

A Critical Study of the Security Dilemmas of Sri Lanka

Saman Kumara, Jeewaka

Department of Political Science, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya

Introduction

The study of security is a sub-discipline of the wider subjects usually still referred to as International Politics. During the Cold War period, the notion of security was perceived as military threats from the external sources (Herz, 1950). It is important to mention here that among the scholars who tried to conceptualize security dilemmas of states within the context of the Third World, Brian L. Job is one of the most important experts on security studies. He analysed the phenomenon and introduced a contrasting new line of thought while thinking of applying the security dilemma (Job, 1992). Especially, Brian L. Job seeks to rethink national security dilemma in the post-Cold War setting. As Job demonstrated, the '*security dilemma*' is the core concept in the field of security studies. This is applied to states without cohesive nationalism, with weak institutional capacities to secure peace and order, with a pre-occupation of internal threats rather than external ones and with legitimacy problems (Job, 1992).

Research Problem

The research problem posed through this research is related to the main broad applications of the security behaviour of the small state, and how Sri Lanka in particular has been able to cope up with a 30 years of armed ethnic secessionist struggle, and ultimately achieved success on the one hand, and on the other, how the fear psychosis generated from this long power struggle has ruptured the main security policy framework of Sri Lanka. Generally, most small states surrounded by stupendous neighbours generate security dilemma. In the initial years of independence, the Indo-British proximity can be understood from this perspective. However, the overt and covert Indian surpluses emanated the required awe, which initiated the fundamental research problem of the present study. Thus, this endeavour seeks to answer the main reasons for national security dilemmas of small states, which are generally based on their internal factors and in the process makes them vulnerable to external constraints and incentives. In this case, the

ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka has generated a series of security dilemmas for this small state, paving the way for its vulnerability internally and externally.

Objectives of the Study

The present research is an attempt to understand and analyse the case study of Sri Lanka from the perspective of security, and its connectivity with the ethnic conflict. Sri Lanka has gained the privilege of being a small state facing the severest ethnic conflict, and ultimately emerged victorious, militarily. It can be added that the Sri Lankan case with all its characteristics can make up an ideal case for the study of national security of small states.

Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Evidence

Since the decolonization commencing with the end of the WW-II, the security dilemma of small states have been a dominant discourse in international relations, propelling many small states into independence and where they form the largest number of states in the international system (Vandenbosch, 1964). As a result of the increase of the intra-state ethnic conflicts, the study of relationship between security dilemmas and internal threats for the small states has assumed much importance.

The first writer to utilize the security dilemma as an explanation for ethnic conflict is Barry R. Posen. The basis of Posen's argument is that security dilemmas within states can occur when conditions are similar to those between states in the international system (Posen, 1993). In this way, he claims that the collapse of multi-ethnic states can profitably be viewed as a problem of emerging ethnic conflict (Posen, 1993). It is important to mention here that the causes of ethnic conflict are grounded in the religious and ethnic divides of the societies, the government's lack of respect for basic human rights, corruption, lack of efficient administration, poor infrastructures and weak national coherence (Bardalai, 2006). In this regard, Barry Buzan emphasized that '*for perhaps a majority of the world's people threats from the state are among the major source of security in their lives*' (Buzan, 1983). Thus it reveals that the state is not simply a provider of security but a source of security too.

It is important to mention here that the Sri Lankan long-standing ethnic conflict with all its characteristics constitute an ideal case for the analyses of relationship between the ethnic conflict and security dilemma of

small states. It is clear that the Tamil separatist struggle on an ethno-regional basis in Sri Lanka in its protracted nature has been vital to the security and stability of the state (Manoharan, 2008). The ethnic conflict has grown to be a serious threat to the internal and external security as well as policy capacity of the Sri Lankan state.

Methodology

This study is based on a single case study method. The research question has been answered by using standard research tools including descriptive and analytical methods. Moreover, the research involves both qualitative and quantitative methods. The sources of this research have been drawn from a wide range of primary and secondary sources.

Conclusion

Since the independence of Sri Lanka in 1948, political rivalry between the political parties has long hindered peace efforts in the country. Apart from this, each ruling party faces constant pressure from the patriotic groups against a peaceful solution for the conflicting demands. Even though the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka has become one of the most internationalised ethnic conflicts in the world, the constraints and incentives role played by regional and international actors were not able to secure sustainable peace and security environment in Sri Lanka.

It is important to mention here, the military victory of the Government of Sri Lanka over the LTTE is not a long term solution for the security dilemma of the Sri Lankan state. Therefore, the Sri Lankan state should try to find some common ground between the federal pattern and the existing Provincial Council pattern or a unitary state system with certain federal features. At the same time it should work towards a complete national unity and integration with the aggregation of national needs, values and interests in the society and a completion of its nation building projects to protect the national security interests of the Sri Lankan state.

Keywords: Nation Building Project; National Needs; National Security; National Unity; Small States

References

- Bardal, A. K. (2006), *Changing Security Scenario*, New Delhi: Knowledge World.
- Buzan, Barry (1983), *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, Great Britain: Wheatsheaf Books.
- Herz, John H. (1950), "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma", *World Politics*, 2(2): 157-180
- Job, Brian L. (1992), "The Insecurity Dilemma: National, Regime, and State Securities in the Third World", in Brian L. Job (ed.), *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security Third World States*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Manoharan, N. (2008), *Democratic Dilemma: Ethnic Violence and Human Rights in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi: Samskriti.
- Posen, Barry R. (1993), "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict", *Survival*, 35(1): 27-47.
- Rickli, Jean-Marc (2008), "European Small States' Military Policies after the Cold War: From Territorial to Niche Strategies", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 21(3): 308-311.
- Sahadeven, P. and Neil DeVotta (2006), *Politics of Conflict and Peace in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi: Manak Publications
- Shastri, Amita(2009), "Ending Ethnic Civil War: The Peace Process in Sri Lanka", *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 47(1): 76-99.
- Vandenbosch, Army (1964), "The Small States in International Politics and Organization", *The Journal of Politics*, 26(2): 293-312.