

Negotiating Peace in Sri Lanka: Dynamics and Implications

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Peace in any society is primarily a contractual peace, which becomes durable with the social capital formation. The diminishing social capital generates the unrest and, thus negotiations for peace starts for revitalizing the process of social capital formation. The negotiation may take place, if the negotiating parties perceive the cost-effectiveness of the negotiating process in their favour. However, unanticipated consequences occur in the course of time before the final negotiation is reached. The parties, which are outside the negotiating process, get involved when they perceive the implications and consequences of the final outcome affect their interest and, thus they may get involved as the negotiating process advances.

Negotiations for durable peace in the island-society have been initiated four times during the last two decades of unrest and ethnic conflict. Several rounds of peace talks took place every time but the efforts for negotiation could not succeed due to skepticism and suspicions which gripped the negotiating parties as well as the parties/groups which are not directly committed to negotiating the peace. The latest peace process was started with the active role of the Norwegian facilitators and changing political dispensation in the last parliamentary elections in 2001.

There is a Sri Lankan think tank, which perceives Norwegian facilitation as a colonial intrusion, government's policy as appeasement before the LTTE's extremism. Such parties though peripheral but become an actor outside the formal process and affect or sometimes determine the whole process. Parties committed are the LTTE, the Government of Sri Lanka and the Norwegian facilitators. The parties involved are the political parties not directly committed to the peace process, non-LTTE Tamil groups, Sinhalese groups, countries like India, international donors of financial support to Sri Lanka, underworld and military establishment and so on. All such parties generate and strengthen the skepticism and suspicion, which contribute to form a public opinion against credibility of the peace process and thereby jeopardizing the whole peace process. The cumulative effect of all is that the recent hold on of the peace process. The assertions of the constitutional authority of the President, political power of the Prime Minister and, presentation of the counter-proposal by the LTTE, have aggravated the whole peace process. The parties committed for negotiating the peace are on tactical withdrawal. The efforts are on for reconciliation at various levels to resume the peace process but the situation is really complex and the final negotiation seems a distant goal.

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