Ethnic Violence in Sri Lanka: Comparing Security Solutions from other Similar Intractable Conflicts

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Sri Lanka has been a focus of international attention since July 1983 due to the ongoing civil war, which has claimed over 60,000 people since it broke out. The civil war and associated ethnic violence has not only claimed human lives, but also delayed social advancement and economic prosperity in this island nation once regarded as a model for a developing nation. Despite international intervention for a 'peaceful solution' the country is at crossroads with an uncertain future. This paper will explore the possibility of moving beyond the irreducible categories of ethnicity and show how other peoples have overcome similar violent political conflicts elsewhere emphasising the possible lessons for Sri Lanka.

When we look at intractable conflicts around the world, we often find political actors who are entrenched in their own battles for power. This power manifests itself in a number of ways such as, territory, voting rights, special concessions, language rights, cultural rights, as well as several other political expressions of a struggle for power and authority. In many cases, the struggle for power must take on an ethnic dimension in order to ensure that the conflict is one between two distant 'others'. Without this dimension it might not be possible to negotiate on a type of universality and core values that bind 'ethnicities'. In this paper we will draw out the similarities of these conflicts to some aspects of the civil war in Sri Lanka in an attempt to provide a set of comparative political tools for the understanding of similar conflicts around the world.

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