciate the author’s revisions and attempts to address my questions and concerns. However, several of my suggestions and questions remain unanswered in the current draft – most notably, the lack of a theory and appropriate test of it – and I do not believe that it is sufficiently revised to warrant publication. Below, I review my original comments and how the author responded to them, as well as suggestions for further revisions.

With respect to the research question, the paper does not begin with the research question, as I had suggested in my previous comments. In the revision memo, the author states that she restructured the beginning of the paper and introduced the research question after a brief review of the topic. However, in my reading of the paper, the research question is still buried at the end of the introduction. Rather than mentioning from the start that the paper focuses on why third-party mediations succeed or fail, the author starts with a long discussion about why conflicts start, then briefly mentions the consequences of conflict, then discusses the history of conflict resolution, and then states that this paper “aims to identify whether third-party intervention, which is considered a crucial tool for successful conflict resolution, can always yield the desired results” (4). Opening the paper with a detailed discussion about the literature on conflict onset is not helpful, as the paper is trying to understand why third-party interventions succeed or fail, and not why conflicts start. Instead, the author should mention the research question at the very beginning of the paper and devote the introduction to providing an overview of the topic under review – why third-party interventions fail or succeed, as tested in the Sri Lankan case.

In terms of the literature, while I appreciate that the author incorporated the studies that I mentioned about the causes of conflict (Cederman et al. 2010, Fearon and Laitin 2003), it was not necessary to devote so much attention to these works at the start of the paper, as they are tangential to the research question – why do third-party interventions succeed or fail in resolving conflicts? Instead, it would have been preferable to mention these studies in a few sentences and then devote more attention to the literature that addresses the author’s research question. In addition, the author did not include any of the studies that I suggested reviewing that pertain
much more directly to the research question – the role of third-party interventions in conflict resolution efforts. Originally, I had suggested that the author examine Virginia Page Fortna’s work, as well as her recent article in the *British Journal of Political Science* with Barbara Walter and Lise Morje Howard (2021). I did not see any reference to these articles in the manuscript or an explanation in the revision memo of why they weren't included.

In terms of the theory, it is still not clear to me what the author’s argument is and how it is being tested. In the revised manuscript, the author mentions that she is “analyzing the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict through the lens of conflict resolution theory, focusing on the tool of third-party intervention (4). On page 5, the author states that there are three key characteristics that “manipulates the third-party mediation” – communication, punishment, and mediator interests. Also on page 5, the author states that there are “three core conditions that are absolutely necessity for successful conflict resolution, which are coherence, commitment, and consistency.”

It seems that the author is arguing that these are the factors that differentiate a “successful” conflict resolution from an unsuccessful one, and that this is what we should be looking for in the Sri Lankan case. If this is indeed the theory, then the author should have defined communication, punishment, mediator interests, coherence, commitment, and consistency, described how these factors are operationalized, and then discussed what type of evidence is needed to test whether these factors were present in Sri Lanka.

However, I did not see these factors discussed in the case study section. Instead, in pages 7-10, the author mentioned how and why Norway became involved in mediation efforts, the role of foreign funds and international donors, and the history of the cease-fire agreements in the 2000s. The only reference to a theory about why Norway’s mediation was not successful seems to be in one paragraph on page 10, in which the author identified three reasons for the “systematic failures of conflict resolution in Sri Lanka – the “absolute lack of any internal consensus in post-independence Sri Lanka about minority representation in the country's political structure,” “the readiness to use force rather than dialogues,” and “the lack of trust between LTTE echelons and the Sri Lankan government over the incoming of international aid.” I do not see how these reasons relate to the factors that the author earlier identified as being critical for explaining a successful mediation effort - communication, punishment, mediator interests, coherence, commitment, and consistency. Moreover, these three factors pertain to characteristics of the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, and not Norway and its mediation attempts.

To articulate and test the theory, it might be helpful if the author defined “third-party intervention” and “success” more clearly. There are many kinds of actors who are involved in third-party interventions, such as countries (like Norway), regional organizations (like the African Union, European Union, NATO), and international organizations (the United Nations). There are also many ways in which these actors can be involved in a civil war, such as mediation efforts, military interventions, peacekeeping operations, and third-party security guarantees. Likewise, there are various ways to define “success” in an ethnic conflict – e.g., a ceasefire agreement, a negotiated peace agreement, an implemented peace agreement, no conflict onset for several years, etc.

The literature has shown that the type of actor and intervention matter for explaining why some civil wars end in a negotiated settlement, and others do not. Notably, Barbara Walter’s 1997 study in *International Organization* found that third-party security guarantees (i.e., peacekeeping troops) are necessary for ensuring that a civil war ends via an agreement that leads to at least five years of
peace. More recently, Magnus Lundgren's 2017 research in *The Review of International Organizations* found that in mediation efforts led by international organizations, peace agreements are more likely to be signed if combatants believe that peacekeeping troops will be sent to enforce the terms of an agreement.

Given that the literature distinguishes between the actors that are involved in an intervention, how they are involved, and what success means, it might be helpful if the author's theory followed a similar approach. This may help orient the paper toward more relevant studies, narrow the theory and hypotheses that are being tested, identify the evidence that is needed to test the theory, and use the appropriate evidence to test it in the Sri Lankan case.

In terms of my additional comments from the first version of the manuscript, the author addressed them sufficiently. However, the section on why and how Norway became involved in Sri Lanka was quite long; to devote more attention to defining and testing a theory, this section can be shortened considerably in a revised manuscript.

Finally, I recognize that there are many ways in which an author can address the comments of reviewers. One approach that I've found helpful, especially as a reviewer, is when the author goes through each comment, explains how it was addressed, and identifies the page number in the manuscript in which this revised text can be found. This way, it is clearer to the reviewer (and the author, when making revisions) that all the comments have been dealt with in an appropriate manner. In this case, the author included a paragraph that explained the revisions, but several of my original comments were not mentioned in this paragraph and it wasn't entirely clear how the other comments were addressed. As a result, I had to double-check that these suggestions and concerns were incorporated in the revised manuscript.

**References**


**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 11 Oct 2022**

**Sonia Dey**, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India

Dear Reviewer, thank you for your time to review my article and give your valuable feedback.
I have taken note of your comments and revised my paper accordingly. As per your suggestion, I have reframed my introduction and have addressed the research question at the beginning of it and have lessened the discussion on conflict. I have also referred to the works that you have mentioned in your comments and tried to include them in my study of role of the role third-party interventions in conflict resolution efforts. I have also reframed the portion on Norway's involvement and accommodated the same while discussing third-party intervention in Sri Lanka. This version focuses more on the understanding of third-party intervention. In contrast to the prior version, this version highlights the practices of mediators, rather the challenges they faced, which led to the failure of their role in the peace process. In this version, I have tried to reorient the paper on two different approaches of third-party mediation on a conflict and the key factors which the mediators failed to address, ending the paper with my analysis and brief suggestions.

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

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Reviewer Report 22 June 2022

https://doi.org/10.21956/stomiedintrelat.18814.r27042

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Chas Morrison  
Center for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, Coventry, UK

I have read this revised manuscript, and I consider that it is not of a high enough level of scholarship to be indexed, even with the changes the author has made.

The main weakness in the paper is the lack of insights or critical analysis of 3rd party meditation in Sri Lanka's war.

But there are many others:

Indian PKF is not mentioned in the abstract. Is this new version of the paper trying to compare Indian and Norwegian 3rd party interventions? It is still not clear why the author persists in discussing these 2 interventions when they have so little in common.

The whole paper is full of unsuitable language, e.g. “all attempts with conflict resolution starts to take the downward slope”, and many others.

The introduction starts with a vague overview of what conflict is, when it should go straight into an overview of conflict resolution and third-party mediation. Similarly, we don't need a history of the LTTE or the civil war itself.
“why do conflicts happen” is not relevant in this paper. The introduction discusses issues that are not the focus of this paper. I would suggest omitting all references to conflict causation, as that is not the focus of this paper.

“Resolution to conflicts is not only subjected to academic theories but also by inputs from field applications and practical understandings”- this doesn't need stating.

“conferences was held in Switzerland in 1946” but then nothing further is said about it, nothing concluded.

“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”- not possible to do by examining a single case.

“this paper navigated through all possibilities to understand the challenges of third-party intervention in the Sri Lankan peace process”- I do not consider that this paper has looked at all the possibilities

“the Sri Lankan peace process had limitless opportunities for a successful outcome”- in what sense were they limitless?

The section under the heading “Understanding conflict resolution” reads a little vague and convoluted.

“the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), responsible for restoring international peace and security”- is that an accurate description of the UNSC?

“External engagement in any conflict is considered vital” - this is not true. And who claims this?

The section on ceasefires needs more integration with the rest of lit review and more critical analysis.

“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”- can it? Says who?

“request was also made by LTTE chief Prabhakaran, followed by which the Ceasefire Agreement of February 2022”- are you completely sure?

There is very little actual analytical discussion of Norway's mediation efforts. The paper keeps changing track to discuss other less relevant issues.

The conclusion repeats the research question, “can third-party intervention, a significant model in the conflict resolution theory, yield desired outcomes under challenging circumstances?”- but the paper has not answered this, or given enough evidence to analyse it. Also, this RQ as given here differs from the RQ towards the start of the paper. The conclusion is not adequate. In any case, it is not necessarily the fault of the negotiators, if the conflict breaks out again or ceasefires are broken.
Overall, this paper gives an overview of different aspects of the Sri Lankan war, without exploring in real depth the issue of 3rd party mediation. It, therefore, does not contribute enough to existing theory or literature.

**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.

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**Author Response 11 Oct 2022**

**Sonia Dey**, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India

Dear Reviewer, I would like to thank you for your valuable feedback on my article.

I have taken note and have revised the manuscript, following your recommendations. I take note of the fact that the Indian and Norwegian types of intervention in Sri Lanka were of different natures, and that is precisely what my article tends to project. I took Sri Lanka as a case study and tried to analyse the peace process through two different models of conflict resolution. The introduction is shortened and revised, mainly discussing the theme of the article and the research question. The sections on LTTE's history and conflicts were omitted, as per your feedback. In terms of statements made, I have made sure to cite them with appropriate references. This version includes a section of final analysis in which I tried to critically analyse the failure of each mediation approach while making brief suggestions to justify my hypothesis. The paper ends with a conclusion in which I answered the research question while citing evidences from the Sri Lankan peace process.

**Competing Interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.
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. Moreover, while most civil wars have an ethnic component (Denny and Walter 2014), most ethnic groups do not rebel (Birnir et al. 2018).

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.

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 Norwegian 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
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**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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Reviewer Report 03 February 2022

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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.