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America and Sri Lanka: Terrorism Ignored?

Elliott L. Watson

Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor
of Philosophy

Swansea University

2010

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SUMMARY

(Abstract)

The central investigation of the thesis is an exploration of why the US has, historically, done very little in terms of assisting the various Sri Lankan governments in their fight against, what the US Department of State determined as, one of the most deadly terrorist organisations on the planet.

The thesis traces the development of the US-Sri Lanka relationship from independence (1948) to present day, identifying trends and motifs in the bi-lateral connection. Once identified, these trends and motifs are used to place the American response to the emerging conflict in a clear historical context. The work makes it clear that there are unambiguous historical indicators in the US-Sri Lanka relationship that help determine the nature of it, and that these indicators become ever more apparent, even dominant, as the war between the Tamil insurgents and the Sri Lankan state intensifies. These historical indicators are then used to frame the impact of the War on Terror on America's orientation towards the conflict. The investigation draws together the historical dynamics that have shaped, and continue to impact upon, the US-Sri Lanka relationship, giving a very definite set of parameters within which the US is prepared to accommodate the Sri Lankan state.

Ultimately, the question of whether the War on Terror, prosecuted by the administration of President George W. Bush, marked a 'turning point' in the relationship between America and Sri Lanka is answered. The judgment, clearly supported by a broad range of original and, at times peerless, primary sources, is that the US operates a very restrictive foreign policy with Sri Lanka, and that this policy has done very little in material terms, to assist against the LTTE – despite the Bush administration's War on Terror.

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To my wife, Lalantha, I owe most of all.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CBK	Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
DCS	Direct Commercial Sales
DS Senanayake	Don Stephen Senanayake
ESF	Economic Support Fund
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organisation
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IMET	International Military Education Training
IPKF	Indian Peace-Keeping Force
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MCA	Millennium Challenge Account
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MEP	Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
P-TOMS	Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
SLMP	Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya (Sri Lanka's People's Party)
STF	Special Task Force
SWRD Bandaranaike	Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike
TUF	Tamil United Front
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UN	United Nations
UNP	United National Party
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Thesis

This investigation is concerned with America's relationship with Ceylon/Sri Lanka from the onset of independence in 1948 to the present. It has as its ultimate goal the determination of the position the ethnic conflict¹ occupies in the 'War on Terror'. To be able to put the conflict successfully into a current global US foreign policy context it is necessary, in fact vital, to establish the historical parameters of the US-Sri Lanka relationship. Consequently this investigation will trace the relationship from its inception back in 1948, after the British ceded independence to Ceylon, through the outbreak of the conflict in 1983, the US designation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam² (LTTE) as a terrorist organisation in 1997, up until 2001 and the onset of George W. Bush's War on Terror. From 2001 onwards the thesis will focus on the issue of whether the US-Sri Lanka relationship has undergone any significant re-orientation as a result of America's publicly declared desire to combat terrorism in all forms and in all parts of the world. In particular, the core question of where (or even whether) the LTTE-Sri Lankan state conflict fits into this unprecedented US foreign policy initiative will be answered.

¹ There are a number of scholars who contest the definition of the island's troubles as an 'ethnic conflict' because it often oversimplifies the very complex nature of the issues involved. However, since it is not the goal of this enquiry to challenge the interpretation of the definition, it will serve our purposes.

² The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam will henceforth be referred to by their acronym, LTTE. An account of this organisation, as well as their goals and methods, will appear in Chapter 2.

Literature Review

a) **Academic Enquiry, South and South East Asia: An Introductory Comparison**

There has been much written about US Policy in South *East* Asia (in comparison to South Asia), primarily because US interest in the region has been something of an explosive twentieth century phenomenon, particularly post World War Two, when the dynamics of the Cold War forced a re-write of American strategic, economic, geo-political and covert policy in the region. Whilst US attention naturally³ followed a *Europe First* policy in the early years of the Cold War, the significance afforded South East Asia in the eyes of successive US administrations brought American policy makers into the realm of somewhat uncharted territory: the religious, geographical, historical and ethnically unfamiliar Asian continent. Acheson's '*Defence Perimeter*'⁴ was a literal re-drawing of US security concerns in Asia, and American rebuilding of post-war Japan heralded a new era of American projection into the East. The Domino Theory developed as an ideological *raison d'être* for an American presence in Asia, often covering less ideologically sound motives for US action in the area, such as defending Syngman Rhee's corrupt government partially as a means of securing access to raw materials in the rich hinterlands of Korea. The Cold War itself evolved into a high stakes and often volatile quest to bring nations into the orbit of either the USSR or the USA. As an unprecedented consequence of this, interest was generated in areas hitherto largely ignored by the two powers: what we now call the 'Third World'. Thus US interest was

³ Due to the Allied concern about Soviet expansion in Europe and their perceived designs on Germany, the United States followed a 'Europe First' policy, prioritising their immediate Cold War attention so that it focussed on the rebuilding of Western Europe as a bulwark against the spread of Communism and as an opportunity to create accessible overseas markets.

⁴ Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State, gave a speech in January 1950 in which he mentioned that there was a Pacific 'defense perimeter' in the Far East comprising countries which the US would defend if attacked. The perimeter included, for example, Japan. According to Acheson, Korea was not part of the defense perimeter. Some believe that Korea's apparent omission from the perimeter was a significant motivation behind North Korea's invasion of South Korea in June 1950.

drawn almost inexorably towards, amongst others (e.g. Latin America) East Asia, and later South Asia.

As a result of intensely high profile post war US policy initiatives in this region, there has been expansive, detailed and insightful research undertaken on the subject of the relatively recent history of US involvement and interest in South East Asia: from the reconstruction of post-war Japan to the 'Police Action' in Korea; from the Indochinese Wars to the recent six party talks on North Korean nuclear non-proliferation⁵. American policy makers have only in reality been employed in the formulation of policy regarding the complexities of South East Asia politics (and often this formulation has been poor and misguided at best) in the last sixty years; the demands of the Cold War necessitated a re-orientation of the value American administrations placed in this region. As such, policy documents like NSC 68 marked the beginning of a re-interpretation of Soviet foreign policy, seeing it as aggressively expansionist and with global designs – designs that should be countered by military means⁶. Thus there were new efforts made to understand the dynamics of South East Asia and the near Pacific, because much of the area had been decimated by the conflicts of World War Two and was beginning to witness calls for self-determination, irredentism, colonial expulsion and, in certain now very familiar

⁵ It is perhaps most practical, to illustrate the breadth and depth of investigation into South East Asia, to cite some work relating to one area of scholarly focus, so that this may be taken as evidence of a greater interest in the region. Investigation into the Indochinese / Vietnam Wars is so extensive that the body of work itself has become a legitimate area of study. In terms of Western historical analysis there are key works such as Stanley Karnow's, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1997), Robert D. Schulzinger's, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Marilyn Young's, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991). In terms of the Vietnamese perspective there are works such as *Following Ho Chi Minh: The Memoirs of a North Vietnamese Colonel* by Bui Tin (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999) and Hanoi's official release: *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002). The Vietnam War's impact on the United States has been well served by such academics as Jon Roper in works such as 'The Politics of Sanity: Vietnam, Watergate and the Psychological Afflictions of Presidents', *EurAmerica*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2000), along with Robert Buzzanco and his *Vietnam and the Transformation of American Life* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999). From works of Poetry to the military analysis of the wars, this area of study continues to generate a great wealth of interpretation and understanding.

⁶ Historians argue over the significance of NSC 68 in as much as it represented a significant departure/continuation of US Cold war policy. What is clear, and what is significant to our inclusion of it, is that it did call for a military resistance to the spread of Communism in addition to the tactics already in use.

cases, nationalist revolution. The new American analysis of the Cold War, particularly after the 'fall' of China and the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb, meant that South East Asia was determined, after Europe, as the next most important theatre for Cold War battle. The new US analysis interpreted South East Asia (irrespective of the individual histories of each country) as a potential, but very immediate, breeding ground for Communist insurgency due to its perceived instability. Concurrently, as interest intensified via American nation-building in Japan and adventurism in countries such as Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, the need for accurate academic research became more urgent and thus developed as a corollary. Consequently, the body of academic investigative work covering this region is vast and exhaustive⁷.

In comparison, there is a relative dearth of academic investigation into American foreign policy relating to the littoral states of *South* Asia – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, precisely because this region has only become of US concern (and often only limited concern at that) comparatively recently. That is not to say that this region does not have a rich and important history of both inter and intra state culture, quite the opposite: Sri Lanka itself has a recorded cultural, economic and political history of over 2,500 years. Simply put, the dynamics of South Asian politics have, until very recently, been a concern only for whichever colonial power had either inclination or necessity to be so concerned. The ways that these littoral states experienced the Second World War, whilst vastly different, did have one thing in common: they endured little or no direct fighting on their soil⁸. As a result, regardless of, or perhaps because of, the nature of individual post - war transitions from colony to independent nation, there was rarely a concern that these new and independent nations would come into the immediate orbit of the Soviet Union as a result of a weakened or damaged socio-economic

⁷ See footnote 5

⁸ The individual World War Two experience of each state was clearly complex and unique and in some cases conflict did take place on South Asian soil, such as when the Japanese moved across India's eastern border into Kohima and Nagaland in 1944; the Japanese also captured the Indian Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 1942

infrastructure caused by World War Two⁹. In fact the region was given a low priority, when compared to South East Asia, in part because the nationalist movements in South Asia were never, at least initially, driven by what the State Department had determined was the case in South *East* Asia- a Moscow/Beijing driven socialism- but rather by the need for a self determined identity outside of the British Empire. Consequently, in comparison to Korea, Indochina and Japan, the Indian Ocean littoral states of India, East and West Pakistan, and Sri Lanka appeared sufficiently stable¹⁰ and were consequently held in little immediate regard by American policymakers. In addition to this, it was obvious to the United States that India (and later Pakistan and Bangladesh) and Sri Lanka, despite gaining independence from Britain, remained firmly under the umbrella of the British Commonwealth, and were therefore under the paternal gaze of the British metropole. In addition (and perhaps more importantly) because of the dependent relationship (Britain upon the US) that had evolved out of the economic and geopolitical realities of the Second World War, these recently independent countries were firmly rooted within the new post war sphere of influence of the United States. This reality was recognised early in the post war world by both the United States and Ceylon:

“In this world today there are really two powerful factors, the United States of America and the U.S.S.R. We have to follow either one or the other. There can be no half-way house in the matter. We have decided, and we intend as long as we are in power, to follow the United States of America and its democratic principles.”¹¹

Despite the ethnic, political, economic, cultural, religious and literal geographic divisions which emerged on the subcontinent¹² post 1947/48, a tradition of democracy¹³, imparted

⁹ Malaya, Burma, Singapore and, perhaps most critically, Korea and Indochina had (along with many other pacific states and innumerable island territories) been devastated by Japanese occupation. Japan itself had been decimated by Allied bombing.

¹⁰ Both India, and after Partition, East and West Pakistan, and Sri Lanka continued into independence as part of the British Commonwealth

¹¹ Junius R. Jayawardene, ‘House of Representatives Debates, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 8. Col. 293’, in *Documents on Sri Lanka’s Foreign Policy, 1947-1965*, ed. Amal Jayawardene (Colombo: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 2005)

¹² British India was partitioned in 1947 along religious lines with the predominantly Muslim areas becoming East and West Pakistan; in 1971 East Pakistan became Bangladesh

primarily by the British Colonial Office, had been implanted into the South Asian region. This South Asian 'democratic hegemony', no matter how fluid or flimsy, often induced the United States to overlook South Asia in favour of its more politically, ideologically and economically volatile regional cousin to the East.

At the same time as post-war academia was forced to evaluate and consider US policy (through the prism of the Cold War) in South East Asia because of the region's perceived propinquity to American global security issues, it can also be seen that a somewhat neglected South Asia, in terms of immediate post-war American foreign policy considerations, developed a rather undernourished canon of academic investigation. As modern South Asia gradually came into focus politically, economically and militarily, so it did for US policy, strategically¹⁴. Since independence the growth and 'maturity'¹⁵ of the South Asian subcontinent in these terms, brought with it a greater interest from the rest of the world, particularly the United States and the Soviet Union. Consequently, it was only a matter of time before intellectual investigation endeavoured to make sense of it.

The littoral states of the South Asian subcontinent have, since independence, gradually assumed a greater role in both the region and the world; India and Pakistan particularly have evolved, somewhat unsteadily at times, into geo-political, nuclear, and more recently in the case of India, economic, powers with which the United States finds it necessary and productive to foster relations. Perhaps nothing is more indicative of, and perhaps more relevant to, this intensification of US interest in South Asia, than the 'partnership' George W. Bush's administration evolved with Pakistan after the events of September 11th¹⁶.

¹³ Pakistan is a constitutional federal democratic republic with Islam as the state religion; India is the largest federal democracy in the world; Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy; Sri Lanka is a constitutional democratic republic; the Maldives are a constitutional presidential republic

¹⁴ Perhaps most recently because of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan

¹⁵ Maturity does not necessarily preclude instability

¹⁶ Operation Enduring Freedom – the America-led war in Afghanistan has necessitated closer ties with Pakistan

Despite continued internal instability due to the state's relationship with various minority groups¹⁷ India has maintained its post independence sovereignty, democracy and, perhaps more importantly, its unity¹⁸. Consequently, rather than its intra-state activities, it is arguably India's inter-state actions over the last forty years or so that have drawn the attention of US policy makers. The Sino-Indian War of 1962, the recurrent wars and tensions with Pakistan¹⁹, India's graduation to the nuclear class in 1974²⁰, and its development into one of the world's largest and fastest growing economic powerhouses²¹ have all given rise to an exponential growth in the interest shown by US policy makers. To some extent Pakistan's emergence on the US radar, mirrors that of India: Pakistan has been faced with political, ethno-religious²² and territorial upheaval²³, but as with India, it is in the realm of her extra-state affairs that it has drawn recent American interest. Pakistan has been involved in both major and minor conflicts with India²⁴, its proximity to, and relationships with, Afghanistan²⁵ and China²⁶ have been of recurrent issue, and

¹⁷ The Minorities at Risk Project (2005) lists nine minority groups within India currently active in political resistance and/or insurgency or who are at risk from the state, <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/>

¹⁸ India was partitioned into India and Pakistan at the same time as independence was achieved and therefore Indian sovereignty and unity has largely remained intact since.

¹⁹ Flashpoints include those of 1947, 1965, 1971 and the more recent conflagrations over Kashmir- the Kargil conflict of 1999, the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, and the Mumbai attacks of 2008

²⁰ According to Globalsecurity.org, as of October 2005, India maintains a stockpile of between 110 – 150 nuclear weapons with at least 110 being currently deliverable,

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/summary.htm>

²¹ The US Department of State puts India's GDP at \$797 billion; exports at \$127 billion (including software exports); imports at \$156 billion; real growth rate at 8.4%. Fiscal year 2005-6, *Background Note: India*.

²² The Minorities at Risk Project (2005) lists six minority groups within Pakistan currently active in political resistance and/or insurgency or who are at risk from the state,

<http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/>

²³ Forcing the creation of the state of Bangladesh out of East Pakistan. Pakistan transitioned from secular politics and law to that based on Shari'a Islamic law in the late 1970's. Pakistan has undergone a number of military coups and has swung between civil and military leaderships throughout its post - partition history

²⁴ As mentioned above. Henry Kissinger personally describes the American 'tilting' towards Pakistan during the India Pakistan crisis of 1971 in his memoirs, *Years of Renewal, Volume 3* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000) p. 81-2

²⁵ Pakistan has a long relationship with Afghanistan (they share a 1000 plus mile stretch of inhospitable border). US interest was piqued by this relationship when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Although the US relationship with Pakistan has been somewhat inconsistent, particularly concerning Pakistan's nuclear program, it has at various times been exceptionally close. Pakistan and President Musharraf are considered firm allies in the War on Terror, in part because of Pakistan's influence in its neighbouring Afghanistan.

the detonation of nuclear devices in 1998²⁷ contributed to a heightened US importance assigned to Pakistan. Gaining Pakistan's support for Operation Enduring Freedom has been an essential element in recent improved bilateral ties. Pakistan's economy, however, is not the potential or actual super structure that is India's²⁸.

The modern growth of India and Pakistan as actors of sufficient (many would say *substantial*) international weight has also been mirrored even more recently by a corollary in growth of academic enquiry (particularly from academics with some genealogical connection to the area) into their relationship with other global powers such as the USA. This re-appraisal of the importance that the US has assigned to India and Pakistan, especially since the end of the Cold War, and in light of the War on Terror, is generating much interest, although there is still, when compared to South East Asia, a comparative deficiency in useful research into US-India/US-Pakistan relations. If the academic canon relating to US-India/US-Pakistan relations is the underprivileged cousin to that covering Indochina, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and Japan, then research into Sri Lanka-US relations is the destitute third uncle that is shunned by the family.

²⁶ Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognise communist China in 1950. For an early contemporary introduction to the Chinese-Pakistan relationship see, George L. Montagno, "Peaceful Coexistence: Pakistan and Red China", *The Western Political Quarterly*, Part 1 Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1, (1965): pp. 309-317.

²⁷ According to Globalsecurity.org as of October 2005, Pakistan maintains a stockpile of 75 nuclear weapons with all 75 being currently deliverable, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/summary.htm>. Both India and Pakistan remain as non signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

²⁸ The US Department of State estimates Pakistan's GDP at \$393.4 billion; exports at \$14.85 billion; imports at \$21.26 billion; real growth rate at 7.8%. (2005 est.). Despite a much smaller export figure than India, 22.6% of this amount is exported to the US, making the US her biggest export market., <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3453.htm>

b) US Interest in South Asia: An Overview²⁹

It is an incontrovertible fact that the interest of the United States, indeed the world, in South Asia since the end of the Cold War has intensified; for reasons of economics, resources (both human and material), politics, strategy, security and terrorism³⁰, South Asia has garnered a degree of value in international relations unprecedented in the region's modern history:

“The growing interest of American business in South Asia parallels the increased importance of the region for U.S. foreign policy makers, and much like the State Department, American firms have an increasing need for people who understand South Asia's history, its languages, and cultures....

It is a region of remarkable social, economic, and technological transformations, yet it is the only place in the world where there has been a recent danger that two nuclear-armed countries could go to war.

...It is also the front line of our Global War on Terror, which remains our principal foreign policy priority. As President Bush has repeatedly reminded us, this will be a long and difficult struggle and one from which we will not shrink.”³¹

In very basic terms American interest in South Asia is centred on numbers: South Asia³² currently has a State Department determined population of over 1.45 billion. The sheer number of people in this region represents a significant volume of potential political capital, to be won over by George W. Bush, and his administration's globally amorphous and interminably complex, War on Terror. Since ethnicity and religion have become enshrined, via extremism and political rhetoric, into the fabric of the War on Terror, the

²⁹ Given much greater analysis in following chapters

³⁰ For an excellent and detailed account of the reasons why South Asia, after the Cold War, has seen a growth of inter and intra-state terrorism, as well as ethnic and religious instability, see Rohan Gunaratna's *Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis and National Security* (Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict Research, 1998)

³¹ Christina B. Rocca, Assistant Secretary for South Asia Affairs, 'Remarks to the American Chamber of Commerce Luncheon, Dhaka, Bangladesh, May 18th 2004', <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/32599.htm>

³² Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

Muslim populations of the world have become a demographic target for ‘winning over’ by the Bush administration³³:

“We will work to undermine the ideological underpinnings of violent Islamic extremism and gain the support of non-violent Muslims around the world.”³⁴

The South Asian states have a combined Muslim population of just around 430 million³⁵, Pakistan shares a border with one of the battlefields, Afghanistan, and in addition most of the littoral states have strategic value in terms of their geographic location on the major sea route to the east and the Pacific³⁶. Politics in most of these South Asian states is inextricably linked to, and almost indistinguishable from in some cases, religion. Consequently it became a strategic imperative, if the War on Terror was to positively involve South Asia, that George W. Bush’s foreign policy made ethno-religiously nuanced diplomatic, ideological and media conscious inroads into this sensitive area.

Economically, South Asia (particularly India) is a vital market for the US: South Asia collectively has seen a GDP growth rate of 6.4% between the years 2001 – 2005³⁷, India and Pakistan leading the way with an astonishing 8.4% and 8.6% respectively. The US-South Asia relationship (bi-lateral and multi lateral) has a mutually beneficial dynamic that solidifies its importance to the United States: despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the balance of trade in favour of the South Asian states³⁸ (South Asia gains access to the lucrative American markets for their products and in return the US gains trade – driven influence in the region) the United States is able to wield significant influence in

³³ With wildly varying results, but undoubtedly with little overall success

³⁴ US Department of State, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, 2006*, p. 11

³⁵ According to the US Department of State as of December 2006, the breakdown is as follows: Bangladesh: 128,918,100; India: 138 million; Maldives: 280,000; Pakistan: 160,829,453; Sri Lanka: 1,379,000. *Background Notes* from each country, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/>

³⁶ Discussed further in the introduction

³⁷ Asian Development Bank, *South Asia Economic Report, 2006*, p. 1

³⁸ For example, in 2006 the US imported 2,145 million dollars worth of Sri Lankan products but only exported a mere 236.6 million dollars worth of US goods to Sri Lanka. This allowed for a trade deficit of 1,908.3 million US dollars. Meaning that the Sri Lanka in particular is clearly dependent on the US willingness to continue buying their products. US Census Bureau, *Foreign Trade Statistics*, <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5420.html#questions>

the area. What is abundantly clear is that there has been a considerable and continued projection of US economic interest into the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

1985 (Records for Maldives begin 1992)	EXPORTS	IMPORTS	BALANCE
South Asia	2976.9	3074.7	-97.8
2006	EXPORTS	IMPORTS	BALANCE
South Asia	12,667.4	30,915.8	-18247.8

Fig. 1, Total US exports and imports to/from the countries of South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka). All figures are in millions of US dollars ³⁹

South Asia's dependency upon what is clearly a lopsided economic relationship (see table above) with America, allows the US to pursue foreign policy objectives via its trade, aid and assistance initiatives with each individual state. Later chapters in this investigation will draw light on the relationship between US policy in the War on Terror and its trade and economic assistance to those countries it seeks to positively influence, in particular Sri Lanka.

c) US-Sri Lanka Relations: An Overview

The relationship between the United States and Sri Lanka, though it has endured historically since independence, primarily due to the commonality of political democracy, is characterised by a constant wavering of cordiality. Depending upon the vicissitudes of the domestic political situation prevailing in Sri Lanka and the now predictable pendulous swing from incumbent party to opposition party at almost every general election⁴⁰, the United States and Sri Lanka have often found each other at opposite ends of the foreign policy spectrum. This was never clearer than during the Cold War when the US was

³⁹ Collated from statistics from the US Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance>

⁴⁰ From independence in 1948 through to today Sri Lankan politics has been dominated by two major parties: the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). These two parties generally tend to alternate rule.

either courted by Sri Lankan leaders for economic and security assistance⁴¹ or publicly vilified⁴² because of observed international transgressions that did not fit into the mould of Sri Lanka's dominant but shifting foreign policy narrative of non-alignment⁴³.

Consequently, depending upon the nature of the Cold War at any specific time and the views of the domestic party ruling Sri Lanka, the relationship between the two was either one of mutual disregard (but often only to the detriment of Sri Lanka) or mutual assistance (again, the benefits usually weighing in favour of Sri Lanka).

Academic investigation into the relationship between the United States and Sri Lanka has been determined by a number of factors, not least of which is the priority the US State Department has assigned to Sri Lanka. Much of the character of the relationship during the Cold War (and, in fact, beyond) is contextually shaped by the relative strategic importance (or lack thereof) of the island to the Americans at any given point in time. During the Cold War, as US policy mutated (often temporarily and unevenly) and as domestic Sri Lankan politics oscillated, so did the bi-lateral relationship: from amicability to thinly veiled hostility and vice versa. More often than not the relationship cooled or warmed depending upon the approach of whichever political party occupied the seat of power in Sri Lanka. There has been limited study into the US-Lanka relationship from independence to today, for the most part because there has only ever been, at best, a narrow and very specific interest afforded Lanka by policy makers in Washington⁴⁴. The onset of the armed ethnic struggle in Sri Lanka and the end of the Cold War made a re-orientation of this policy inevitable. However, what hasn't happened as a corollary is a full scholarly investigation into the modifications and/or continuities of US policy vis á vis the ethnic conflict. What is of more concern is the academic neglect shown to the US-

⁴¹ Primarily by those within the UNP who maintain a more liberal approach to economic policy

⁴² By the more socialist nationalist parties such as the SLFP

⁴³ For an excellent discussion of the nuanced nature of non-aligned politics of Sri Lanka, see W.M. Karunadasa, *Sri Lanka and Non-Alignment, A Study of Foreign Policy from 1948-1982*. (Colombo: Image Lanka Publishers, 1997)

⁴⁴ An historical trend which will prove exceptionally relevant in the 21st century

Sri Lankan dynamic in relation to the ethnic/terrorist crisis in the context of the most recent US foreign policy paradigm shift: the War on Terror.

d) Academic Coverage

As commented above, one of the most striking features of the academic study pertaining to US-Sri Lanka relations is, plainly speaking, its deficiency. When compared to the literature and enquiry relating to US-India/US-Pakistan affairs, that specifically detailing modern US-Sri Lanka relations, is practically non-existent. That is not to say that Sri Lanka as a focus of study has not generated (and continues to generate) academic interest, simply that the specific issue of recent investigation into the ethnic crisis and the American approach to it in the context of the War on Terror, is sorely lacking⁴⁵. There is a vast and detailed canon of research into the origins and course of the ethnic struggle⁴⁶, much of which will be referred to throughout the course of this investigation, but there is very little that seeks to place this struggle into a more global context with specific reference to US foreign policy since the events of September 11th and the subsequent undertaking by the administration of President Bush to conquer all forms of ‘terror’. There is no other study that places the current manifestation of the bilateral relationship in an historical context, as this one does.

This investigation traces the evolution of US- Sri Lanka relations from the onset of independence to, and with emphasis on, present day. The analysis made and judgments drawn will be both historical and political; the work will approach the subject primarily from the perspective of the United States⁴⁷. The aims are three fold:

⁴⁵ ‘Sorely lacking’ because not only is South Asia, as Rohan Gunaratna claims, one of “...the most insecure geographic regions in the world.”, but also because the LTTE is “...the world’s most ruthless insurgent-terrorist organization.” Rohan Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Crisis and National Security*, (Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict, 1998) p. 153 & p. 15 respectively

⁴⁶ Perhaps the most authoritative work being by Sri Lanka’s eminent historian, K.M. De Silva, in *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*, (India: Penguin Books, 1998)

⁴⁷ Except when it is necessary to draw on interviews from key Sri Lankan figures such as former President Kumaratunga

- 1) To determine trends in the US-Sri Lanka narrative so that recurrent themes, once identified, may be used as historic-contextual reasons for, and determinants of, recent US policy towards Sri Lanka;
- 2) To place Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis in a qualitative framework of US policy towards the island, i.e. how the United States views and responds to the ethnic crisis with regard to the milieu of its own foreign policy objectives;
- 3) To establish the quantitative and qualitative nature of the developments in US policy towards Sri Lanka and the ethnic crisis, since the declaration of George W. Bush's 'War on Terror', i.e. a determination of whether there has been any significant modification in the American approach to Sri Lanka's 'terrorist'⁴⁸ problem since September 11th.

The research is to be an over-arching endeavour that will place the ethnic crisis inside both the historical US-Sri Lanka relationship cultivated since 1948 as well as the global paradigm of President Bush's US anti-terror campaign; it will ultimately reach substantial judgments as to the veracity of George W. Bush's claim that, "...we must make use of every tool in our arsenal...America will help nations that need our assistance in combating terror."⁴⁹

Due to the encompassing nature of this investigation, in that it will cover the period from 1948 to present day, any critique of literature must take a similarly inclusive approach and incorporate material that, whilst not immediately linked to the War on Terror, has crucial bearing on the framework of US policy towards Sri Lanka. To this end it makes a

⁴⁸ The word 'terrorist' is used because this work will reach judgments concerning US policy and the ethnic crisis, therefore the definition of the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation by the USA, is the only useful term to use – regardless of whether it appropriately describes the LTTE or not

⁴⁹ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2002*, p. 3

critique of literature covering such a lengthy period of time less problematic if it is subdivided into three basic categories:

- 1) Seminal literature relating specifically to the US-Sri Lanka relationship from Sri Lankan independence until the outbreak/formalisation of the ethnic conflict in 1983.
- 2) Research and investigation into the ethnic crisis and America's response to it from 1983 to 2001.
- 3) Enquiry pertaining to US-Lanka relations in regard to the ethnic crisis post September 11th, with specific reference to the War on Terror.

1) US-Lanka Relations, 1948 – 1983

There is little academic material covering the US-Sri Lanka connection in this period and as such a review of intellectual substance is reduced almost to the extent of examining a few core texts. What is immediately of import when looking at scholarly enquiry covering 1948-83 is that it is primarily from the political perspective of Sri Lanka. Ramashish Prasad Sinha's, 'Sri Lanka United States Relations'⁵⁰, is one of the few manuscripts to specifically tackle the issue. Sinha, as with others, has attempted with some success to demonstrate a clear qualitative link between domestic Sri Lankan political pressures and the subsequent motivations for her foreign movement⁵¹. What he, and academics like W.M. Karunadasa⁵², investigates is the contingency of the Sri Lankan

⁵⁰ Ramashish P. Sinha, *Sri Lanka United States Relations*, (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1992)

⁵¹ S. Lenka and S. Pattanaik explain this link between the dominance of the two domestic political parties (UNP, SLFP) and their foreign policies in class terms, in their socialist interpretation of Sri Lanka's foreign policy. 'Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy: A Class Analysis', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 8, No. 1. (Aug., 1979): pp. 48-57

⁵² W.M. Karunadasa, *Sri Lanka and Non-Alignment, A Study of Foreign Policy from 1948-1982*, (Colombo: Image Lanka Publishers 1997)

foreign policy making machine as a functioning base structure for small state activity in international relations.

Sinha undertakes the explicit task of determining the key developments of the bilateral relationship from 1948-1977. There is much of value in Sinha's work, such as his clear placement of Sri Lankan foreign relations in the structure of domestic political discourse; demonstrating the partisan pressures brought to bear on Sri Lanka's foreign policy.

Unfortunately, Sinha's work, as with that of S.U. Kodikara⁵³, H.S.S. Nissanka⁵⁴, and Karunadasa, examines the US-Lanka narrative purely from the vantage point of the Sri Lankan perspective. Whilst this is not a criticism- all of the authors indicate that this is their intention – it does mean that a capacious vacuum exists where the US perspective is concerned. In addition, this also means that US policy towards the island is often interpreted simply as a reactive dynamic, reacting to Sri Lankan issues, rather than one that fits into a mutual relationship, and one that is ultimately a small part of an intricately global US concern.

Unlike the other major contributors to the very limited canon of research, whilst Sinha's is perhaps the only account to deal explicitly with the issue of US-Lanka relations, it does so in an often clumsy manner and, at times, with a naïve partiality towards Sri Lanka: "The U.S. Government's decision to cut off aid was wrong..."⁵⁵ Karunadasa, Nissanka and Kodikara⁵⁶ set a more objective course in their investigations than does Sinha, and determine their subject to be a specific aspect of Sri Lankan foreign policy during the years 1948 to 1982: that of Sri Lankan non-alignment in the Cold War world. As such, this precise academic remit does not deal exclusively with US-Sri Lanka relations but does incorporate the dynamic into a holistic view of Lankan non-alignment.

⁵³ Shelton U. Kodikara, 'Continuity and Change in Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy: 1974-1979', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 9 (Sep., 1980): pp. 879-890

⁵⁴ H. S. S. Nissanka, *Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy: A Study in Non Alignment* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1984)

⁵⁵ Sinha, *Sri Lanka United States Relations*, p. 92

⁵⁶ Shelton U. Kodikara, 'Major Trends in Sri Lanka's Non-Alignment Policy after 1956', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 13, No. 12 (Dec., 1973): pp. 1121-1136

Consequently Karunadasa and Nissanka, much like Kodikara, discuss US-Sri Lanka relations in the context of a wider view of Sri Lankan foreign relations, and thus resign the relationship to simply one of many in the framework of Sri Lanka's foreign policy. This pattern is repeated in most other literature covering this period; US-Sri Lanka relations are only ever explored (if at all) as a small component of a general discussion on Sri Lankan foreign policy. As a result there is, to all intents and purposes, no true academic work covering the post-independence relationship.

Perhaps a more critical limitation to this body of investigation is the simple fact that none of the work concerned with US-Lanka relations is able to put this bi-lateral connection into any context regarding a) the ethnic crisis or b) the War on Terror. This is obviously because the work was concluded before the outbreak of both these conflicts. Therefore, whilst the literature covering this relationship post-independence is able to establish certain trends⁵⁷, there has been no further study of these trends and, hence, no real extrapolation of them into the post 1983 era and obviously none into the post September 11th era.

2) America and the Ethnic Crisis, 1983 – 2001

There has been much written about the ethnic crisis of Sri Lanka which began in earnest in 1983 with the anti-Tamil riots⁵⁸. These anti-Tamil riots are generally considered the 'spark' that set ablaze the conflict which had been simmering not so far below the surface of the Sri Lankan polity. The riots are also the event that essentially helped define the modern contours of what has become one of the world's most intractable ethnic conflicts, as well as marking the point at which the Sri Lankan issue became an international one⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ Particularly the work of Kodikara and Karunadasa

⁵⁸ When the majority Sinhalese, in direct response to the LTTE ambush which killed 13 Sinhalese soldiers in the Jaffna peninsula, conducted vengeful and violent reprisals against the Tamil community (Indian and Sri Lankan), throughout the island but primarily in the country's capital, Colombo.

⁵⁹ See chapter 6 in De Silva, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*

Authors such as K.M. De Silva⁶⁰ and H.L.D. Mahindapala⁶¹ have traced the poly-causal origins of the ethnic crisis and discussed with great intellectual vigour the politico-historical course of events, whilst others such as Kumari Jayawardena⁶² have interpreted the outbreak of conflict as a more recent manifestation of a modern Sri Lankan history (both pre and post independence) that is defined by ethnic and class tension. There are any number of insightful works that deliberate the origins and course of the conflict⁶³, but there are few which seek to put the conflict (1983-2001) into an international context, and even fewer still who specifically interpret the ethnic crisis within a framework of US foreign policy. Those that do tend to incorporate it as a small part of a wider view of South Asian security or as an even smaller part of a global foreign policy environment non specific to US-Sri Lanka relations. There are a number of reasons for this dearth of investigation into Sri Lanka/US relations (1983-2001) vis á vis the ethnic conflict, not the least of which is that the relationship in this period was summarily overshadowed by that of India/Sri Lanka⁶⁴. Consequently what occurred (and quite understandably so) was that, in terms of the ethnic conflict, academic investigation focussed on the role India played (both direct and indirect) rather than on what, if any, the United States played. It is crucial to note that it is only through the lens of the events following September 11th 2001 that US policy, in connection with the Sri Lanka conflict, demands re-appraisal. If the War on Terror was a truly a global affair, then what did the US do to assist the Sri Lankan government? Perhaps more importantly, in an attempt to place US anti-terror efforts into local historical context, what approach to the conflict did the US maintain during the eighteen years prior to 9/11 (whilst being in the shadow of India), four of which were crucially played out after Madeline Albright placed the LTTE on the State Department List of Foreign Terrorist Organisations? Once US efforts in relation to the conflict pre 2001 are explained, the thesis can then provide evidence to which US efforts

⁶⁰ De Silva, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*

⁶¹ H. L. D. Mahindapala, 'Origins of the North – South Conflict', in *Peace in Sri Lanka, Obstacles and Opportunities* (Colombo: World Alliance For Peace in Sri Lanka, 2005), p. 49-89

⁶² Kumari Jayawardena, *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Centre for Social Analysis, 1986)

⁶³ We will draw upon many of these works to help illustrate the background for our investigation

⁶⁴ This issue will be given greater explanation in later chapters

after 2001 can be compared. Consequently, a key question can be addressed – did the War on Terror represent a turning point in American-Sri Lankan relations?

The subject of Sri Lanka's ethnic/terrorist strife from 1983 to 2001 (pre War on Terror) is covered by innumerable authors and is manifest in all manner of books, journals and newspaper/magazine/internet articles. Those that examine the issue in light of US foreign policy considerations are few. Perhaps the most prolific author to put the conflict into, not only an international and comparative context, but also a global terrorist structure, is Rohan Gunaratna. His specific work on Sri Lanka's national and international security complex is considered by many as pioneering. In works such as 'Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis & National Security'⁶⁵, 'International & Regional Implications of the Sri Lankan Tamil Insurgency'⁶⁶ and 'Indian intervention in Sri Lanka'⁶⁷, Gunaratna details the complex and organic network of the LTTE, relating their activities, as well as the Sri Lankan government responses to these activities, to wider trans-national security implications. Gunaratna has become one of *the* authorities on the nature and evolution of the Sri Lankan terrorist insurgency and how the LTTE terrorist network in particular transcended national and geographic boundaries. Consequently, much of Gunaratna's work is specifically related to the nature and mechanics of terrorism and how terrorist groups, in this case the LTTE, have an extra-territorial reach. Whilst the international reach of the LTTE is crucial to the understanding of this investigation, it only really serves as a premise as to how the USA specifically relates to both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis in this period. Gunaratna, as with others such as Manor and Segal⁶⁸ touches on the bi-lateral US-Sri Lanka relationship as a rather small part of either a regional security composition or as an instructive investigation on global terrorist

⁶⁵ See footnote 30

⁶⁶ Rohan Gunaratna, *International & Regional Implications of the Sri Lankan Tamil Insurgency* (Colombo: International Foundation of Sri Lankans, 2001)

⁶⁷ Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies* (Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict Research, 1994)

⁶⁸ J. Manor, & G. Segal, 'Causes of Conflict: Sri Lanka and Indian Ocean Strategy', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, No. 12. (Dec., 1985): pp. 1165-1185

networks. What tends to happen therefore is that the US-Sri Lanka relationship (if referenced at all), once again, becomes relegated to a rather minor part of a larger whole.

There are few notable investigations into the specifics of US policy in South Asia during this period. In those that are of merit, lamentably, Sri Lanka is given such little concern as to make the reference so isolated it becomes almost irrelevant. Shivaji Ganguly's 'U.S. Policy Toward South Asia'⁶⁹, whilst a robust account of US – India/Pakistan/China relations in the 1960's/70's/80's, throws only a cursory glance at the issues relating to Sri Lanka; and even then only with reference to India's involvement in peace-keeping in 1987⁷⁰.

3) US-Lanka Relations and the War on Terror, 2001 - present

Since the attacks on the World Trade Centre of September 2001 there has been a renewed interest in US foreign policy and in particular its remit regarding terrorism. Consequently academic (and in some cases, not so academic) enquiry into this area has become something of a veritable growth industry. Unfortunately, the nature of academic investigation as it is, much of the enquiry has developed around issues that are perhaps of more immediate international popularity, hence study has centred on such very vital but also very headline-grabbing concerns as Al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden, the Taliban, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia and such. The proliferation therefore of work on US foreign policy in these areas, as well as in the moral dimension of US foreign activity⁷¹, has been astonishing. What is perhaps equally astonishing is the lack of any serious investigation into, a) how the cycle of terrorism (a terrorism recognised by the State Department since 1997) in Sri Lanka fits into the framework of the US prescribed 'global' War on Terror, and b) how this modern manifestation of the relationship then fits into the historical context of the association.

⁶⁹ Shivaji Ganguly, *U.S. Policy Toward South Asia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990)

⁷⁰ The IPKF (Indian Peace-Keeping Force) was invited into Sri Lanka by President Jayawardene to assist in the disarming of the LTTE

⁷¹ Noam Chomsky is perhaps the best known academic currently discussing this issue

There have been works produced that ‘include’ the modern US-Sri Lanka relationship but none thus far that seek to determine the long term, historical, underpinnings of the bilateral bond, establish how these underpinnings help determine current relations, and what developments this relationship witnessed after the war on terrorism was declared.

Authors such as Rohan Gunaratna have sought to investigate terrorism as a complex global phenomenon that requires an equally multifaceted and global effort to subjugate. Gunaratna, with works such as ‘Inside Al Qaeda’⁷² and ‘Combating Terrorism’⁷³, has become an authority on some of the causes and methods of modern terrorism. A Sri Lankan, Gunaratna has developed a close interest in the study of the LTTE, particularly its international connections, and has helped elevate the Sri Lankan conflict to a more international audience. The internationalism of Gunaratna’s studies on terrorism provide vital awareness to the academic and political community concerning the inner workings of terrorist networks and help put into context the US-led War on Terror. Unfortunately, much like many of the others in his field such as Edirippulige⁷⁴, Gunaratna focuses more on the detail and nature of modern terrorism, offering valuable advice to be followed by national and international authorities, but does not specifically investigate (and in fact never sets out to) the country to country issues raised by an ongoing insurgency in Sri Lanka and the correct placement of it in the supposedly ‘global’ War on Terror. The US-Lanka relationship (post 2001) is discussed rather perfunctorily by Edirippulige amidst suggestions for international solutions specific to the ethnic conflict, and more generally in terms of solutions to terrorism globally by Gunaratna.

⁷² Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002)

⁷³ Rohan Gunaratna, (editor). *Combating Terrorism, Regionalism and Regional Security* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2006)

⁷⁴ Sisira Edirippulige, *Sri Lanka’s Twisted Path to Peace: Some Domestic and International Obstacles to the Peace Process* (Colombo: Resource Management Foundation, 2004)

As a result of the interest generated by the global fight against terrorism there has been a number of recent works that have sought to re-examine Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, and in particular, the path to peace. Some of these works have wisely included the international dimension of the conflict and have emphasised the need for foreign or 'third party' assistance⁷⁵ (both regional and extra-regional) in any attempt to resolve the grievances of the warring parties. As a result, investigation into the conflict has been kick-started. Works by Venkataramanan⁷⁶ and Samaranayake⁷⁷ have both included brief historical accounts of the recent US approach to the Sri Lankan hostilities as part of essays on the application of external forces (theoretical and actual) in Sri Lanka's peace process. Sadly, whilst of import, these accounts of US-Lanka relations remain far too brief to be useful outside of the context and the construct of the essay.

There have been other recent works which attempt to give specific insights into Sri Lankan foreign policy and as such they assist in the progress of debate concerning US-Sri Lanka relations. Unfortunately, too many of these works suffer from severe limitations: many are rife with chronic bias in one form or another⁷⁸; others are far too general and make clumsy or only passing reference to US-Lanka issues⁷⁹ (often whilst discussing external influence in the various peace processes⁸⁰) or the War on Terror.

⁷⁵ See work by Ira William Zartman, 'Managing Terrorism and Insurgency through Peace Processes: Options for the Future', in *Pathways out of Terrorism and Insurgency: The Dynamics of Terrorist Violence and Peace Processes*, edited by Luigi Sergio Germani and D. R. Kaarthikeyan (Elgin: New Dawn Press, 2005), pp. 41-49

⁷⁶ K. Venkataramanan, 'Dilemmas of External Actors', in *Sri Lanka, Peace Without Process*, edited by B. Raman, N. Sathiya Moorthy, and Kalpana Chittaranjan (Colombo: Observer Research Foundation, 2006), pp. 197-225

⁷⁷ Dr Gamini Samaranayake, 'Of Phases and Paces'. Ibid pp. 164-195

⁷⁸ A perfect example being a collection of speeches, essays and such entitled, *Peace in Sri Lanka: Obstacles and Opportunities* (Colombo: World Alliance for Peace in Sri Lanka, 2005) which contains any number of examples of 'axes to grind' or entrenched political views, rendering the content (with some notable exceptions) almost irrelevant

⁷⁹ See Tyrone Fernando's *Alien Winds Across Paradise, A New Look at Sri Lanka's Foreign Relations Through the Ages* (Colombo: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 2002)

⁸⁰ See the thorough paper by Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'Government – LTTE Negotiation Attempt of 2000 Through Norwegian Facilitation: Context, Complexities and Lessons', in *Negotiating Peace in Sri Lanka, Efforts, Failures & Lessons*, edited by Kumar Rupesinghe (Colombo: The Foundation for Co-Existence, 2006), pp. 231-259

There are perhaps only two notable attempts (at least the only two specific attempts) to examine US policy towards the conflict in Sri Lanka within the framework of post September 11th anti-terror initiatives. One is by C. Yusuf Mumtaz in his Policy Background and Options Paper, 'U.S. Policy Toward the Continuing Conflict in Sri Lanka'⁸¹. Yusuf Mumtaz does a solid job of summarising some of the important aspects of recent US-Lanka relations, highlighting, among other issues, the American trend towards 'non-involvement'⁸². He also gives a potent but very brief outline of US interest in the island and places the conflict into an even pithier historical context. However, Yusuf Mumtaz's work never sets out to analyse the historic roots of the US-Lanka dynamic, nor does he claim to determine the place of the Sri Lankan conflict within the War on Terror⁸³; his paper is a 'Policy Options Paper' and as such it puts forward recommendations for US policy rather than a thorough examination of it. The other is a work by former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Jeffrey J. Lunstead, entitled, the United States' Role in Sri Lanka's Peace Process⁸⁴. Lunstead's work offers the reader an exceptional insight into the working relationship America maintained with Sri Lanka in this brief period of time, and his personal experience lends an unprecedented authenticity to the analysis. However, the work looks at the relationship through a narrow focus on the peace-process, and only over a slender period of time – this is the stated goal of Lunstead's study. There is a brief overview of the history of US-Lanka ties, but this is only really to serve as a general introduction to the core of the paper. Despite the limitations to Lunstead's study (which are broadly historical), Chapter 7 and 8 will use his work to support and confirm some of the key arguments set out in this thesis.

It is not the goal of this study to re-interpret the modern nature of terrorism or propose a theoretical (or even actual) examination of ethnic insurgency. This investigation is based

⁸¹ C. Yusuf Mumtaz, *U.S. Policy Toward the Continuing Conflict in Sri Lanka*, Nathan Hale Foreign Policy Society, Department of Studies, <http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/sri-lanka.pdf>

⁸² Ibid, p. 7

⁸³ In fact although the paper was written in April 2004, the War on Terror is only briefly mentioned

⁸⁴ Jeffrey J. Lunstead, *The United States' Role in Sri Lanka's Peace Process, 2002-2006*, (Colombo: The Asia Foundation: 2007)

purely on the need for a current historical and political analysis of US policy towards the Sri Lankan conflict, set in a detailed historical context, and with acute emphasis on how one of the world's most intractable state-terrorist conflicts fits into the greatest paradigm shift in world geo-politics since the death of the Cold War.

e) Chapters

This thesis is concerned, at its heart, with tracing the evolution of the US-Sri Lanka relationship, beginning with the achievement of independence in the early Cold War world of 1948, to the present global War on Terror environ. Because this evolution is to be examined for recurring themes, so that they may be applied as historic-contextual determining factors in the current manifestation of the relationship, then the most practical approach is to be a chronological one. However, before the investigation can realistically begin and since the central precept of it (around which all other material orbits) is the ethnic conflict/Sri Lankan state-terrorist issue, then it is imperative to begin, for the sake of clarity and foundation, with a brief overview of the origins of the island's discord. Thus the following chapter (Chapter 2) will be put to this purpose.

Chapter 3 is to be an investigation into US-Ceylon relations covering the period immediately following independence in 1948 up until the formal outbreak of the conflict in 1983. This chapter will deal specifically with the identification of the key characteristics of the relationship so that trends, once recognised, can be traced throughout the entirety of the study (1948-present). The trends and tendencies, once highlighted, will be used to: a) place the core investigation (1983 – 2001, 2001-present) into a politico-historic context, and b) demonstrate the qualitative and quantitative changes/continuities in this relationship post 1983 and, more crucially, post 2001.

Chapter 4 will narrow its focus as it examines the origins and growth of the American attitude to Ceylon/Sri Lanka's linguistic, cultural and religious tensions. Essentially the

chapter will determine the manner in which America has traditionally viewed these tensions so that the modern manifestation of the conflict, and America's methodology in its approach to it, can be placed into an historical context. Ultimately this chapter will form the basis for a set of principles which continue to impact America's willingness to involve itself in the island's troubles.

In 1983 the island saw an explosion of the tension between the Sinhalese and the Tamils with the anti-Tamil riots. From this point onwards the ethnic, religious, territorial, and linguistic issues of Sri Lanka entered a new context: that of an ethnic conflict; a civil war; an international concern. This chapter (5) will summarise the main issues and developments of the conflict post 1983 and relate US foreign policy attitudes directly to this new armed milieu. The chapter will amply prove the central posit established in previous chapters, that historically identifiable criteria assist in the determination of the US approach to Sri Lanka's conflict. It will also reinforce, and carry forward, the notion that the defining characteristics of American attitudes to the conflict are: reluctance and hesitation.

Chapter 6 will examine three key issues: firstly, the arrival of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga at the office of the presidency and the impact this had on the relationship Sri Lanka maintained during this period with the Americans; secondly, it will detail her government's handling of the conflict (prior to 2001), particularising those issues which have historically tended to impact Washington's willingness to assist against the LTTE, e.g. the government's human rights record; thirdly it will investigate the landmark proscription of the LTTE by the US State Department. From 1997 onwards the LTTE are designated as terrorists by the US State Department under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1996. This chapter is employed in the examination of this designation to determine what, if anything, changed in terms of US policy towards Sri Lanka as a direct result of Madeleine Albright's (Secretary of State) decision. In short, this chapter will establish whether there was any significant shift in US-Lanka relations as a result of the US

placing the LTTE on their list of Foreign Terrorist Organisations. The question will be asked: Did the designation alter the way in which the US orientates itself towards the island's conflict and the government of Sri Lanka post 1997?

Chapters 7 and 8 will work in concert to examine the consequences for Sri Lanka and the conflict of George W. Bush's global War on Terror. These chapters are concerned with the establishing of clear indicators as to how the War on Terror affected America's relationship with the Sri Lankan government in respect to the island's ongoing conflict. They will place the island's conflict into the context of this new foreign policy paradigm and establish what modifications occurred in the US-Sri Lanka relationship as a direct result of George W. Bush's declaration. The core question of whether the War on Terror represented a 'turning-point' in the US-Sri Lanka relationship will be answered in these two chapters by utilising a substantial combination of primary interviews, statistical data, official reports, and quality journalism. Chapters 7 and 8 will ultimately draw all of the themes of the thesis together and reinforce the core arguments presented herein.

f) Primary Sources: The Basis for Study

It is important to note that in a study of this breadth (in terms of the period of time covered), and the distinct historic and political phases covered in the investigation (e.g. from Independence to Commonwealth to ethnic conflict and so on) there will inevitably be a number of sources specific solely to either the time period or the phase but there will also be sources that will sustain their use throughout the investigation. What is equally important to note is that any description of sources used will, for purposes of practicality, only include a selection deemed most pertinent to the investigation.

One of the key sources that will be of use throughout the investigation (though particularly during the early years) will be the record of Parliamentary Debates (also known as House of Representatives Debates, Hansard Volumes). These volumes are an

extensive, detailed, occasionally amusing and invaluable source of evidence regarding the discussions held on the floor of the Sri Lankan legislature. These discussions offer a primary insight into the issues, concerns and political manoeuvrings of the day – particularly the attitude *de jour* towards foreign entanglements. Any investigation into the dynamics responsible for shaping policy, driving attitudes vis á vis the Cold War, the ethnic crisis and the War on Terror, as well as those appraising the job being done by those contemporarily in government, will often start with these crucial records. Conveniently they are recorded and published annually up until the last full year. The Parliamentary Debates will provide a thorough and traceable record of trends and attitudes covering the entirety of this research.

A key indicator of the closeness or congeniality of the relationship between the United States and Sri Lanka is the economic bond that has been sustained (often unevenly) from the outset of Independence. Consequently, records of these financial, trade, aid and industrial ties are an essential primary measurement, over time, of the dynamics affecting US-Lanka relations. Hence we will use records from the US State Department, Department of Defense, and such that specifically detail financial, trade, aid and assistance transactions between the two countries. For example, one of the earliest agreements between the two countries, and one which has been an ever present (but often varying) symbol of the co-operation between the US and Sri Lanka, is that which began under the Eisenhower administration's Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954 (commonly known as P.L.480 entitlement). P.L. 480 entitlement (Title I, II and III) is distributed by the United States Agency for International Development. We will also use the annual Trade Summaries from the Office of the US Trade Representative to trace the impact of decisions made in Sri Lanka on the trade relationship – determined, for the most part, by the United States.

Various USAID archives and reports (too many to reasonably detail) will be used to determine any trends in the US-Lanka relationship over the last fifty years or so, as well

as to judge American policy responses, as regards aid and assistance, to key issues within the Sri Lankan polity. Perhaps, fortuitously, USAID recently published a detailed commemorative compendium entitled, *50 Years of Partnership in Sri Lanka*⁸⁵, that broadly describes and assesses the bi-lateral relationship since its inception in 1956. Although this is incredibly brief and general, tending towards a lack of objectivity it will still clearly be a useful tool and will, in combination with the various more detailed primary documents available in the USAID archives, act as a barometer of the cordiality between the two countries over most of the time period covered in this investigation. In terms of statistical analysis, some of the work's most illuminating data comes from USAID's Overseas Grants and Loans, commonly known as the *Greenbook*.

One of the enduring features of Sri Lanka's foreign policy movements is its adherence (albeit in often different forms) to the school of non-alignment. This observance of non-alignment has been a constant in Sri Lankan foreign policy, surviving the onslaughts of the Cold War, persisting to this day as a means of elevating the needs of Sri Lanka (whatever they are judged to be by the political party of the day) above the great power rivalries. Consequently, to successfully measure the tone of Sri Lanka's foreign policy (particularly its early foreign policy), and thus the reasons for the fallout of it stateside, we will examine the minutes, declarations, resolutions and personalities of some of the more appropriate Summit Conferences of the Non-Aligned Movement.

One of the work's most valuable and enduring sources is the New York Times. This periodical provides the study with an invaluable trace of American journalistic attitudes to Sri Lanka over the entirety of the period. From 1948 until present day, the New York Times will be used as a constant 'barometer' of the US mood towards South Asia that will afford detailed evidence – through reportage – of the events, trends and issues dominating the bilateral relationship. The New York Times will also be invaluable for its

⁸⁵ USAID, *50 Years of Partnership in Sri Lanka*, 2006

role as an important opinion-shaper of American attitudes towards the island's conflict, its government, and the LTTE.

Clearly one of the most obvious sources of, not only valuable (as long as one is cautious) information, but also of the attitudes surrounding certain issues and pervading certain periods, is the Sri Lankan press. Perhaps more so than anywhere else in the world, because of the maturity of the country's national newspapers and the vitality of political discussion and public interest in the volatile conflict situation⁸⁶, the Sri Lankan press is an imperative source of primary views and attitudes – both of politicians (Sri Lankan and US) and the public. Consequently, we will use, where relevant, certain newspapers such as The Ceylon Daily News and the Daily/Sunday Mirror, The Island and the Sunday Leader for evidence of local attitudes and incidents.

One of the major barriers, according to the policy language that emanates from Washington, to a more direct involvement by the US in the state-terrorist conflict, is the dubious human rights record of the Sri Lankan government. Consequently, we will examine a number of sources, ranging from the press statements of successive American Ambassadors to Sri Lanka and USAID's Country Program Strategies, to the annual UN Human Rights Watch World Reports and the Quarterly Reports of Field Offices (Asia and Pacific Region) from the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, so that we can examine one of the major official reasons for US hesitancy towards direct involvement. We will also be comparing other countries determined by the US as violating human rights in order to validate (or invalidate) the US argument for less direct intervention that is used in the case of Sri Lanka. Thus we will be looking for trends implied in the sources mentioned whereby the US censures the Sri Lankan government

⁸⁶ At the time of writing (March 2007) a Sri Lankan Air Force base located next to the international airport at Katunayake was a target for an unprecedented air attack by the LTTE. The continued and daily impact of the conflict on the general population induces the public to take an interest in the political machinations of those in government, driving the national press to provide detailed (though occasionally overtly biased) explanations to an eager readership.

for perceived human rights transgressions and then, as a result, reduces its physical support for it.

In order to investigate and establish the complicated connections that the United States and Sri Lanka maintain, particularly those which have evolved since the outbreak of the ethnic strife, and crucially, with immediate regard to the post 9/11 War on Terror, we need to explore a plethora of interrelated primary evidence that will give us a detailed understanding of the position the terrorist insurgency⁸⁷ occupies in America's global battle. The pillars, upon which the United States has built many of its recent country to country relationships, and those which have set out America's re-designed 21st century foreign policy goals are found in such publications and developments as the various National Security Strategy reports, The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism reports and the Millennium Challenge Corporation reports. These pillars are where much of our enquiry into the determinants of America's current relationship with an island enduring, a Washington-recognised, terrorism will begin.

In close association with these pillars are sources too numerous to fully detail here such as, the annual Country Reports on Terrorism from the US Department of State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Terrorist Assets Report from the Office of Foreign Assets Control (US Department of the Treasury), the Terrorist Interdiction Program, the Designated Foreign Terrorist Organization list, the Regional Strategic Initiative (RSI), the Antiterrorism Assistance Program (ATA) and so on.

Perhaps more potent, in terms of what the US relationship to Sri Lanka consists of in an *actual* sense (other than rhetoric from Capitol Hill), is the source material abundantly available that closely documents what Sri Lanka receives from the United States in terms of aid, assistance, military training and equipment, loans, donations and the like. Some of the invaluable material we will use as the basis for the most recent phase of American

⁸⁷ As determined by the US Department of State

foreign policy transactions with Sri Lanka are as follows: Congressional Budget Justifications for Foreign Operations (including all military sales and agreements between the US and Sri Lanka, the Millennium Challenge Account reports and statistics, various CRS Reports to Congress), Treaties in Force: a List of Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States in Force, House International Relations Committee Reports (Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific), Daily Press Briefing of the Office of the Coordinator for Counter Terrorism, the Tokyo Declaration on Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka, Asian Development Bank financial statements, Donor Conference minutes and declarations, and so on.

The strongest sources are the interviews contained herein. There are a number of interviews conducted by the author with high ranking officials such as former US Ambassadors, as well as with journalists such as Barbara Crossette – South Asian Bureau Chief for The New York Times. Perhaps the thesis's most preeminent source is an interview with former President and Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. These sources provide unrivalled primary insights into the inner workings of the US-Sri Lanka relationship at the highest level.

The strengths of the sources used are threefold: they represent clear principal evidence of attitudes from both American and Sri Lankan policy makers; they give detailed, diverse and substantial core proof of the bi-lateral relationship and, perhaps most importantly, the sources are numerous and, used in combination, are particularly potent.

CHAPTER TWO

The Origins of the Conflict and the Growth of the LTTE

This chapter has as its goal the identification and clarification of the origins of the US-Sri Lanka relationship in 1948 (Ceylonese independence) and the path of the relationship as it evolved up until the formal outbreak of the ethnic strife that has engulfed the country since 1983. The relationship will be analysed from an historical and political perspective to determine predominant themes, motifs and key characteristics, as well as identify trends so that a contextual structure can be developed in which to place the current manifestation of US-Lanka ties. In a sense, this historical context will help illuminate the way in which the United States relates to Sri Lanka today, providing an instructive background to, what is essentially, a contemporary case study of American responses to entrenched terrorist insurgencies in South Asian states.

Many of the sources used in this chapter are unique for two reasons: firstly, unless otherwise stated, they have yet to be used to support research in this field; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, they give us clear insight into the attitudes of US commentators on Ceylon/Sri Lanka whilst simultaneously demonstrating the lens through which informed American readers would have learned about the US-Ceylon relationship and the emerging conflict. This is crucial to the investigation because it is imperative that the American perspective, historically and politically, is accurately represented as so much work in this area tends to be dominated by the Sri Lankan viewpoint, often at the expense of objectivity. Ultimately, this investigation is looking to establish key considerations for US policy makers, rather than simply those of Sri Lanka.

Although the focus of this chapter is to define the US-Sri Lanka relationship pre-1983, it is vital that before this investigation begins, a broad summary of the origins of the conflict be given so that the complex dynamics determining the ongoing war and the

resultant American attitudes to it can be traced historically. Thus we can provide the contemporary relationship with an organic historical context formed from the evolution of the strife. This will not only provide a foundation from which to assess the US-Sri Lanka relationship but will also give insight into why the conflict has become an important study in terrorism and the global activities of successful terrorist organisations; in short, why the Sri Lankan conflict should be, and is, of interest to the United States.

The following introduction to the origins of the conflict is essentially a synthesis of authoritative works on the subject, supported with original sources that help to illuminate, historically, the American attitude towards the evolution of the conflict

¹. Since there is a fundamental need to gauge the American perspective on the ethnic crisis, archived newspapers, particularly The New York Times, are utilised in order to provide a barometer of American thoughts.

“After a quarter of a century of warfare, the LTTE is at the cutting edge of insurgent and terrorist technology, military adaptation and innovation... The lethality of its strategies and tactics have led to the revision of manuals on counter-insurgency and counter terrorism.”²

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have, over the course of the last twenty years, emerged as one of the most, if not *the* most, organised, innovative, deadly and pioneering international terrorist³ organisations currently operating today. Before the world came to fear Al Qaeda, and before the public gasped in horror at the sight of suicide bombings taking place in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the LTTE were developing the tactics of terrorist insurgency that came to be the very models for the more familiar faces of terrorism to adapt and to follow. According to one American journalistic authority, the

¹ Perhaps the most authoritative work on the historical anatomy of the conflict is De Silva's *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*

² Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis and National Security*, p. 16

³ Again, the term 'terrorist' is being used because this is an investigation into how the US views the organisation, and the US proscribed the LTTE as terrorists in 1997

LTTE “...professionalized, and institutionalized...”⁴ such acts, now almost commonplace in the Middle East, as suicide bombing.

The growth of the LTTE is inextricably bound to issues that, though they have their roots in the pre independence history of Ceylon, become dangerously divisive in the years following 1948 (particularly after the year 1956)⁵. Consequently, any explanation of the LTTE must necessarily be subsequent to a detailed account of the origins of the tensions that gave birth to both the conflict and the organisation.

a) **Origins of the Conflict: Politics, Religion and Language**

Although the conflict in Sri Lanka is commonly termed an ethnic conflict, in as much as it involves both the racial and cultural identities of the peoples concerned, it also, somewhat uniquely, absorbs linguistic and nationalist elements. Crudely and basically put, the two core elements involved in the conflict are the Sinhalese Buddhists and the Tamils⁶. Despite the fact that the Sinhalese are the numerical majority⁷ they have often claimed, occasionally with good reason, to be the potential prey of a Tamil population so closely linked⁸ to the populous⁹ and sympathetic South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Consequently, a fear of being ‘swamped’ by a Tamil population that demonstrates clear

⁴ A. Waldman, ‘Masters of Suicide Bombing: Tamil Guerrillas of Sri Lanka’, *New York Times*, January 14, 2003

⁵ Explored in detail in De Silva’s *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*

⁶ K. M. De Silva warns, quite correctly, of oversimplifying the conflict into these two groups because within each of them there are a number of distinct social, political and linguistic divergences. For example, the Tamil population maintains an identifiable, and very clear division between what many refer to as the Indian Tamils (those brought to Ceylon by the British to work on the plantations in the hill country) who are seen through the lens of the Hindu caste system as ‘low’, and the Sri Lankan Tamils who have a long history in Sri Lanka and consider themselves quite separate from, and superior to, the Indian Tamils. The Sinhalese themselves are not one strictly homogenous whole but the dominant religion is Theravada Buddhism and their unifying language is Sinhala

⁷ Out of a population of almost 20 million the Sinhalese constitute roughly 74% and the Tamils 18%
Source: US Department of State, *Background Note: Sri Lanka*, 2006

⁸ Both geographically – the northern Jaffna peninsula of Sri Lanka is only just over twenty miles from the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu – , culturally and politically

⁹ Tamil Nadu has a population of just over 62 million Tamils. Source: Census of India,
http://censusindia.gov.in/Data_Products/Library/Provisional_Population_Total_link/webed.html2001

and enduring associations with such a vast and proximate regional neighbour, has become a dominant part of the Sinhala psychology and is thus something to be actively resisted. For their part the Tamils, particularly the Sri Lankan Tamils, have quite fairly (in many cases) asserted that the state machinery built and in operation after independence has functioned in extreme favour of the Sinhala majority, subsequently disenfranchising them of political, linguistic, educational and territorial rights.

As commented earlier, many of the tensions that came to the fore in the decades after independence have their roots in earlier times, but the modern manifestation of the conflict is really a child of the, often ugly, political machinations that came to dominate the post-colonial period. On the 24th September, 1947 Don Stephen Senanayake (henceforth referred to as D S Senanayake) of the UNP¹⁰ became the first Prime Minister of Ceylon and proceeded to oversee the judicious, organised and, perhaps most importantly, peaceful transfer of power. Ceylon moved from being a long held colony of the British Empire to being a sovereign nation whilst at the same time opting to remain within the British Commonwealth for reasons of trade and defence.

The pluralism and multiculturalism¹¹ of the Ceylonese polity was recognised as a strength¹² of the country by D S Senanayake¹³ and, as such, it was understood as being a unique and integral part of the nation's identity. This perceived unity through diversity was not a sentiment shared by everyone and, in fact, did not last as a serious political consideration much after 1956, with the election of Solomon West Ridgeway Dias

¹⁰ United National Party

¹¹ The religious, linguistic and cultural diversity found in Sri Lanka is staggering. Just a cursory glance at the religions that have taken root offers an insight into Sri Lanka's diversity: Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and various derivations thereof

¹² Although this strength did not seem to include plantation Tamils of Indian origin

¹³ Although DS Senanayake died in 1952, his views on this were largely shared by his immediate successor – his son Dudley. Sir John Kotelawala, the PM after Dudley, initially proposed two official languages, Sinhala and Tamil, but later, as support for SWRD and his MEP increased, Sir John began to move closer to his opponent's 'Sinhala Only' stand largely in the hope of improving the election chances of his UNP

Bandaranaike (henceforth referred to as SWRD Bandaranaike) of the SLFP¹⁴. According to K. M. de Silva (henceforth referred to as de Silva), Bandaranaike's election victory in 1956 "marked a watershed in Sri Lanka's history in the rejection of so much that had come to be...part of the normal order in post-colonial Sri Lanka"¹⁵. De Silva's 'watershed' is so crucial to the understanding of the origins of Sri Lanka's civil strife because it marks the point at which the notion of Sri Lankan nationalism, indeed of a viable national identity, becomes indelibly connected to language and religion: that of Sinhala and Buddhism. Needless to say, a government which embodies such sentiments and one that is given a substantial democratic mandate by the voters, is bound to pursue policies consonant with its campaign pledges. Unfortunately, in retrospect, this meant pursuing policies of exclusion for many Sri Lankans, in particular the Tamil community.

The question that begs to be asked is, why would a government, indeed the democratic majority of the population, wish to see the application of such blatantly discriminatory and obviously divisive policies? The answer is profoundly complex but can be reduced to a number of key points for the requirements of this overview. Firstly, under British colonial rule the Sri Lankan Tamil community had enjoyed, what many Sinhalese saw as, a privileged position within both social and economic spheres, way out of proportion to their numbers. Consequently, it became advantageous to make political capital from the very real popular anxiety that the majority Sinhalese were being kept from their rightful social and economic inclusion by a 'non Sri Lankan minority'. Secondly, in respect of sheer numbers, the majority Sinhalese began to believe that, in line with democratic enfranchisement, those of the greatest number deserved greatest representation, and thus political dominance, far beyond anything received by the lesser numbered sections of society. To these, perhaps very reasonable, popular concerns was added an emotional third key element: the rejection of an inclusive multicultural national identity, and the adoption of a nationalism based exclusively on the Sinhala language and the Buddhist

¹⁴ SWRD Bandaranaike broke away from the UNP to form the Sri Lanka Freedom Party which, uniting wildly disparate political elements in a coalition known as the People's United Front (Mahajana Eksath Peramuna or MEP), defeated the UNP in 1956

¹⁵ De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, p. 626

religion. As early as 1946, these issues were being discussed internationally. More specifically, commentators such as G. E. Jones were contextualising the tensions for American readers in constitutional terms, by connecting them to the upcoming transition of Ceylon to a Dominion of the British Commonwealth:

“The main dissension regarding the existing state of affairs comes from the large minority groups: the 700,000 Ceylonese Tamils (racially related to south Indians), the 900,000 Indians and the 400,000 Moslems.

All of these groups fear the dominance of the Buddhist Sinhalese who form more than half of the island’s 6,700,000 population. Although communal feeling is not as deeply engraved as in India the minority groups would like more constitutional safeguards for their communities.”¹⁶

It is imperative at this juncture to make the point as clearly as possible, that the many references to commentators such as G. E. Jones and newspapers such as the *New York Times*, provide a vital insight into just how information concerning Ceylonese issues (such as the ethnic tension) was transferred to American ears. Consequently, these reports not only represent a barometer of American attitudes towards Ceylon¹⁷ but also, more importantly, they are one of the major conduits through which elite American opinion gained its perspective on the developing issues within Ceylon.

When Ceylon achieved its independence from the British in 1948, there was a great feeling throughout the general population that Ceylon was moving into an almost pre-destined era of prosperity and cultural regeneration. Finally, after over 400 years of foreign intervention and control that had variously subjugated and exploited the Ceylonese population, a fresh new chapter was to be written, not by outsiders, but by the Ceylonese. These sentiments were trumpeted by the competing parties in the run up to, what would become, the pivotal General Election of 1956. Journalists such as Pulitzer-Prize winner, and Executive Editor of *The New York Times* (1977 – 88), A. M.

¹⁶ G.E. Jones, ‘Ceylon Welcomes New Constitution’, *New York Times*, June 3, 1946

¹⁷ Provided the journalists filing the stories were American!

Rosenthal, covered this period with barely disguised relish, describing the divisive machinations of the UNP and the SLFP-led coalition, the MEP, as they exploited the island's ethno-religious strains in order that they achieve victory. General anticipation was further heightened by the religious excitement surrounding the Buddha Jayanthi¹⁸ celebrated in Ceylon in 1956. The import of this occasion was not lost on the political parties:

“Religious prejudices were also exploited. Sir John (UNP) had himself photographed often with Buddhist monks. But the coalition went in for monks en masse – thousands of them preaching through the countryside that the salvation of the religion depended on the defeat of the Government.”¹⁹

Rosenthal put it even more bluntly in an earlier article when he said:

“And every candidate seems out to show this predominantly Buddhist country that when it comes to love for Buddhism he runs the Tibet's Dalai Lama a close second.”²⁰

It is precisely these events, reported so vividly by journalists such as Rosenthal, that helped to shape America's early attitude towards Ceylon, her governments, and the rising ethnic issues. The attitude, once fired in the kiln of Washington, was to prove stubbornly durable and in fact remains largely, and atavistically, intact today.

Not only was Ceylon independent, religious revivalism²¹ had taken hold in certain sectors of the Sinhala population, and many saw the fortuitous combination of independence and the Buddha Jayanthi as an almost divine signal that both Ceylon and Buddhism must be

¹⁸ The 2500th year of Buddhism in Ceylon

¹⁹ A.M. Rosenthal, 'Ceylon Follows India into Neutralist Camp: Election, Decided on Local Issues, Will Affect South Asia Pattern', *Special to the New York Times*, April 8, 1956

²⁰ A.M. Rosenthal, 'World Watching Ceylon Election: Ruling Party, Backed by West Is Running Scared, but is Expected to Win the Fight', *Special to the New York Times*, April 2, 1956

²¹ On 4th February, 1956 The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress issued a report on the state of Buddhism in Ceylon. The report detailed the disadvantageous position held by Buddhism in twentieth century Ceylon. It, in part, blamed the neglect on post-independence UNP governments

restored to their rightful place of prominence: Ceylon was to reclaim its unencumbered place in the world; Buddhism its dominant position in Ceylon.

To this political, religious and cultural reclamation was added the reasserted ownership of language. English, the lingua franca of the British Empire, was the language of administration in Ceylon. Once the overt paternalism of the metropol had dissipated with independence, there emerged, alongside the calls for religious and political autochthony, the need to reassert the values of the mother tongue:

“Politicians from both sides promised to even things out by making Sinhalese the only official language. It became a contest to see which side could promise to be tougher on the Tamils, and apparently the voters thought the Opposition coalition would wield a bigger stick in office than the Government party.”²²

Unfortunately²³, as with religion, there were a number of languages in use in Ceylon, both in government and private offices, and thus the notion of a ‘mother tongue’ was as contentious as a ‘mother religion’.

Thus the rising sentiment of social and economic²⁴ exclusion under the British, the “democratic sanction”²⁵ assumed to be theirs by sheer weight of the number of Sinhala speakers, combined with the religious re-assertion of Buddhism in Ceylon, made for a potent and attractive mix for many Sinhala Buddhists in Ceylon. Perhaps more importantly, it proved and still proves to this day, to be an irresistible and inexhaustible fount of political advantage:

“The changing social structure of Ceylon is one of the important reasons behind the defeat of the Government (UNP). This country is still run by a thin layer of English-educated people. But beneath that layer a new group of middle-class

²² Rosenthal, ‘Ceylon Follows India into Neutralist Camp: Election, Decided on Local Issues, Will Affect South Asia Pattern’

²³ ‘Unfortunately’ bearing in mind the linguistic division that was to transpire

²⁴ Particularly with reference to employment

²⁵ De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, pp. 626-627

people, educated in Sinhalese and without the job opportunities to match their training, has been building up.

These are village people but their youngsters look to the city for their future, and there they do not find it. Sir John's party...woke up to the discontent when it was too late. The Opposition (MEP)...played up to the resentment in the villages-and towns too-...

Both sides in election tried to make votes out of the prejudices of the Sinhalese majority... the Sinhalese always say the Tamils...get all the good jobs."²⁶

The overriding sentiment embedded in many of the reports (including the above and exemplified by Rosenthal's comments in his earlier articles) making their way from the shores of Ceylon to the ears of American readers (and thus American policy makers) during this time was that, almost in spite of themselves, the Ceylonese politicians were largely responsible for the stimulation of the passions engulfing the island. As a result, the troublesome predicament Ceylon's politicians found themselves in could only really be solved by those who chose to commit themselves to a less volatile position- by abandoning the passionate extremes of the debate. The news reports carried in American papers thus helped to shape the mindset of Americans with regard to the conflict, in as much as they created (and sustained) a policy position to the conflict that saw the government of Ceylon (and later Sri Lanka) as one of the causes and ongoing contributors to the ethnic divisions. This position remains largely intact throughout the entire period covered by this study: in US policy circles, as much as the US wishes to defend her Sri Lankan allies against all forms of violent infringement and terrorist activity, she is also bound, in terms of the action she is willing to take, by her historical understanding of the evolution of the discord. This understanding suggests, and continues to suggest to many contemporary American minds, that successive Sri Lankan governments have indulged in activities distasteful to US policy makers – effectively cutting themselves off from maximum American assistance vis a vis the conflict because of the unwillingness of the Sri Lankan government to either toe the ideological American

²⁶ Rosenthal, 'Ceylon Follows India into Neutralist Camp: Election, Decided on Local Issues, Will Affect South Asia Pattern'

line²⁷ (as was often seen during the height of the Cold War) or because they intermittently, but willingly, violated human and civil rights.

Although most of the political actions that drove Ceylon into deep division occurred in the years following SWRD Bandaranaike's election in 1956, it is not to say that these divisions had not been hinted at earlier. For example, when the Ceylon Citizenship Act²⁸ passed through the legislature in 1948, effectively disenfranchising the majority of the Indian plantation workers, the Tamil Congress, which had crossed over to D S Senanayake's government in 1948, split and a new Federal Party was created by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. The new party was formed partly out of contempt at the Congress's new political alliance with the UNP and partly out of disgust at the discriminatory legislation. However, this piece of legislation and the split in the Tamil Congress, was seen as having little consequence at the time because, it was generally accepted among the dominant political groups (even among the Tamil Congress, its leader – G. G. Ponnambalam being a member of Senanayake's cabinet at the time of the legislation) that the Plantation Tamils were little more than an "unassimilated group without roots in the country"²⁹ and hence of little real concern³⁰. In addition, the newly created Federal Party was viewed at the time as something no more than a mild irritation. However, what the Federal Party advocated, largely in response to the official discrimination of the late forties and then galvanised by the swathe of exclusory populist legislation after 1956, was a set of ideas that would eventually evolve into the central themes that we see espoused by many of the pro Tamil organisations today, including the LTTE: a separateness of both language, history, culture, religion and perhaps most problematic, territory, from the dominant, and apparently oppressive, Sinhala majority.

²⁷ Discussed in detail later in the thesis

²⁸ The Ceylon Citizenship Act No. 18 deprived approximately 705,000 Indian plantation workers of their citizenship rights, rendering them 'stateless'

²⁹ De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, p. 602

³⁰ 'Concern' in terms of the future history of the island

b) Democratic Decay

“But the plaster is flaking off the big cool Government buildings that the British built to look out on the Indian Ocean. And, invisibly, the structure of democracy is also flaking away. Neither the parliamentarians nor the newspapers...represent the new forces stirring in Ceylon.”³¹

What renowned journalist and New York Times military correspondent, Drew Middleton, was referring to in 1958 when he talked about the ‘flaking’ away of democracy, was, in a sense, three things: Firstly, the actions of a new and popularly elected government that had successfully exploited the social and economic anxieties of the majority Sinhalese to win the 1956 election, and had now started using its singular mandate to create discriminatory (albeit populist) legislation; Secondly, the reaction of the Tamil community to this legal discrimination, which began in earnest with The Official Language Act, No. 33, often resulted in civil unrest³²; Thirdly, to maintain control and restore order in times of communal disturbance, the government regularly resorted to methods which many commentators at the time considered out of keeping within a democracy: “The majority of sources remained anonymous because of certain aspects of law enforcement under the State of Emergency”³³. Elie Abel, was less cryptic when he commented upon the March 12th passing of the amended Public Security Act in 1959 by the Bandaranaike government:

“The Chief criticism of the legislation is that it infringed upon the civil liberties of the general population, that it put too much power into the hands of the Prime Minister and that it might impair the bargaining position of Ceylon’s trade unions.”³⁴

³¹ Drew Middleton, ‘Ceylon’s Democracy Faces New Test in Wake of Strife’, *Special to the New York Times* July 13, 1958

³² The government placed the death toll caused by the rioting of May and June at around 150 whilst other sources placed it closer to 400

³³ Middleton, ‘Ceylon’s Democracy Faces New Test in Wake of Strife’

³⁴ Elie Abel, ‘Ceylon Gives Sweeping Powers To Leader Under Security Law: Senate Vote, 15-14, Arms Bandaranaike With Right to Outlaw Strikes and Curb Disorder – Opposition Is Bitter’, *Special to the New York Times*, March 13, 1959

In the same article, Abel quotes Senator Justin Kotelawala³⁵ criticising the legislation as “...asking for a cannon to kill a bird... Ceylon would become one more country that had won its independence only to lose its liberty”.

Once it became clear just how much popular support could be massaged out of the issues of religion, language and the vagaries of economic disenfranchisement, successive Sri Lankan governments and opposition parties, in one respect or another, actively fashioned, exploited and ultimately formalised (by producing legislation), the widening divisions within the country. American author and journalist, Marshall R. Singer, in his essay, *New Realities in Sri Lankan Politics*, describes the political dynamics behind the tensions best when he says:

“It is important to note that when in power, both major Sinhalese parties - the UNP and the SLFP – have tried to reach an accommodation with the Tamils on the ethnic question. However, as soon as the government *in* power reached an agreement with the Tamils, the government *out* of power screamed “sell-out of the Sinhalese people”, and the government of the day reneged on the agreement.”³⁶

What followed the watershed election of 1956 was decades of legislation motivated by the sectional interests of the Sinhalese Buddhists and organised by the political parties of the day, regardless of their political colouring.

It is not necessary to detail in any great analytical depth all of the populist legislation or the resultant communal issues that came after 1956, but there are some laws/issues which have an impact specific to this wider investigation and so they are worth, at least briefly, noting here.

³⁵ Brother of Sir John Kotelawala

³⁶ M.R. Singer, ‘New Realities in Sri Lankan Politics’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXX, No. 4, (April 1990): p. 412

- The Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956 (the Sinhala Only Act) passes through the legislature, essentially bonding nationalism to language – the Sinhala Language. In response to the riots which followed, the full implementation of the Act was postponed until January 1961³⁷
- July 1957, in response to Tamil opposition to the Act, SWRD Bandaranaike attempts to negotiate some kind of settlement with the Federal Party whereby (amongst other things) Tamil would become an ‘Official Language’ of administration in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Negative reaction to this proposed settlement from extremists within his own coalition forced SWRD to abandon it publicly.
- Tensions and pressures generated by the issue of language and the abortive settlement of 1957 again led to riots in May 1958. In an attempt to temper the anger within the Tamil community, SWRD is able to get The Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28 through Parliament on the 14th August, 1958, a provision of which was to allow (rather vaguely) for the ‘reasonable’ use of Tamil in administration. The Tamil community remained largely unimpressed.
- In January 1961, Sirimavo Bandaranaike³⁸ insists that Sinhala become the language of administration throughout the island as provided for under the ‘Sinhala Only Act’. Civil disobedience in the North and Eastern Provinces results. In the same month she begins the nationalisation of Ceylon’s schools – with obvious repercussions concerning the language of instruction and access to education.
- 1st January, 1963, Sinhala officially made the language of Ceylon
- In January, 1966 the regulations under the Tamil Language Act of 1958 are finally piloted through the national legislature by a UNP-led coalition.

³⁷ De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, p. 628

³⁸ Wife and successor to the late SWRD Bandaranaike – the world’s first female Prime Minister

- In April 1971, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)³⁹, leads a large scale revolt against the government because of its apparent inability to keep its electoral promises.
- On the 22nd May, 1972, a new autochthonous ‘republican’ constitution is adopted as Ceylon is renamed Sri Lanka. Chapter II of the constitution establishes the primacy of Buddhism.
- On the 7th September, 1978, Sri Lanka adopts another new constitution and is renamed the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. Under this constitution Tamil is granted National Language Status (Chapter IV Article 19), although Sinhala remains *the* official language.

Despite the very real economic and social issues (on all sides) involved in the evolution of post-independence Ceylon, what the actions of, often opportunist⁴⁰, politicians did (via the laws they passed) was to create the popular impression that there was a formal reality to the argument that, to be a true Sri Lankan National, you had to be a Sinhalese speaking Buddhist. Although, as stated earlier, political parties of all shades contributed to the volatility of the divisions within the Sri Lankan polity, in the decades immediately following independence, there were key people who are clearly more responsible than others. Perhaps here it is best to quote in full the eminent Sri Lankan historian, K. M. De Silva:

“In retrospect, it would seem that the two Bandaranaiques between them had established a new equilibrium of political forces within the country, to which their supporters and associates as well as their opponents were compelled to accommodate themselves. Its primary features were the acceptance of Sinhala as the national language, Buddhist predominance within the Sri Lankan polity and a sharp decline in the status of the ethnic and religious minorities.”⁴¹

³⁹ The JVP are an ultra-left Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalist organization who represent the various social and economic interests of many educated, unemployed and underemployed young Sri Lankans

⁴⁰ And less frequently, honest and concerned politicians

⁴¹ De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, p. 644

c) **The Growth of the LTTE**

The origin, growth and evolution of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is complex to say the least. Although an understanding of the origins, goals, and methods of the LTTE is essential in order to appreciate the points that will follow in this investigation, it is primarily the US attitude to the organisation and their role as a US recognised purveyor of advanced terrorist activity, that concerns us. As a result, this exposition of its genealogy will include only the most salient features germane to the discussion.

As commented earlier, the origins of the LTTE are bound closely to the development of the post-independence tensions, in as much as it evolved as a reactive organisation – created as a response to the infringement of rights, perceived and actual, by the Sri Lankan state. Born, if one likes, out of the state machinery that it now does battle with.

The LTTE, as with many of the radical Tamil organisations that became active in the 1970's⁴², has as its goal a complete political and administrative separation from the Sinhalese dominated parts of the island: what they call Tamil Eelam⁴³. They claimed that prior to colonisation by the Europeans (Portuguese, Dutch and British) Sri Lanka was broadly divided into two kingdoms: the Tamil Kingdom in the North and the Sinhalese Kingdom in the South⁴⁴. Consequently, these Tamil groups claim an historical justification (which is fiercely contested) for their separatist ideology. Whether this claim has any veracity is not really an issue for our discussion. What is of import is that these calls for secession from the Sri Lankan state, and the establishment of Tamil Eelam in the north and the East of the island, have their modern origins in the tensions following independence⁴⁵. They are a direct result of the dynamics of the political discourse already

⁴² Such as the Tamil New Tigers, the 'forerunner' of the LTTE

⁴³ Many Tamils, radical or otherwise, contest that they "constitute a distinct nation. They form a social entity, with their own history, traditions, culture, language and traditional homeland. The Tamil people call their nation 'Tamil Eelam'". See the following website: www.eelam.com/tamil_eelam.html

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Manifest in the Federal Party's founding ideology in 1948

described, having evolved in tandem with the perception (actual or otherwise) that each successive Sri Lankan government merely increased the alienation of the Tamil people. Thus the attitude became one of, 'if you don't want us as part of your nation, we will simply create (or re-create) our own'. Consequently, despite occasional attempts by certain governments to address the grievances of the Tamils, the pattern has been a general increase in feeling of disenfranchisement, particularly amongst the younger generations in the North. The sad fact is that, as ill feeling escalated amongst the Tamil communities in the North and East, so did their outbursts of discontent – from calls in parliament for a redress of grievances⁴⁶, to sporadic and spontaneous violent clashes with the government, and eventually leading to the birth of organised terrorist activity. In concert with this activity, came the inevitable backlash by the Sri Lankan state machinery: the violence of the militant Tamils was met with equal, and in many instances more than equal, brutality meted out by the government. The cycle of violence remained one of the key engines of the conflict.

As a result of government plans to limit Tamil entrance to university in the early 1970's, radicalisation gripped Tamil youth groups. Out of this increasingly radical environment came the 'Tamil Students Movement', a militant student organisation⁴⁷ based in Jaffna⁴⁸. From this loose grouping of militant students, angry at the new republican constitution of 1972 formalising the primacy of Buddhism and Sinhala in Sri Lanka, emerged two separate, and avowedly violent, Tamil factions: the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) and the Tamil New Tigers (TNT). The latter of these two organisations, the Tamil New Tigers, led by Chetti Thanabalasingham, became increasingly active in violent agitation for a separate Tamil homeland, assassinating the Tamil Mayor of Jaffna, Alfred Durayappah⁴⁹, in 1975. The person in charge of the military wing of the TNT was

⁴⁶ Led primarily by the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in the 1970's

⁴⁷ South Asia Terrorism Portal. SATP is an online database of information relating to "...terrorism and low intensity warfare in South Asia...". South Asia Terrorism Portal, 'Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam', <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/terroristoutfits/LTTE.HTM>

⁴⁸ The northern part of the island and the centre of the 'historic' Eelam

⁴⁹ Alfred Durayappah belonged to the SLFP and was one of the North's highest profile supporters of the government of the day: the United Front coalition

a young man whose name was to become very familiar to all who take an interest in the study of advanced terrorism, Velupillai Prabhakaran. In fact, the assassination of Durayappah was carried out by Prabhakaran at the tender age of 21.

From this point onwards, the TNT would conduct activities designed to intimidate, threaten or destroy anyone who was either a public supporter of the Colombo based government, or who chose to depart, even slightly, from the Tamil United Front's⁵⁰ determination of what constituted the inviolable goal of a 'Tamil Homeland'. The TNT were renamed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 1976, and the group emerged as the leading purveyor of public assassinations and criminal undertakings in the North. Almost as a direct response to the severity and gravity of the agitation witnessed in the North and the East, and the calls by the radical Tamil groups (as well as the TULF) to fracture the territorial integrity of the island, anti-Tamil riots erupted in August 1977, just a month after the new UNP government took office.

The activities of the LTTE, under Prabhakaran, led parliament to approve a bill proscribing it in 1978. This proscription was due to last only one year but was extended in May 1979 for another year. In concert with this, the government was able to get the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Temporary Provisions) passed through parliament, giving the government a greater legal armoury to deal with the growing instability in the North and East. Thus, the issue of security in these regions was given priority by the Jayewardene⁵¹ government: to the creaking police structure already in place, was publicly added a military superstructure expressly charged with the swift eradication of terrorism. Needless to say, the tensions already present in the North, and particularly in Jaffna, were merely exacerbated by these new developments. When elections for District Development Councils were held in 1981, Jaffna became the epicentre of a series of assassinations by the LTTE (and other extremist groups) bent on demolishing any

⁵⁰ The TUF (renamed the Tamil United Liberation Front in 1976) was a direct descendent of the Federal Party, whose ideology formally enshrined the goal of a separate Tamil Homeland

⁵¹ Jayewardene became prime minister in July, 1977

chances of UNP gains there. What followed established something of a blueprint for a familiar pattern of terrorist violence and state reprisal: local police officials were targeted for their part in administering the government's instructions to put down disorder; the police force, for their part, reacting with violent reprisals of their own⁵². And so on. As the cycle of criminality, terrorism and police retaliation gained pace, so certain groups, in particular the LTTE, fought their way to the forefront of the Tamil movements. Under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran,

“...the LTTE stormed its way to pre-eminence in the mid-1980's, in a series of bloody encounters with their rivals, and have retained that position since then, virtually unchallenged by the latter. They became the principal exponents of Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka.”⁵³

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are the only organisation to have successfully assassinated two heads of state: Rajiv Gandhi of India in 1991 and Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka, in 1993. They created a separate Black Tiger wing, which dedicated itself solely to the development and deployment of suicide cadres. In addition to the standard guerrilla units, the Tigers operated a naval fleet, in many respects, equal to those of the Sri Lankan and Indian navies. They conducted sophisticated maritime operations, owning a number of large vessels which were used for the procurement of weapons and dual use technologies and, as of 2007, became the only terrorist organisation in the world to maintain an operable air force⁵⁴.

There are few commentators of repute in the world today that would deny the international nature of the LTTE, with its massive Diaspora network, upon which it relies for financial, political and propaganda support, in countries such as the USA, Canada, the

⁵² One of the most infamous incidents of police reprisal was the burning of the Jaffna Library, one of the oldest and finest in Asia. In response to the shooting of local law enforcement officials by Tamil militants, police officers destroyed the library which contained just under 100,000 largely original and irreplaceable books

⁵³ De Silva, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*, p. 158

⁵⁴ Used for the first time in April 2007 to bomb fuel and power sources in Colombo during the final of the Cricket World Cup, as Sri Lanka took on Australia

UK, France and Australia. The issue at large is, in the US declared War on Terror, where, if anywhere, does the LTTE – one of the world’s most sophisticated terrorist complexes – fit?

“Curbing the LTTE’s transnational network will require concerted international collaboration. LTTE operations are global, they necessarily require a global response. To narrowly view the group’s activities within the context of a single state will provide a skewed, partial analysis that will be detrimental not only to Sri Lanka but also the international community in general. Such is the legacy of a world in which the dividing line between domestic, regional and international security has become increasingly blurred.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ P. Chalk, *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam’s (LTTE) International Organization and Operations – A Preliminary Analysis, Commentary No. 77*, <http://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/com77e.htm>

CHAPTER 3

The Origins and Evolution of US-Sri Lanka Relations (1948 – 1983)

a) Overview

The core of this thesis is an investigation into the current state of relations (from September 11th 2001 onwards) between the United States and Sri Lanka. More specifically, its aim is to consider the place of the LTTE terrorist insurgency within the current America-led War on Terror. This issue will ultimately be addressed in the final chapter, however, in order to reach that point in the discourse it is crucial to trace, examine and explain how the ties between the two countries evolved, establishing, where possible, any significant determinants of the relationship. These determinants, once recognised, will provide an historical context within which to place the current manifestation of the relationship, crucially assisting in the understanding of the enduring, though exceptionally fluid, bond these two countries maintain. As earlier commented in Chapter 1, although there has been investigation into the bond which exists between the years 1948-1983, all investigation has been substantially limited in objective, scope, and depth. None have sought (successfully) to trace trends or to utilise crucial source material which helps to illustrate the relationship from the perspective of the United States. None have used the historical narrative as a means of setting a context for the present relationship.

**b) The Origins of the Relationship:
American ‘Friendship’, Decolonisation, and Ceylon’s Cold War Dilemma**

Following the collapse of the wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union, and after the surrender of both Nazi Germany and Japan in 1945, the United States found itself playing a global role in foreign affairs. The Cold War, significantly ‘heated’ by the ‘fall’ of China, the Korean War, and the adoption of NSC 68¹, saw the greatest expansion in American history of her overseas commitments as she began an unprecedented projection of US influence and interest into the post war world. Thomas Jefferson’s wistful notion of an America without ‘entangling alliances’² was crushed by the weight of the demands of the Cold War.

The early Cold War was fought against the backdrop of an accelerating process of decolonisation, particularly in Africa and Asia, leaving recently independent³ states to emerge with varying degrees of self-determination and with myriad views concerning their own, often precarious, positions not only within the global community or within their regional spheres of influence, but also within the ideological context of the battle between the superpowers. In his excellent, if ideologically partisan, contemporary article, ‘Communism Bids for Dominance in Asia’, Nathaniel Peffer illustrated the dangers inherent for the USA in ignoring these newly independent Asian nations (and those aspiring to independence) as they looked to improve their economic and social ‘lot’:

“While there is nothing new in colonial possessions and movements for colonial independence serving as pawns in international politics, the Russian-American bipolarization and the sharpening of the struggle between the two gives the pawns a higher value.

¹ See Chapter 1

² See Thomas Jefferson’s Inaugural Address, March 4th, 1801. For full text of the address see, The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jefinau1.asp

³ Clearly there were varying degrees of independence, from Commonwealth/Dominion status nations (such as India, Pakistan and Ceylon) that *managed* a process of separation from the metropol relatively peacefully, to those countries which found themselves fighting prolonged struggles for complete separation (such as Vietnam/Indochina)

...what must be avoided is that America be forced to decide whether to let communism, with presumptive Russian control, move into southern Asia or to try and prevent it, by force if necessary.”⁴

In the same article Peffer goes on to highlight the reality facing the nations and irredentist movements of South Asia when he comments that these “...peoples may not accept Russian aid unless they have to, but if they have to, they will.” The key target for the US according, somewhat presciently⁵, to Peffer should be that American aid, assistance, and friendship as well as political pressure, must be proffered and brought to bear to provide “...economic amelioration”⁶ for the peoples of South Asia. ‘Economic amelioration’ would, in the Cold War mindset of the US, act as the panacea to Ceylon’s potential ideological ‘ills’. The foundation thus laid would then support the liberal democratic structure the US saw, and for the most part still sees today, as crucial to the success of their alliance system.

It was most certainly with this in mind that President Truman was one of the first to offer his congratulations, as well as the friendship of the United States, to Ceylon on the very day of her independence. In his personal message to Ceylon’s Governor General, Sir Henry Moore, Truman said:

“On this memorable occasion, I extend on behalf of the United States of America sincere and best wishes to you, to Prime Minister Senanayake and to the people of Ceylon.”

And as if to gently remind them of the Cold War environment and their place within it:

“The people of Ceylon today assume added responsibility for their own destiny. We are confident that they will join with other democratic nations and peoples in

⁴ Nathaniel Peffer, ‘Communism Bids for Dominance in Asia’, *New York Times*, October 31, 1948

⁵ Bearing in mind the current association of American aid with the application of democratic and liberal economic principles in recipient countries

⁶ Peffer, ‘Communism Bids for Dominance in Asia’

the high endeavour of increasing individual liberty and freedom throughout the world”

Truman goes further and, not so subtly, gives the firm promise of conditional American friendship should they continue to follow this course of democracy and individual liberty:

“Please accept my firm assurance that Ceylon embarks on its new course with the firm friendship and good-will of the United States of America, whose government and people look forward to the maintenance of cordial relations with your country.”⁷

In November of the same year, President Truman reiterated his position regarding Cold War Ceylon, when he met her first envoy to the United States, Ambassador Sir George C. S. Corea. Independent Ceylon had a choice to make and, according to the US, the only acceptable route was towards the bloc promoting “democracy, freedom and peace”⁸.

Consequently the American view of independent Ceylon was generated in part by the early Cold War lens, through which US policy makers often saw a refracted, though nonetheless real, threat from the Kremlin to exploit all areas of social, economic and political weakness to be found around the world. Encouraged by reports of economic hardship and social exclusion emanating from areas still coming to terms with the consequences of colonialism, these newly independent countries represented, to the US, undeniable areas of weakness and were thus designated by the State Department as prospective prey for Russian expansionism. The shackles of colonialism may have been thrown off, but the complex systems of colonial economic exploitation would die hard. Consequently, US ‘friendship’, as guaranteed by Truman, would always be contingent upon the political, social and economic line that Ceylon, as one of these ‘potential areas of weakness’, chose to follow: an economically liberal and politically democratic Ceylon would always be supported by aid and assistance from an America keen on creating and maintaining an ideological ‘bloc’ as a bulwark against the spread of communism in South

⁷ Partial text of the message reproduced in a *Special to the New York Times*, February 4, 1948

⁸ Author not named, ‘President Sees Ceylon Envoy’, *New York Times*, November 25, 1949

and South East Asia; a Ceylon following the path of a tightly restricted and nationally directed social and economic model, would find little sympathy and, perhaps even outright hostility, from the United States. Thus implicit within Truman's early communications with Ceylon was an 'ultimatum', not unlike the one issued by George W. Bush when he announced that, "You are either with us or you are against us in the fight against terror"⁹.

The notion that the early American relationship with Ceylon was shaped, at least in part, by the ability and/or desire of Ceylon's ruling government to function sympathetically towards a US primarily concerned with the containment of communism, becomes a patent reality when one undertakes even the briefest examination of Ceylon's post-independence governments. Over the course of the next half a century, Ceylon's ruling governments have generally alternated quite dramatically in successive elections between those who espouse economic and social liberalism (such as the UNP), and those who advocate a greater degree of state economic control and overt socialism (such as the coalitions dominated by the SLFP). Clearly, based upon the premise of US support being conditional upon a certain very unambiguous ideological direction, this latter manifestation of Ceylon's politics would be met consistently (particularly during the Cold War, but also in the years after) with either an obvious reduction, or at the very least a narrowing, of American support.

One of the main contentions of this investigation is that the undulating nature of US assistance to Ceylon/Sri Lanka and, later, US support against the LTTE, is due in large part to the willingness of the government de jour to adopt the central tenets of US social and economic liberalism. The very basis of this relationship was established in 1948 by the Truman administration, reiterated in his bold new Point Four programme (outlined in his inaugural address of 1949) which linked aid and technical assistance to the observance of certain liberal socio-economic conditions, an adherence to the protection of

⁹ Joint press conference held in the White House with French President Jacques Chirac, November 6, 2001

human and civil rights, and tacit support against communist aggression. It is worth quoting a substantial portion of his Inaugural Address here because it underscores the point being made.

“First, we will continue to give unfaltering support to the United Nations ... (which) will be strengthened by the new nations which are being formed in lands now advancing toward self-government under democratic principles.

Second, we will continue our programs for world economic recovery... In addition, we must carry out our plans for reducing the barriers to world trade and increasing its volume. Economic recovery and peace itself depend upon increased world trade.

In addition, we will provide military advice and equipment to free nations which will cooperate with us in the maintenance of peace and security.

Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefit of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.

More than half of the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas.

I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefit of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. And, in cooperation with other nations, we should foster capital investment in areas needing development.

Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the peoples of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies: hunger, misery, and despair.”¹⁰

Truman’s idealistic phrasing should not be viewed as mere rhetoric; there was a very real belief in US foreign policy-making circles that those countries recently, or soon to be, emancipated from colonialism would require economic and technical assistance, if they

¹⁰ ‘Truman’s Inaugural Address, January 20, 1949’, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/50yr_archive/inagural20jan1949.htm

were not to become Asian, or indeed African, satellites of an expansionist Soviet Union. As a corollary to this Cold War mind-set, it also became a truism that stable, democratic and economically 'open' nations would naturally evolve from the transfer of American assistance (both economic and technical) to regions recently released from their colonial masters. In his excellent series of articles, the chief London correspondent to The New York Times, Herbert L. Matthews, gave an influential (though thoroughly western-centric) appraisal of the shrinking of the British Empire and what consequences, responsibilities, and opportunities it held for the United States:

“ The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall program are little more than measures to fill power vacuums caused by British withdrawals.

In many cases the torch that is falling from British hands is being picked up by the Americans. That can be done because...of historical, social and political reasons that show Americans as the inheritors of the British democratic traditions.

...American private capital investment could play a great role. This is not “mercantilism” in the seventeenth century style, but development, which is as much for the benefit of the native as for the mother country.”

And as if to reinforce the link between assistance and the formation of stable and democratic states, he goes on to comment,

“It is accompanied by a steady education in self-government.”¹¹

Embedded within Matthews' first article in the series is something of a syllogism: he comments that Britain is now a debtor nation owing much in capital to the US; Britain has also now become something of a dependent on its own Dominions within the Commonwealth¹²; the United States, in its desire to 'fill the vacuums' left by the physical removal of the mechanisms of British colonialism, was beginning to shift resources and

¹¹ Herbert L. Matthews, 'Britain at the End of an Era: Dominions Now in Key Role', *Special Correspondence to the New York Times*, Article 1, November 24, 1947

¹² One of which Ceylon was about to become

technical knowledge to the erstwhile empire as a method of solidifying and stabilising an ideological bloc as a fortification against the spread of communism; ergo the US were, in a real sense, contributing to the very survival of Britain. The relevance of this to the early US-Ceylon relationship is profound because it, very obviously and publicly, tied Britain, and hence it's Dominions within the Commonwealth, to the United States – a fact that greatly perturbed many within the Ceylonese polity who had seemingly thrown off the chains of one master just in time to be bound, perhaps more dangerously, to another.

Consequently, and not unsurprisingly, a certain degree of suspicion existed in Ceylon, particularly within the left opposition, that the island nation had not fully achieved independence because she remained a part of the British Commonwealth – a potential source of economic, political and ideological exploitation. This consternation in itself was two-fold. Firstly, there were those within parliament who argued that true decolonisation had not occurred and thus true sovereignty had not actually been achieved:

“...a freedom which the Hon. Minister of Commerce and Trade has described as bloodless. Unhappily, it is also bodiless and spiritless also.”¹³

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly in light of the Cold War, there were those “...Marxists and Trotskyites, who deemed the Commonwealth tie as an imperialist bondage with Britain”¹⁴, and that these ties implicitly aligned Ceylon with the USA. Mr Herbert Sri Nissanka (M.P. for Kurunegala) plainly voiced his concern over this connection when he said,

“...and if American capital and British capital were to unite to attack Russia, perhaps, it may be the view of the Government Benches that we...join in with England to attack Russia...we would be destroyed before we are able to wink.”¹⁵

¹³ G. R. Motha, 'House of Representatives Debates', *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 1, Oct. 14-Dec. 23, 1947-48, p. 159

¹⁴ Karunadasa, *Sri Lanka and Non-Alignment, A Study of Foreign Policy From 1948 to 1982*, p. 21

¹⁵ 'House of Representative Debates', *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol.1, Oct. 14-Dec. 23, 1947-48, p. 504

Not only were those in Ceylon's parliament apprehensive about the significance of her attachment to the Anglo-American bloc, there were those who were equally perturbed by the potentialities of being too closely linked to the Soviet camp. The Hon. Mr Sittampalam (M.P. Mannar), Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, was one of many who believed that,

“...the L.S.S.P and the B.L.P might be able to lead the masses of this country astray, either to join Russia or some other International organisation, and, eventually cause us to lose our independence.”¹⁶

Even before Ceylon peacefully made the transition from a model colony to a sovereign state¹⁷ within the Commonwealth of Nations on the 4th February 1948 she found herself being forced into a global paradigm that demanded confirmation of her position in relation to it: alignment to either of the two power blocs (a decision which carried with it the dangerous entanglements that may have simply supplanted one metropole (Britain) for another (the US or the USSR)); or non-alignment (a decision which carried with it enumerable other challenges for an infant nation state).

It was into this complex and, at times, dangerously nebulous, political environment that infant but independent Ceylon was born and instantly compelled to function. The United States clearly established the parameters of 'friendship', delineating unequivocally the line between what it considered the correct path for Ceylon to follow, and the dangers inherent in following the only other alternate path. 'Friendship', according to the contemporary US definition, meant aid, assistance and support would be in generous supply if there was a strict adherence to, and observance of, the conventions inherent in an economically liberal and politically democratic model of government.

¹⁶Ibid, p. 109

¹⁷ For an investigation into the debate over whether Ceylon was truly 'sovereign' see Karunadasa, *Sri Lanka and Non-Alignment, A Study of Foreign Policy From 1948 to 1982*

The issue for Ceylon was fraught with dangers, for it was (and for the most part still is today) abundantly clear that she must depend upon economic and military support, in one way or another, for her security and survival. In 1948 Ceylon maintained no military infrastructure outside of that residual presence operated by Britain. In addition to Ceylon's political Commonwealth ties she had negotiated, as part of her independence, certain defence and trade agreements with Britain. Some of the key articles that caused concern within the Opposition were those that allowed for the continued use by Britain of Katunayake airport, Trincomalee harbour in the east, as well as the establishment of preferential price controls for certain Sri Lankan goods imported by the British Government. One of the major arguments for the defence agreements was that Ceylon, unlike India for example, had very limited means of defending itself from either regional or extra- regional threats, thus leading Prime Minister D S Senanayake to comment that,

“I feel that we cannot get a greater friend than Britain. I say that deliberately, and I hope that every Member, every person in this country, would realize what this friendship means to us.”¹⁸

However, it was still seen by many in Opposition as a clear alignment on the side of Great Britain, the USA and the capitalists against the socialist bloc and against the greater interests of Ceylon:

“As I said before, we do not suffer from any racial bias. We do not dislike the English people. But we dislike the Imperial methods of the rulers of England. We dislike..., the capitalists with whom the Ceylonese, led by the Hon. Prime Minister, has entered into an alliance.”¹⁹

This, not wholly unrealistic, perception alarmed many within the political spectrum that Ceylon would simply be used as a pawn by the Western powers in a conflict which would a) instantly abrogate the newly won Ceylonese 'independence' and, b) cast doubt over the future viability of Ceylon as a functioning sovereign nation state, when it could so easily

¹⁸ 'House of Representatives Debates', *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol.1, Oct. 14-Dec. 23, 1947-48, p. 83

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 374

find itself embroiled in a conflict that seemed to have little to do with it. The Hon. Mr Suntharalingam, Minister of Commerce and Trade perhaps best summed up the caution with which Parliament viewed its agreements with Britain (which seemed to implicitly tie Ceylon to the US) when he said,

“We shall find whether this document – The Ceylon Independence Act – along with the Agreements have or have not given us the freedom that we want.”²⁰

Thus independent Ceylon faced an immediate and seemingly intractable dilemma that would inevitably dominate her movements in the international arena: how could Ceylon (as an immature state) maintain territorial and political integrity without any practical means of security, whilst remaining unengaged in the Cold War, yet fully engaged in international relations? The matter became even more complex, and was recognised as so, when the economic dependency of Ceylon on foreign countries was highlighted:

“...we are almost entirely dependent on foreign countries for the supply of food. It is not a case where you can choose this country or that, but we are dependent upon many countries for our rice, sugar and other essential commodities.”²¹

This economic dependency, both in terms of aid/assistance as well as trade, is one of the key aspects of the US-Lanka relationship that will be traced throughout the period of this chapter as well as the period 1983 to present, and used to demonstrate US orientation towards Sri Lanka in the context of the ethnic conflict and the wider War on Terror. Bilateral economic conditionality is a major aspect of the modern form of the relationship.

Consequent to the recognition of economic reliance, early Ceylonese politics was dominated by either a) a desire to somehow extricate the island from it, i.e. withdraw from international dependency, or b) the somewhat reluctant realisation that, at least in the short term, ties to certain countries was inevitable and vital. The question for the first

²⁰ Ibid, p. 138

²¹ Dr G. R. de Silva, Ibid, p. 180

UNP government, under the guidance of D S Senanayake, became how to reconcile calls for absolute independence – a starting over of sorts promoted by the leftist ideologues, whereby history should be forgotten and ignored, to be replaced by a new and immediate national socialism (which is still a credible proposition to some of the more extreme political parties) – and the perceived reality of economic and defence requirements dooming Ceylon to a new international bondage.

This dialectic in early Ceylonese politics, of preserving sovereignty and ensuring true independence in a Cold War world which many Sri Lankans perceived as dangerous to be a part of, yet also at the same time guaranteeing that international relations were conducted as a crucial means of ensuring economic and political security, is a theme that dominates post-independence Sri Lanka.

The solution to this seemingly intractable problem was a brave decision to, as far as possible, follow the route of the ‘Middle Way’²² in foreign policy; a more flexible forerunner of the later forms of non-alignment pursued in the seventies²³. Instead of choosing international partners (or choosing none at all) based upon ideology, the government of D.S. Senanayake decided that economic realities dictated the kinds of international connections that would be made. Crucially it meant that:

“Our policy in foreign affairs is to be the friend of all and the enemy of none...”²⁴

Thus, from these inauspicious beginnings, Sri Lanka and the United States came together to form what would be a long-lasting, but at times highly capricious, bond. Formed out of

²² A term used by D.S. Senanayake to describe his foreign policy. W.M. Karunadasa elaborates this as a ‘Buddhistic Phrase meant to keep away from two extreme ends of life. With the use of this phrase D.S. Senanayake meant to keep away from the two power blocs’. Karunadasa, *Sri Lanka and Non-Alignment, A Study of Foreign Policy From 1948 to 1982*, p. 43

²³ See W.M. Karunadasa’s investigation of the foreign policy pursued by Prime Ministers, Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike and J.R. Jayewardene, during the 1970’s. Ibid

²⁴ Prime Minister D S Senanayake, ‘House of Representatives Debates’, *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol.1, Oct. 14-Dec. 23, 1947-48, p. 23

contingent Cold War circumstances and determined by perilous choices, the birth of the relationship was traumatic enough to leave indelible marks that, as the alliance matured, became almost inherent characteristics easily identifiable, not only in the decades immediately following independence, but also in the post 2001 period. These indelible marks are characterised from the Sri Lankan perspective by pendulous swings between the desire to reinforce her political and economic sovereignty, by rejecting the rules of 'friendship' as laid down by Truman, and the embracing of certain economic and political realities which determine friendship with the United States as, at the very least, a necessary evil. The American perspective is based on a more reactive policy: as long as Sri Lanka maintains certain US determined standards of political, social and economic practice (ranging from the maintenance of a liberal economy to the respect for human and civil rights) then she will continue to receive the support (in all its variations) of the American government. It is when Sri Lanka appears to fall short of these US imperatives that the relationship becomes strained and support is narrowed. In addition, the extent of American 'friendship' will always be framed by the degree to which Washington sees the island as strategically important²⁵.

c) America and Ceylon: An Unsure Friendship, 1948-1983

America and Ceylon share an uneasy relationship, one that is contingent upon a number of very clear and formative conditions. These conditions, as mentioned earlier, form the basis of a bi-lateral connection that can be characterised by its political and economic undulations but lauded for its historical endurance. For Ceylon, the period following its independence in 1948 is dominated by two, largely unpredictable, political imperatives: firstly, the developing religious, ethnic and nationalistic tensions which culminate in the formal outbreak of the conflict in 1983; secondly, the ability of Ceylon's governments to navigate the hazardous Cold War waters of foreign policy whilst being fundamentally dependent on foreign aid and assistance. It is the juxtaposition of these two imperatives,

²⁵ The strategic significance of Sri Lanka to America is a constant thread which runs through this work as it is an issue that contextualizes all 'conditions' of the relationship.

coursing through the lifeblood of post-independence Ceylon, that largely shape the Cold War relationship she maintained with the United States. For her part, American reaction to these two issues would determine the level of ‘friendship’ proffered, based upon Washington’s understanding of how closely Ceylon lived up to Truman’s ideal of ‘cooperation’.

The goal of this chapter is to examine the period 1948 – 1983, and provide sustainable evidence to support the argument that, based upon the posits already examined above, trends within the US-Ceylon relationship can be identified and explained. This, once achieved, can be used as an historical lens through which the current manifestation of the relationship can be viewed. To this end, the following section of the chapter is devoted to an exposition of the nature and extent of the ‘friendship’ the US offered Ceylon during this period as well as the causes of its being increased or curtailed. Clearly, since this thesis is primarily concerned with the current manifestation of the US-Ceylon relationship (2001 to present), it is important that, although the historical foundation necessarily be investigated, it will be done so by using a selection of evidence, rather than by simply taking a chronological tour of the entire period, which would prove too lengthy an undertaking and would draw the focus too dramatically away from the core of the thesis. Consequently, the most appropriate way to determine the levels of friendship achieved in this period is to examine certain key events and issues²⁶ of the period as relating to the already established criteria²⁷, and then observe American reaction to these events by demonstrating, through increased/decreased levels of aid and assistance, bi-lateral agreements and diplomatic co-operation, the extent to which ‘friendship’ had been positively or negatively affected.

i) The Party Perspective

²⁶ Events and issues relating to the two strands of the post-independence narrative: the developing ethnic, religious and nationalistic tensions; the Cold War alignment

²⁷ The criteria being those established by Truman

The small number of investigations undertaken which have examined the early US – Ceylon relationship have generally been carried out in one of two ways: either thematically, taking specific issues, often the issue of non-alignment, as the narrative centre around which the argument is built²⁸; or there are those who have chosen to trace a basic political chronology²⁹, attempting to identify rudimentary shifts in the relationship from general election to general election. For the purposes of this investigation it is clear that the former approach, whilst sophisticated, is too ideologically narrow. The latter approach, too broad and shallow. Historically, both approaches have tended towards the Sri Lankan perspective.

Whilst it is true that successive general elections in Ceylon have, since independence, largely returned the party in opposition, dumping unceremoniously out of the office the incumbent party government, it would be something of an inadequate generalisation to suggest that the more economically liberal UNP-led governments automatically and successfully court the goodwill of the United States for the duration of their tenure. In the same way, to contend that the more socialist SLFP led governments find no warmth from US friendship, would, again, be to under appreciate the relationship. This is not to say that the ideological hue of the incumbent governments was not a factor, it most certainly was, just that it was in no way the *only* factor. There are clear instances when the political party of the day has broadly determined certain aspects of Ceylon/Sri Lanka's relationship with the United States, i.e. the ideological commitment of the governments of Ceylon has helped to characterise the relationship, frequently raising issues that repel or attract the US. However, the complexities of inter-state relationships are such that they require a greater degree of subtlety in their explanation. An examination that takes a single broad stroke across a relationship and finds it neatly boxed into sequential periods of domestic party dominance, fails to appreciate the organic, and often paradoxical, evolution of bi-lateral state association. For example, during the SLFP-led coalition

²⁸ See Karunadasa, *Sri Lanka and Non-Alignment, A Study of Foreign Policy from 1948-1982*.

²⁹ See Sinha, *Sri Lanka United States Relations*

government of SWRD Bandaranaike³⁰ – a coalition which included hard-line Marxists and Trotskyites – total US economic assistance leapt from a largely insignificant \$100,000 in 1955 to an unprecedented \$20.6 million in 1958³¹ - an amount not equalled again until a decade later when, incidentally, the UNP were back in power.

Consequently, the only real alternative to this kind of approach³² – of broadly summarising the relationship based simply upon the ideological principles of Ceylon's government de jour – is to examine certain key decisions taken by either governments (UNP or SLFP dominated) which positively or negatively affect the US-Ceylon connection, with particular reference to those relating to both the emerging conflict and the Cold War. We will then, by gauging American reactions to these issues (in tangible terms of aid, assistance, and other bi-lateral considerations), be able to build up a pattern of US behaviour within the relationship which can then be used as a politico-historical basis from which a workable set of governing principles can be determined and extrapolated beyond 1983 and, in particular, into the post September 11th era. This approach will thus conveniently include the ideological nature of Ceylon's governments - a broad imperative that helps contextualise the relationship - without being too narrowly bound to it, whilst at the same time allowing the examination of individual actions by those governments, and the US response, in the wider context of the emerging ethnic division and the Cold War. This is key because, whichever political party dominated Ceylonese politics during the period 1948-1983, all were forced to function, in one respect or another, in the contiguous context of these two nation shaping issues. It is these two issues, and the actions taken by Ceylon's government in their respect, which we will use as evidence to determine whether Ceylon lived up to the criteria of qualification for US 'friendship', as set out by Truman. This chapter will examine the Cold War context, the following chapter will look at America's response to the growing ethnic crisis.

³⁰ SWRD Led the MEP (Mahajana Eksath Peramuna) from April 1956 until his assassination on 26th September, 1959

³¹ Source: USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)*

³² Once we have excluded the narrower thematic approach

ii) Charting a Course

When Ceylon achieved its independence in 1948 she did so with a vigorous optimism driven, in part, by an absolute and unshakeable faith that after hundreds of years of foreign domination, she would finally be able to chart her own course, take pride in her own decisions and, perhaps more importantly, determine her own future. This vigour was tempered somewhat by the very real necessity for Ceylon to maintain a degree of association with Great Britain, for purposes of finance, trade and defence³³. Independent Ceylon was born into life very much with a mother. As such, being a member of the Commonwealth, Ceylon was overseen by her former imperial matriarch. This obviously had an impact on her relationship with the United States in the sense that, at least very early in her independence, contact between the two countries was limited to what was sanctioned (albeit loosely) by, and seen as necessary to, the Commonwealth/British Foreign Office. The second US Ambassador to Ceylon (1949 – 1953), Joseph C. Satterthwaite, remembered as much in an interview given in 1972:

“; so the first aid programs in other words, had to come from the British Empire and did, to the countries they were giving up. I don't recall that we gave any aid to Ceylon for years.”³⁴

In fact the early US relationship with Ceylon was thin to say the least. Satterthwaite, in the same interview, half mockingly describes how, until the Commonwealth Conference on Foreign Affairs³⁵ (Foreign Minister's Conference) in Colombo of 1950 (of which the US, for obvious reasons, was not a part, but during which Satterthwaite entertained all of the visiting ministers excluding Nehru), Ceylon's international reputation was based

³³ In November 1947 Ceylon signed a Defence Agreement and an Agreement on External Affairs with Britain

³⁴ 'An Oral History Interview with Joseph C. Satterthwaite', Harry S. Truman Library, November 13, 1972, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/satterwt.htm>

³⁵ Also known as the Commonwealth Conference of Foreign Ministers

primarily upon the knowledge contained on the packaging of boxes of exported Lipton Tea. Consequently, he went on,

“...the Colombo Conference put us on the map and I got coding machines out and all kinds of things as a result of this conference, and we got organized like a real embassy. It had just been a consulate up to 1948.”³⁶

The Colombo Plan, which was the result of the Conference, essentially created a Commonwealth collective of member states³⁷ who agreed upon the principles of mutual economic and social cooperation for the countries (Commonwealth) of South and South East Asia³⁸. This Colombo Plan (which continues today as The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific and now includes 26 member states, many of which are non-Commonwealth countries³⁹) was a clear attempt, by those involved to develop bi-lateral assistance partnerships, based upon the principles of mutual and self-help, with the view to raising the developmental level of each regional country to a position of international equity. This equity, it was hoped, would eventually negate the obvious and insecure reality faced by the newly independent nations of South and South East Asia – that of over dependence upon the more economically robust, and apparently exploitative, countries currently dominating the world.

Thus, at least in the most immediate history of independent Ceylon, she had little to discuss with America. America in turn had, beyond an initial encouraging but blanket Cold War interest in emerging nations, little interest in Ceylon. That is not to say that there was no relationship or that what relationship there was, was not amicable. Ceylon did, along with another forty five other countries, sign the First International Wheat

³⁶ Satterthwaite, ‘An Oral History Interview with Joseph C. Satterthwaite’

³⁷ Initially this was a collective of 7 countries: Australia, Britain, Canada, Ceylon, India, New Zealand and Pakistan

³⁸ For a descriptive early examination of the Colombo Plan see, C.S. Blackton, ‘The Colombo Plan’, *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 20, No.3, (1951): pp. 27-31

³⁹ See ‘The Colombo Plan’ website, www.colombo-plan.org

Agreement with the United States in 1949 but this amounted to little more than a US attempt to guarantee world markets and prices for its wheat exports, whilst at the same time the co signatory importing countries could ensure supplies of wheat at equitable and stable prices⁴⁰. Particularly for countries like Ceylon, this agreement was not always equitable⁴¹. As amicable as the early relationship was, it still consisted of little in the way of solid bi-lateral attachment.

iii) Indicators of Friendship

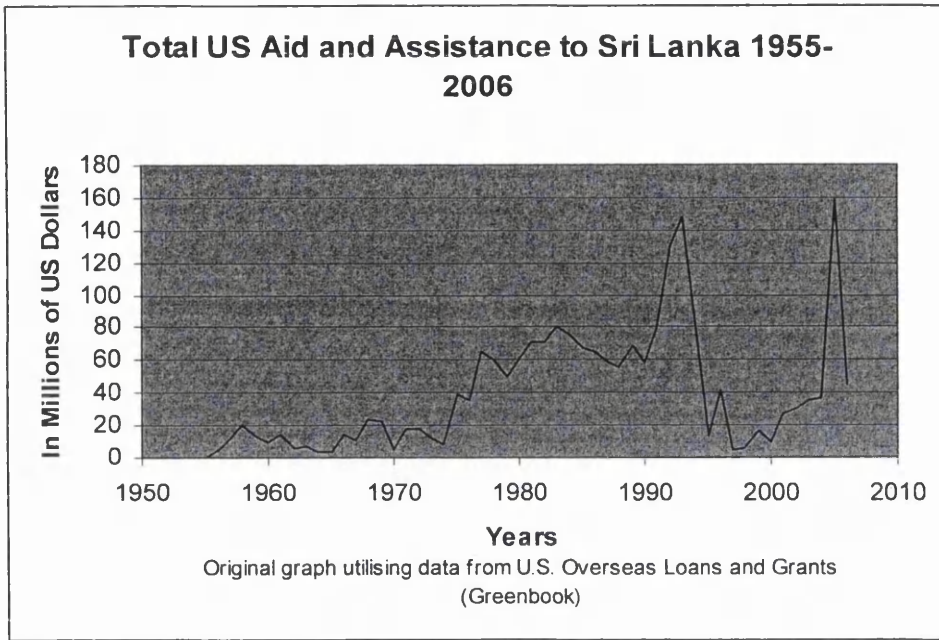
One of the challenges involved in a study such as this is addressing the issue of which criteria to use to determine the amicability of the relationship. In short, the question that raises itself is, how does one measure friendship? Of course, the most appropriate index of friendship, particularly when one of the parties is a developing nation, and the other is the world's foremost economy, must crucially be that of aid and assistance. As of 2006, the U.S. Agency for International Development⁴² alone has contributed over \$1.6 billion to Sri Lanka since 1956⁴³, yet over the course of the last fifty years this assistance has been very unevenly spread. In terms of total assistance (in all of its forms) to Ceylon, the United States, as the graph below demonstrates, has a long history. Significantly the levels of assistance fluctuate discernibly, and quite extraordinarily in places, over time.

⁴⁰ See Frank H. Golay, 'The International Wheat Agreement of 1949', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* Vol. 64, No. 3, (1950): pp. 442-463

⁴¹ Sinha, *Sri Lanka United States Relations*, p. 23

⁴² Hereafter referred to as USAID

⁴³ USAID, *50 Years of Partnership in Sri Lanka*, p. 5



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Fig. 1, Total US Economic Assistance to Ceylon in the years 1955 – 2006

Unfortunately, aid and assistance alone do not a ‘friendship index’ make. There are obvious reasons why economic assistance might not always reveal the entire picture in a relationship, for example the tsunami that destroyed much of the coastal region of Sri Lanka in 2004/5 would partially explain the skewed assistance statistics for the years immediately following. However, if one can separate such irregular phenomena from the core statistics whilst simultaneously combining the findings with other key issues (such as the activities of the Sri Lankan governments) and additional measurable criteria (such as trade agreements and diplomatic exchanges), then we can build up a fuller picture of the nature of this enduring, but often turbulent, relationship.

⁴⁴ Author’s original graph using data collated from USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)*

**d) Attraction and Repulsion: The Duality of the US-Lanka Relationship
(Uneasy Association – The Cold War and Ceylon’s National Interest)**

“The Asian peoples for the past several decades have been engaged in a revolution in which they have been trying to throw off the poverty and oppression of past centuries. They have been striving for independence, better education, more widespread ownership of the land and control over their own destiny. It is no accident that their goals and our goals are the same. The American people have been the leaders in a revolution... by the common people. And the basic objective of American foreign policy is to make possible a world in which all peoples, including the peoples of Asia, can work, in their own way, towards a better life.”⁴⁵

The first Prime Minister of Independent Ceylon, D S Senanayake (UNP), led a government that was largely sympathetic to the United States. However, up until 1950, that sympathy was limited in its tangibility, seen in words more than deeds. When the Korean conflict began in June 1950 this sympathy began to demonstrate itself more clearly and, crucially, in practical terms. As pointed out by US Ambassador Satterthwaite, Ceylon,

“...became of some importance as a fuelling station for our naval vessels, and liberty for the sailors... the Mediterranean fleet would go out from time to time and go back again. We had sometimes an aircraft carrier, mostly one cruiser and maybe four or eight destroyers.”⁴⁶

The fact that Prime Minister Senanayake permitted harbour facilities to American sailors and war ships is an unambiguous signal of the nature of the attachment between his government and the United States during the early intensity of the Cold War. In fact, in addition to the economic reality facing Ceylon (of dependence upon other countries) Senanayake’s decision to side unequivocally with America, was also clearly affected by two major practical considerations: the fact that the Soviet Union continued to veto

⁴⁵ Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s Address to the Commonwealth Club of California, ‘Text of Secretary Acheson’s Address on U.S. Policy Towards the Changing Era in Asia’, *Special to the New York Times*, March 16, 1950

⁴⁶ Satterthwaite, ‘An Oral History Interview with Joseph C. Satterthwaite’

Ceylon's entrance into the United Nations, and the political circumstances facing Senanayake from the opposition benches in parliament.

“Among the Eastern members of the Commonwealth, the developments in Korea produced a different reaction, modified in each instance by special local factors. The Government of Ceylon, which has no less than three different types of Communist party in opposition to it in Parliament, is strongly anti-Communist and well disposed towards the United States, from which it has secured able technicians in banking, agriculture and irrigation and to which it sells much of its rubber. It was inclined to view the Korean struggle in terms of American resistance to Communism and to minimise the role of the United Nations. Such a tendency can be largely explained by the fact that the Soviet veto has prevented Ceylon from becoming a member of the United Nations – and, incidentally, from being asked to contribute towards resistance to aggression.”⁴⁷

For her part, the US viewed Ceylon and the Senanayake government with a cautious respect, lauding the Colombo Plan and including Ceylon in its wider Cold War Asiatic concerns. Lawrence Hunt made the somewhat idealist and strategic, but nonetheless enlightened, point in 1951 that, providing the Asian commonwealth countries are willing to resist the spread of communism, they will be valued by US foreign policy⁴⁸. This value should demonstrate itself, according rather presciently to Hunt, in something akin to the European Marshall Plan but set in Asia. Echoing Thomas Jefferson's words to President Monroe, Hunt suggests (in reference to Asia) that America should “Emancipate a Continent”⁴⁹. Hunt's comments give us a wonderful insight into the early Cold War mentality of many Americans who looked into the future and saw Asia as an area vital to US security, but one desperately in need of assistance, if it is to be strong enough to survive the ideological battles to come:

“What the American people must realize is the urgent need for such a great undertaking. The problems of Asia cannot be solved by radio broadcasts, by dropping atomic bombs, or by letting hundreds of thousands of people starve to

⁴⁷ F. H. Soward, 'The Korean Crisis and the Commonwealth', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 2. (1951): pp. 115-130, p. 120

⁴⁸ L. Hunt, 'The Anglo-American Partnership', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 276, (1951): pp. 105-111

⁴⁹ *Ibid* p.109

death...The magnificent American effort under the Marshall plan helped to save Europe from Communism and helped to restore her war-damaged economy. In Asia, the Anglo-American partnership must work literally "from the ground up" to prevent hundreds of millions of human beings from sinking even lower in the scale of living and becoming a prey to Communist propaganda."⁵⁰

Consequently, and in no small part because of Senanayake's apparent willingness to cooperate with the US, both countries entered into a 'mutual co-operation agreement' under Truman's Point Four Program on the 7th November, 1950. In accordance with this agreement,

"The Government of the United States of America and the Government of Ceylon undertake to cooperate with each other in the interchange of technical knowledge and skills and in related activities designed to contribute to the balanced and integrated development of the economic resources and productive capacities of Ceylon."⁵¹

This agreement is important because, going back to Truman's inaugural address, it is made perfectly clear that such US assistance would be made available only to those countries "...which will cooperate with us in the maintenance of peace and security"⁵². Thus, Ceylon was demonstrably viewed by the US (rightly or wrongly) as an ally in the early Cold War battle against the communists, and received as its reward, technical assistance.

The early Cold War produced an environment and a mind-set not dissimilar to that created by America's War on Terror, in the Manichean sense that, whoever wasn't one hundred percent 'with' the US, was thus, in practice, one hundred percent 'against' the US⁵³. Herein lies the complexity of Ceylon's relationship with America. Despite having a government, and indeed a prime minister, who ideologically sided with the US, there were economic contingencies that meant Ceylon found it impossible to function

⁵⁰ Ibid p.109

⁵¹ UN Treaty Series, No. 1265, p126, 1951

⁵² 'Truman's Inaugural Address of January 20, 1949', Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

⁵³ See White House Press Release, 'President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership', Office of the Press Secretary, June 24, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020624-3.html>

exclusively within the US sphere of influence. Subsequently, she found, and would continue to find almost regardless of the political shading of her government de jour, that a relationship with the United States could not always be as friendly as it may have liked. In a Cold War world of black and white, the US-Ceylon bond would be forever obliged to exist in a spectrum of greys. There is evidence of these grey areas as early as 1950 when Ceylon and, perhaps rather incongruously the UK, extended recognition to the newly Communist China⁵⁴. However, American consternation (both with the UK and Ceylon) was quickly balanced by Ceylon's gentle acquiescence to US requests to use harbour facilities during the Korean War. However, Ceylon's recognition of China was an early acknowledgement by leading politicians in Ceylon that the country's economic future would not, in fact could not, be tied exclusively, and thus restrictively, to either the 'black' or the 'white' of the Cold War. Ceylon would simply collapse inwards under the strain of economic alienation. Dr G. R. de Silva's concerns, voiced back in the years immediately following independence, that Ceylon could never be ideologically bound to one bloc over another because of her dependency upon many politically diverse countries for her staple commodities, had proved prescient indeed⁵⁵.

Prime Minister Senanayake's 'Middle Way'⁵⁶ was a deliberate attempt to chart a neutral, or non-aligned, course in foreign affairs, driven mostly by the desire to sustain Ceylon's fragile and dependent economy, but also by the contextual realisation that the island's ideological position was under the close and judgmental scrutiny of both power blocs. It is this 'judgement' (on the part of the USA) which tends to shape the US-Sri Lanka relationship – even to this day Truman's criteria for 'friendship' casts a long shadow over the island's economic governance, the state's handling of the ethnic crisis, and the government's civil and human rights record.

⁵⁴ Since Ceylon was not a part of the UN (her application for membership was still being vetoed by the Soviet Union) she was not bound by the General Assembly embargo resolution of May 18th 1951 which restricted trade with China

⁵⁵ See footnote 163

⁵⁶ See footnote 164

Perhaps nothing so clearly illustrates the uneasy connection between the US and Ceylon, than the Dudley Senanayake⁵⁷ government's decision, despite the implications inherent in the UN embargo⁵⁸ and, more importantly, the US 'Battle Act'⁵⁹, to initiate trade with the Chinese in October 1952. Despite Ceylon being part of the Commonwealth, she was, with regards to certain issues, not simply a bidder of London's wishes. Nor was she tied to any common central and overarching policy mechanism that congealed all of the countries of the Commonwealth around a certain unified goal. F. H. Soward identified early in the post war world, that

“...the Commonwealth as such has no policy, any more than it has a central executive or a single army. Gone beyond recall are the days when the voice of London was the voice of empire. At best, a Commonwealth choir may sing the same song. At times there will be rival soloists, singing in unharmonious competition...”⁶⁰

What this meant, at least for Ceylon, was that she was not always bound by the wishes of the UK when it came to foreign policy. Later in the Cold War this would become ever more apparent, particularly after the negotiated withdrawal of British bases from Trincomalee and Katunayake in 1957 (15th October and 1st November respectively). Rather oddly however, in respect of China, Ceylon was actually following a precedent set by the UK. Hong Kong, Great Britain's Crown Colony, was trading with both China *and* the Soviet Union by 1950⁶¹.

Dudley Senanayake's government was well aware of the potential fallout from straying from the ideological side of the US and, as expected, the fallout was swift to follow. Condemnation from Washington was immediately supported by attempts at diplomatic pressure. However, in 1953 Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, responding to a

⁵⁷ DS Senanayake died due to injuries sustained in a horse riding accident on the 22nd of March, 1952. His son, Dudley, was appointed Prime Minister on the 26th.

⁵⁸ See footnote 196

⁵⁹ The Mutual Defense Assistance Control Act of 1951 passed Congress as a means of denying communist countries access to strategic goods originating in participating countries in the American continent, Europe and Asia.

⁶⁰ Soward, 'The Korean Crisis and the Commonwealth', p. 116

⁶¹ Hunt, 'The Anglo-American Partnership', p. 106

request by US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, to exert pressure on Ceylon regarding her trade with China, commented that members of the Commonwealth were fully sovereign and that no pressure would be brought to bear on Ceylonese policy formation⁶². The question that thus begs to be asked is: why would a government that had close sympathies with the US, indeed a government which was faced with fearsome communists from the opposition benches, decide to initiate trade with an avowed enemy of the US? The answer has its branches in the infant non-alignment movement but its roots in something more immediate to the new nation state of Ceylon: economic survival.

Despite the climate of Ceylon being ideally suited to the cultivation of rice, much of the land is already given over to other, crucial, export produce such as tea and rubber. What this means is that, rather counter intuitively for a predominantly rice eating population in South Asia, Ceylon/Sri Lanka must import the vast majority of its basic food staple. Consequently, she is often at the mercy of external market dynamics for both the cost and the quantity of rice she is able to import. These dynamics can be affected by any number of contingent forces largely outside of the control of the Ceylonese government⁶³. The shifting sands of the larger Cold War were a constant source of consequence for Ceylon's access to the rice produce that she needed. More specifically, in June 1950, when Kim Il Sung and his North Korean forces attacked South Korea, procurement of the commodity at a cheap enough price became something of a challenge. Compounding this problem was that much of the rice Ceylon imported was paid for by the export of significant revenue generating items such as rubber. Thus Ceylon needed to find a way to increase its export quota so that it could find the extra capital needed to source its necessary rice requirements. An opportunity afforded itself which would solve both of these problems – an opportunity taken full advantage of, despite the possible repercussions in the West.

⁶² Li Chang, 'Ceylon's Trade with Communist China', *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 6, (1953): pp. 70-72, p. 72

⁶³ This largely holds true even today

As a consequence of the 'Battle Act' and the embargo resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in May 1951 which restricted the trading of certain strategic goods (including rubber) with China, and after the withdrawal of rubber exporting licences from key outposts of the British Empire (Malaya and Singapore), "Communist China entered the rubber market of Ceylon in September 1951"⁶⁴. Because Ceylon was not bound by the UN resolution, and clearly felt the issue important enough to risk alienating US opinion, she embarked upon, what would become a long lasting and beneficial relationship with Communist China, whereby she would receive large quantities of rice heavily reduced in price. China, in return, would gain access to the vital rubber market of Ceylon. As W. Ivor Jennings pointed out in 1952, it wasn't that the Chinese communists had any real support in Ceylon, especially from the UNP government, but the Sino-Ceylonese agreements were reached because. "...the trade hinders the United States from rigging the (rubber) market"⁶⁵. For Ceylon, economically speaking, this was a win-win situation. For the United States, this development was a major concern⁶⁶. Almost immediately the US made overtures to Ceylon to reduce its relationship with China in return for US assistance in procuring rice. She also offered to purchase rubber from Ceylon. Divergences over the issue of prices paid for Ceylonese rubber and the costs of the rice procured on the open market, led to the termination of further talks. The consequences of this divergence are easy to calibrate:

"In the meantime, Ceylon's rubber export to China has kept mounting and its exports to the United Kingdom and the United States have simultaneously declined. In the first ten months of 1952 rubber exports to China amounted to 46,320,191 pounds, valued at 93,251,159 rupees, making China first on the list."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Chang, 'Ceylon's Trade with Communist China' p. 71

⁶⁵ W. Ivor Jennings, 'Politics in Ceylon', *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 17, (1952): pp. 177-180, p. 180

⁶⁶ President Eisenhower made direct reference to the issue in certain sections of his diaries: 'The Presidency: The Middle Way'; 'Concerning my political intentions'; 'On an almost normal schedule', *The Presidential Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, December 1955 to April 1956*, <http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/presidential-papers/first-term/documents/1744.cfm>

⁶⁷ Chang, 'Ceylon's Trade with Communist China' p. 71

Thus the First Five Year Rubber-Rice Agreement of 1952 became something of a precedent in as much as it clearly demonstrated that Ceylon would, regardless of the ideological bent of the government of the day, view national interest over Cold War allegiance. This form of *realeconomics* is a continuing trend in Sri Lankan governance because, for almost its entire post-independence history it has endured, in one area or another, an adverse balance of payments and trade. Consequently, economic well-being, and thus national interest, would always, if push came to shove, trump international alignment. This, perhaps as much as anything, has been the engine driving Ceylon's sustained interest in non-alignment. Of course, this kind of thinking did not, and does not, always sit well with her US partner.

Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala (UNP)⁶⁸ made some progress in ameliorating the damage done to the US-Ceylon relationship due its apparent lack of Cold War alignment, demonstrated by its burgeoning ties with Communist China, in a number of very public denunciations of the communist menace⁶⁹. In 1953 he banned the importing of communist literature from countries such as China and the USSR, restricted money remittances from communist states⁷⁰ and embarked upon a 50 day world tour of countries such as the US, England and Canada⁷¹. In November of the same year he welcomed US Vice President Richard Nixon to Colombo⁷² and in 1954 he authorised the use of airport facilities by the US to transport French troops to Indochina⁷³.

An analysis of the first UNP governments demonstrate a peculiarity in the US-Ceylon relationship in as much as, whilst the governments in power might, in every other

⁶⁸ Dudley Senanayake resigned in October 1953 and his cousin, Sir John, became PM

⁶⁹ Sir John Kotelawala. 'Address to the Press Club,' in *Documents on Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy, 1947 – 1965*, pp. 148-149

⁷⁰ No author named, 'Ceylon Will Curb Financing of Reds', *Special to the New York Times*, January 4, 1954

⁷¹ Sinha, *Sri Lanka United States Relations*, p. 28

⁷² Elliott L. Watson, 'Vice President Nixon's Forgotten Trip to Ceylon', *The New Nixon*, <http://thenewnixon.org/2009/06/16/vice-president-nixon%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98forgotten%E2%80%99-trip-to-ceylon/>

⁷³ Sinha, *Sri Lanka United States Relations*, p. 36

measurable respect, identify clearly with the central tenets of the US ideological tradition, essentially following the imperatives laid down by Truman back in 1949, when economic concerns necessitate prompt remedy, Ceylon often displays the courage (or the temerity) to seek other, less ideologically acceptable, options. Thus, non-alignment, in whatever form it takes, is often one of the key determinants of the relationship. Although it materialised in the early years of the Cold War, the judicious (and occasionally not so judicious) use of non-alignment by Ceylon, as a tool used to ensure the island's strategic, economic and political security, remains a powerful condition of the US-Sri Lanka relationship. This is because Ceylon continues to use the policy to navigate the precarious waters of an ideologically diverse international community it is heavily reliant upon for its own survival.

When SWRD Bandaranaike, leading an SLFP coalition known as the People's United Front (MEP), defeated Kotelwala's UNP government in a landslide general election in April 1956, Ceylon entered into a period, to all intents and purposes unbroken until 1965⁷⁴, of gradual alienation from the United States. The Bandaranaike's presided over a government, at its core socialist, which fundamentally altered the relationship Ceylon enjoyed with America. As such, it serves as a useful case study in the contrasts between the dominant parties (UNP and SLFP) and their foreign policies during the Cold War. The reaction of the US to some of the foreign policy actions of the ideologically less 'acceptable' Bandaranaike governments, gives us a clear indication of what the attitude of Washington policy makers was to the perceived straying from the fold of Ceylon. In terms of the foreign policy standards set by the Bandaranaike governments, the apparent transgression made by the previous UNP government when it began essential trade with Communist China, fades into insignificance. In his appraisal of the nature of SWRD Bandaranaike's non-alignment, Karunadasa quite rightly asserts that, "... the

⁷⁴ Upon his assassination in 1959, he was succeeded by Wijeyananda Dahanayake . He was unable to hold the government together and elections in March returned Dudley Senanayake (UNP) back to office. He did not have a workable parliamentary majority and subsequent elections in July saw SWRD's wife, Sirimavo, become the world's first female prime minister

Bandaranaike period (1956-1959) marked a phase of transition in the evolution of Sri Lanka's foreign policy.”⁷⁵

The investigation, at this juncture, is looking to establish certain trends in the US – Ceylon relationship which can then be used to contextualise the relationship as it stands today. Consequently, the narrative of the discourse does not require a simple chronology of the period 1948-1983 but a selection of definitive examples of the issues and events within this period which demonstrate clearly how certain acts of governance on the part of Ceylon helped shape the relationship in its relative infancy. These trends in governance, and the US reaction to them, is what we shall extrapolate and utilise to help explain the current (post 2001) manifestation of the relationship and its position within the War on Terror. Arguably the greatest contrast between parties and the clearest examples of the ideological impact of these political parties on the operation of foreign and domestic policy, takes place in these early years. Nowhere else in the period is it clearer that the US is responsive to a very particular set of governing principles when it comes to its relationship with Ceylon. It is in these infant years that the genetic markers in the evolution of the US-Ceylon bond are unequivocally set. That is why these issues and events are included, to the exclusion of others.

To summarise the complex foreign and domestic actions taken by Ceylon during the Bandaranaike administrations and then draw direct correlations to the US reaction, is an almost interminable task. What can be done, however, is describe overall tendencies in the relationship and demonstrate that these trends are consequences of, if not specific issues, then of a collective set of actions. The US response, more often than not, was generated out of a combined set of both foreign *and* domestic decisions taken by the Bandaranaike governments. Consequently, the study will have to, where necessary, examine certain foreign policy actions taken by the Ceylonese government, in conjunction with related domestic decisions (although the investigation will, where

⁷⁵ Karunadasa, *Sri Lanka and Non-Alignment*, p. 57

possible, leave until the following chapter, any discussion about the US response to the growing ethnic issues in this period).

In December 1955 Ceylon was granted UN membership. Under the new government of SWRD Bandaranaike, Ceylon signed the first agreement for bilateral economic assistance with the US in April 1956, under which the US modified its 'Battle Act' stance towards her and extended \$5 million dollars in development aid⁷⁶. In November of the same year the two countries exchanged notes establishing an agreement under which Ceylon would purchase "certain military equipment, materials, and services" from the US⁷⁷. In June 1958, both countries signed an agricultural commodities agreement worth \$6.3 million in rice and wheat imports to Ceylon⁷⁸. From these seemingly auspicious beginnings, where US aid and assistance rose from \$0.1 million in 1955 to an unprecedented peak of \$20.6 million in 1958⁷⁹, there was, particularly during the Prime Ministership of Sirimavo but with its origins in the administration of her late husband, a precipitous decline in the 'friendship' offered by the United States to Ceylon.

⁷⁶ US Department of State, *A List of Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States in Force on January 1st, 2006*, p. 298

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 298

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 297

⁷⁹ Source: USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)*

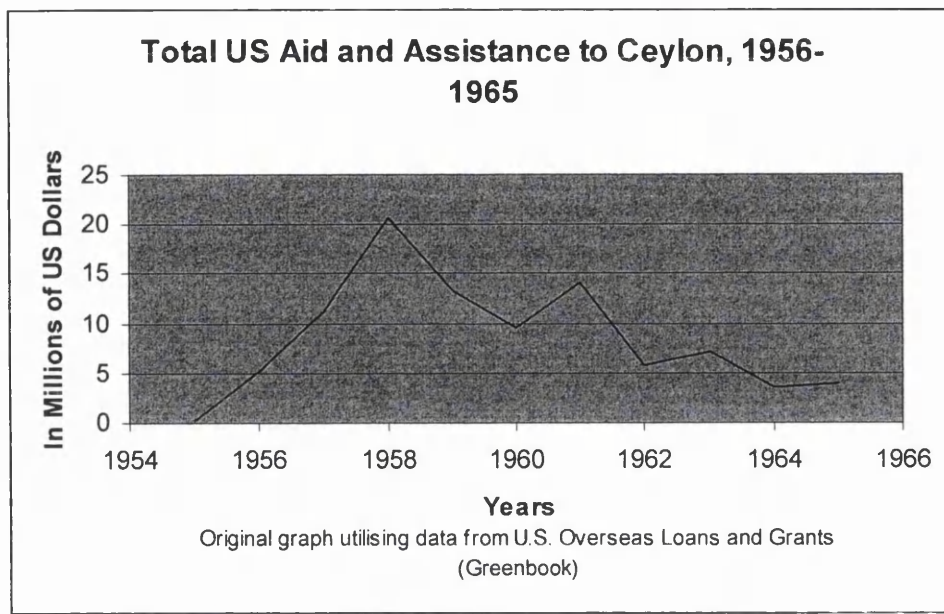


Fig. 2, Total US Aid and Assistance to Ceylon in the years 1956 – 1965

Despite the rise in US aid and assistance to Ceylon in the early years of the SWRD Bandaranaike government (at least part of which was agreed by the previous government), the seeds of US alienation were sown, ideologically speaking, by the very triumph of the SLFP led coalition in 1956. Whilst the ‘Middle Way’ platform of foreign policy established by D.S. Senanayake for the UNP was, by and large, westward leaning, looking occasionally to the Chinese only out of economic necessity, the ‘neutralism’ espoused by SWRD was decidedly less convivial to the US. American observers were mostly correct when they reported that the 1956 election would, “...give more satisfaction to Moscow than to Washington”⁸⁰. The contrast between Sir John Kotelawala’s anti-communist rhetoric and his successor, SWRD Bandaranaike’s, bold socialist and neutralist pronouncements, could not demonstrate more clearly the fundamental differences between the two parties, and thus such a contrast, as early as it is in the US-Ceylon relationship, offers an opportune case study seeking to determine trends and major influences.

⁸⁰ Rosenthal, ‘Ceylon Follows India into Neutralist Camp: Election, Decided on Local Issues, Will Affect South Asia Pattern’

There are two distinct issues working in tandem here. The first is that the SWRD-led coalition was essentially a socialist government containing elements of capitalism (whereas the reverse was true for the UNP governments). This socialism manifested itself most clearly through its denunciation of the UNP as an elitist party that sought to preserve the privilege of the wealthy business class, and through its desire to nationalise great swathes of the Ceylonese economy. The second, and perhaps the most internationally visible, issue was that Bandaranaike's neutralism was clearly a snub to the Western bloc. The criteria for US friendship, as laid down by Truman, demanded strict ideological allegiance from any country wishing to *enjoy* that friendship. Bandaranaike's neutralism made it abundantly clear that no such commitment would be forthcoming. The importance of this was not lost on American onlookers:

“The Soviet world is relatively easy on these problems of commitment versus non-commitment. All the Russians have to hope for and work for is that a country be neutral. Neutralism is counted as a victory for the Russians, a defeat for the West.

Neutralism for Ceylon means things the West, with all its theoretical respect for a country's desire to be neutral, cannot like.”⁸¹

Socialism at home and neutralism abroad ultimately (particularly under the stewardship of Sirimavo Bandaranaike) proved a potent poison to the health of the US-Ceylon bond. The dramatic decrease in US aid and assistance after 1958⁸² is a clear indication of Washington's attitude to the neutralist and socialist activities of the SWRD/Sirimavo governments. After the election of SWRD and his coalition government in 1956 there followed a series of actions⁸³ in rapid succession that served to antagonise the United

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² This decline takes into account the potential skewing of the figures caused by the very limited assistance given by the US in 1957 to help Ceylon deal with severe flooding and in 1958 to assist with the communal riots

⁸³ It must be noted that the activities of the governments of Ceylon vis à vis the conflict, and their consequent impact on the relationship with the US, will be discussed separately

States⁸⁴. In August and September of 1956 Claude Corea, Ceylon's High Commissioner in London, is sent to Moscow and then Peking, on what would later be dubbed the 'Corea Mission', to determine diplomatic possibilities. In February 1957 communist China's Chou En Lai (Foreign Minister) visited Ceylon, following which both countries exchanged their first diplomats in April. Similarly, in June of the same year, Ceylon exchanged her first diplomat with the Soviet Union. In 1957 Ceylon signed substantial Trade and Payments Agreements with a variety of US unfriendly nations such as China, the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland (among others). In November 1957 a soviet cultural delegation visited Ceylon and three months later the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Viliam Sorky, arrived. Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia followed shortly after.

A clear indication of the fervent anti-West feeling within the SLFP government can be seen when, after the assassination of SWRD Bandaranaike in September 1959, Dr W. Dahanayake is appointed his successor but is expelled by his *own party*, in part, because of his overt pro West foreign policy initiatives. When he is ultimately replaced by SWRD's wife, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the deterioration of the US-Ceylon relationship accelerates. Under Sirimavo's guidance Ceylon achieved an elevated level of international recognition. Via her near domination of the non-aligned movement in this period⁸⁵ she attracted much of the world's attention for her skilful, but often polarising, projection of non-alignment as a viable 'aloofness' from Cold War geo-politics. Unfortunately, for the US-Ceylon relationship, Sirimavo's pronouncements on non-alignment were not concomitant with the ideological American worldview. Perhaps an additional blow to the relationship was served by the fact that, as Ceylon's international reputation (vis à vis non-alignment) grew, it also drew a spotlight, at times powerfully illuminating, onto the activities of the small Indian Ocean state, which might otherwise have been overlooked. In short, Ceylon no longer operated in the peripheral shadows of

⁸⁴ The justification for these actions are not the focus of this investigation, merely the outcomes

⁸⁵ Karunadasa, *Sri Lanka and Non-Alignment*, Chapter 3

the Cold War, she was now in plain sight. So too were the actions of her new Bandaranaike government.

One of Sirimavo's first orders of business was the result of a mixture of motivations: of a newly emergent national desire for Ceylon to take control of her own economic destiny, and the fulfilment of an ideologically driven (but astutely politic) promise to socialise the country by the ruling party. In December 1960, the government introduced the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation Bill to parliament, effectively announcing its intention to nationalise Ceylon's oil interests. Had this action taken place outside the spotlight of the Cold War, and involved less socialist rhetoric, then it might have passed under the radar as a simple and justified act of national economic interest - as early as 1958 unemployment was skyrocketing (rising by 31% in that year alone), 40% of her food was imported, a series of strikes and riots had led to high insurance premiums on freight and inflated shipping rates which crippled an already lean export trade, and her import bill was rising rapidly⁸⁶. As it was however, the oil interests it was looking to nationalise belonged, in large part, to American and British companies: Caltex Ceylon Ltd, owned jointly by Texaco Inc. and the Standard Oil Company of California, the Esso Standard Eastern Inc., an affiliate of the Standard Oil Company (New Jersey), and the Shell Oil Company (Ceylon)⁸⁷, a member of the Royal Dutch Shell Group⁸⁸. In addition to this, there seemed to be the clear international understanding that this was the precursor to increased imports of Soviet oil products⁸⁹. As a follow up to the Bill, in May 1961 the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation Act established the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation, which was designed as a state controlled competitor to any foreign oil interests currently operating in Ceylon. This corporation set about taking control of,

⁸⁶ Drew Middleton, 'Ceylon Economy Faltering Badly', *Special to the New York Times*, July 14, 1958

⁸⁷ Shell Oil Company was (at the time) the largely independent American subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell

⁸⁸ J.H. Carmical, 'Ceylon Studying Foreign Oil Move', *New York Times*, August 4, 1963

⁸⁹ Ibid

“...about one-third of the most favourably situated service stations and other facilities. The installations taken represent about 50 percent of the companies’ sales volume.

Perhaps most importantly for the US,

“No prompt efforts were made to compensate the oil companies for the seized installations. Russian oil was imported to be sold through them by the new state-owned Petroleum Company.”⁹⁰

Of course, Ceylon’s government had sound economic reasons for the nationalisation of its oil installations – it meant it could purchase and control its own supply of oil with greater cost efficiency than it had been able to do under the monopolising oil companies. Later, in January 1964 the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (under the Amendment Act of 1963) extended its control of the import, export, selling, supplying and distributing of certain petroleum products – essentially nationalising *all* of the island’s oil companies. Ceylon was very conscious of how this action would be interpreted by the West – as an ideologically motivated seizure and a definitive Cold War shift towards the Soviet bloc. Consequently, some rather transparent attempt to assuage US concerns was made by the government. In a manner reminiscent of the Truman Doctrine’s announcement of Marshall Aid as being open to anyone and not against one country, Ceylon announced that,

“...the Ceylon Government was prepared to purchase petroleum products from any country in the world, provided the terms were not less advantageous than those already obtained by its government-owned company.”⁹¹

The government-owned company had signed long term contracts with the Soviet Union, Rumania and the United Arab Republic, for the purchase of petroleum products at well below the price offered by both the American and British oil companies. In the high drama of the Cold War, Ceylon’s government (at least to the West), had clearly (and

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ J.H. Carmical, ‘Ceylon Oil Moves Held Soviet Gain’, *New York Times*, June 17, 1962

rudely) chosen the Soviet bloc as an economic partner. The consequences were swift and immediate.

On the 1st August, 1962, the US Congress passed into law what became known as, the Hickenlooper Amendment⁹². This amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1962 provided for the suspension of US aid to foreign countries which expropriate American property without just and adequate compensation. In the first two years of its enactment the 'Hickenlooper Amendment' was invoked only once – against Ceylon⁹³. The standards ultimately set by the Amendment allowed the US to suspend all aid that fell inside the operating criteria of the Foreign Assistance Act, as well as “any other”⁹⁴ assistance originating under Public Law 480 (except famine and disaster relief). Primarily due to the US response to Ceylon’s nationalising of private US oil interests without due compensation which began in 1961, we see a drastic decline in American aid and assistance, from \$14.1 million in 1961, to \$5.8 million just a year later. The general decline in assistance continued even further, amid diplomatic wrangling over what, if any, compensation would be conferred and when, until in 1965 it stood at a malnourished \$3.9 million⁹⁵.

Since 1956 the West had given (variously through the Colombo Plan and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) about \$61,600,000 in aid to Ceylon. A substantial portion of this, \$36,550,000, was given by the US through its aid programs⁹⁶. The importance of aid and assistance to Ceylon, particularly from the US, is never recognised as starkly as when it is withheld. Although Finance Minister P.B.G. Kalugalla’s statement to parliament in February of 1963 put a brave face on a financially

⁹² For an exceptional investigation into this amendment, its practical application, and its utility as a method of pressuring countries into protecting private foreign investment, see R.B. Lillich, 'The Protection of Foreign Investment and the Hickenlooper Amendment', *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 112, No. 8, (1964): pp. 1116 -1131

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ An addition made to the original Amendment as a means of closing any humanitarian 'loophole' that might have allowed aid to continue to flow into Ceylon, Ibid

⁹⁵ Source: USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)*

⁹⁶ Middleton, 'Ceylon Economy Faltering Badly'

and diplomatically damaging row, the loss of American economic and technical assistance was a serious blow to Ceylon's hope for economic constancy⁹⁷. W. Dahanayake put it more realistically, recognising the right of Ceylon to manage its own oil interests while at the same time appreciating the premium value of an American partner, when he said:

“... it is very clear to all thinking people that the Government of Ceylon, in this particular instance, is not wrong...I beg of the Hon. Prime Minister and her Cabinet to resume negotiations with the American Government. We need the aid that they give us. We should not spurn such aid. There are certain public utility undertakings and certain very essential projects for which we need the aid of those who are in a position to help us. At the same time we are not prepared, a small nation though we may be, to sell our birthright for a mess of pottage.”⁹⁸

The ability and the desire of the US to narrow its aid and assistance commitment to the island in response to perceived transgressions by the government of the day, is a common theme that runs through the entirety of this study. As is the island's economic instability and thus the reluctant understanding that, as a viable nation state, Sri Lanka is fundamentally dependent on that aid – a fact which draws even more significance to it once the LTTE are proscribed by the US in 1997, and later during the Rajapakse regime's unilateral prosecution of the war against the terrorists.

At the same time as Sirimavo Bandaranaike was pushing forward the nationalising of Ceylon's oil industry, defiantly pronouncing that she would not “...dance to the tune of the capitalist countries to obtain aid!”⁹⁹, and in the process successfully alienating the island from much needed economic assistance from the west, her government was doing much to aggravate the US in other areas. On a number of occasions over the course of the early part of the 1960's, Sirimavo expressed any number of sentiments that simply served to justify (rightly or wrongly) the American proclivity for viewing all Cold War activity

⁹⁷ *Documents on Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy, 1947 – 1965*, Document No. 75, pp. 129-134

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, Document No. 76, p. 134

⁹⁹ Comment originally reported in the *Observer Newspaper*, February 24, 1963, p. 38. Partially reproduced in 'The Protection of Foreign Investment and the Hickenlooper Amendment', p. 1116

as 'either for us or against us'. Both in the UN and Ceylon's parliament, Sirimavo continually expressed support for Castro's Cuba¹⁰⁰ and distress at US support for the corrupt and anti-Buddhist government of South Vietnam¹⁰¹. In June of 1962, Sirimavo sent a personal letter to President Kennedy in which she expressed consternation at another US nuclear test:

"I have read with great disappointment of the explosion by the United States on the 26th April of the first nuclear device in its new series of atmospheric tests...the resumption of these tests is a grave setback to peace and brings mankind once again to the brink of nuclear destruction... The neutralist nations like Ceylon... are shocked at this disregard of their earnest wishes. I earnestly request your personal intervention even at this stage to stop these tests."¹⁰²

Despite (or perhaps because of) her statements on non-alignment – "It merely means that each country that is non-aligned adopts independent judgments on foreign policy without being tied to the ideas or ideologies of opposing power blocs"¹⁰³ – it appeared to Washington, with the clarity of crystal, that in domestic *and* international affairs, Ceylon was clearly choosing an ideological side. The wrong side, according to the US.

The Rice-Rubber agreement of the early fifties could be viewed almost in isolation in terms of Ceylon's steady infant relationship with the US. It was certainly an important and revealing precedent, establishing the premise that Ceylon would, whenever reasonable and necessary, view its own national interest as more important than Cold War allegiances, however it still represented more of an anomaly than a substantial deviation. Under Sirimavo Bandaranaike the Chinese-Ceylon connection became ever more pronounced and, in tandem with her governments other actions vis à vis the US, the socialising of Ceylon's economy, and the Cold War, served as another reason for American concern.

¹⁰⁰ Sirimavo Bandaranaike, *Selected Speeches* (Colombo: Department of Government Printing, 1996) p. 30

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 31

¹⁰² *Documents on Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy, 1947 – 1965*. Document No. 19, p. 29

¹⁰³ Sirimavo Bandaranaike, *Selected Speeches* p. 26

In January 1963 Sirimavo personally visited Mao Tse-tung, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in China. Her primary reason for going to China was to help bring a resolution to the Sino-Indian War, however, whilst there China and Ceylon's personal interests were re-affirmed¹⁰⁴. Prior to the visit in February 1962, Ceylon's Ambassador to China, A.B. Perera, gave a speech in which Ceylon's absolute dedication to Communist China's application for re-entry into the UN was restated. Not only this, but his speech made none too subtle reference to US policy towards China:

“The Government of Ceylon are firm in their belief that only the representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China are competent to occupy China's place in the United Nations and its Organizations. We oppose and we shall continue to oppose all attempts to create “two-Chinas” or any other variation of the “two-China” theory.”¹⁰⁵

Seen through the prism of the Cold War, this was not a Ceylon preserving national interest (as in the Rice-Rubber agreement) but a country driven by an ideologically anti-West government.

It is not necessary to highlight all of the actions of the two early Bandaranaike governments that helped cause a rift in the US-Ceylon relationship. Suffice to say that Sirimavo's declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Nuclear Free Zone¹⁰⁶, just at a time when the US were looking to Diego Garcia as a naval ‘communications station’; that her denying of permission for the US Seventh Fleet to enter territorial waters and protesting their presence in the Indian Ocean just when the conflict in Vietnam was escalating; that her government's decision to nationalise *all* oil interests at the height of the diplomatic argument over compensation; that her own political party's decision to enter into a coalition with the Marxist LSSP at the same time as her own government was declaring

¹⁰⁴ *Documents on Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy, 1947 – 1965*. Document No.104, pp. 191-193

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, Document No.103, p. 190

¹⁰⁶ Sirimavo's ‘Statement in the Senate on the Ban on Entry into Sri Lanka Airports, Seaports and Territorial Waters of Naval Vessels and Aircraft carrying Nuclear Weapons’, *Ibid*, Document No. 22, pp. 33-34

itself ideologically non-aligned, all resulted in a further weakening of Ceylon's vital connection to America.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of how the actions of the various Sri Lankan governments impact upon the US-Sri Lankan relationship, can be seen by the contrast between the early UNP and SLFP governments. Whether driven by ideology *or* national interest, it is clear that the US judges the activities of Ceylon upon their ability to fulfil a very specific set of criteria. When the Sri Lanka government takes action, it does so, not in a vacuum, but in a sensitive world environment where both domestic *and* foreign policy initiatives are scrutinised for their ideological value *and* their individual merit.

If we were looking beyond the first twenty years of the relationship we would easily recognise these recurrent themes: the United States, with much less to lose from the connection than Sri Lanka, giving or withholding its 'friendship' depending upon, not simply the political philosophy, but also the characteristic activities, of successive Sri Lankan governments.

Whilst it serves little purpose to claim that a UNP-led government in Sri Lanka will find an instant and natural 'friend' in the US, or indeed that an SLFP-led government will just as swiftly and no less naturally find little warmth from Washington, for, although each political party, as we have seen, may be guided by certain ideological leanings, they are not necessarily preordained to act in strict accordance with them. At times (though not always) national interest, whatever that is adjudged to be, may just as easily trump ideology. However, this having been said, any government will tend to view national interest through the lens of its own ideology. Consequently, we can see clear correlations between the nature of the governments that gain power, and the amount of 'friendship' offered by the US. For example, if we look at Fig. 1 (the graph of total US aid and assistance) when Sirimavo loses the election to Dudley Senanayake (UNP) in 1965, aid begins to flow freely once more, rising from \$3.9 million in 1965 to \$14 million the

following year. This figure rises to an unprecedented \$23.5 million and \$22.9 million in the years 1968 and 1969 respectively. As if further clarification of this point were necessary, in May 1970 Sirimavo and an SLFP coalition, including the Marxist LSSP and the CPSL (Communist Party of Sri Lanka), are returned to power and almost immediately aid and assistance fell from the \$22.9 million in 1969 to \$4.2 million in 1970. In the year 1977, when Sirimavo is replaced by the UNP Prime Minister J.R. Jayewardene, aid and assistance to the island almost doubles! Of course, due to the complexities of governmental policy and its impact on international relations, such correlations are not always uniform or even, but it is a fact is that they are there.

This chapter has focussed on the trends which emerged in the US-Ceylon/Sri Lanka relationship before the formal outbreak of the ethnic conflict. We have established clear parameters for the relationship by examining various actions of contrasting Ceylonese governments and measured the reactions of the United States to these actions. We have further detailed the impact of ideology on both foreign and domestic policy decisions taken by Ceylon's governments and the resultant 'friendship' (or lack thereof) extended by Washington. The Cold War and Ceylon's national interest have helped determine the progress and character of the relationship because, not only did the Cold War continue well into the initial period of ethnic strife, but Ceylon's national interest continues to be judged by very specific criteria as laid down by Washington. What is more, the issues which shaped the early relationship have left indelible marks, instantly recognisable to sensitive observers, today.

The following chapter will focus on the US reaction to the growth of the conflict in the period 1948-1983 and, as such, it will support this chapter. In tandem with this chapter it will provide our investigation with a three tier set of relationship-governing principles: ideology, government policy vis à vis Sri Lanka's national interest, and government action concerning the development of the conflict.

CHAPTER 4

American Orientation

“The people of the lovely island of Ceylon are awakening from a nightmare of murder, arson and looting to face other and perhaps more severe challenges to parliamentary democracy.

The communal rioting of May and June killed 158 persons by Government count – other sources put the total at 400 – and left 12,000 persons homeless. The violence was only one expression of the conflicts within Sinhalese society that are slowly eroding democratic government, weakening the national economy and destroying a way of life based largely on western values

Censorship of outgoing news dispatches is maintained. As a result this dispatch was sent from London because censorship has forbidden balanced reporting of the situation from Ceylon.

The riot’s causes were religious and national, evoked by the ancient rivalry between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The Buddhist Sinhalese form about 68 per cent of Ceylon’s population of 8,000,000 and the Hindu Tamils approximately 10 per cent

Antagonism between the two groups first broke into the open in a dispute over the use of the Tamil language.”¹

In his special to the New York Times, Drew Middleton provides a contemporary 1958 American assessment (albeit heavily ideological) of the issues that served to help shape what would become the island’s dominating narrative: the ethnic conflict. Perhaps, more informative for the purpose of this study, Middleton highlights many of the early concerns which, over time, have helped to determine and explain how US policy-makers have approached Ceylon/Sri Lanka’s state-insurgent strife. One of the key components of the US view of the conflict is that, although it has its historical origins in a time well before the Second World War, the modern manifestation of it is firmly rooted in the post-independence era. What this means essentially is that, quite unsurprisingly, the US puts

¹ Drew Middleton, ‘Ceylon’s Democracy Faces New Test in Wake of Strife’, *Special to the New York Times*, July 13, 1958

heavy emphasis for responsibility of the strife upon the governments which dominated independent Ceylon. In tandem with this is the steady growth in the belief (correct in many respects) that as successive governments attempted to get to grips with the developing turmoil, they began to use certain weapons in their arsenal, not always constitutionally permissible in a democratic republic. Hence, as US observers watched (with varying degrees of interest) the cultural, religious and linguistic antagonisms intensifying, they also began to formulate opinions regarding the government's methods of maintaining control of the populations.

What emerges out of this historical framework, and is in fact the main argument of this chapter, is that because the US views the conflict through the prism of the activities of post-independence Sri Lankan governments (activities which often cause discomfort to US policy makers), it has frequently been reluctant to provide substantive material support to the Sri Lankan state in its handling of the crisis and its dealing with an organisation which, if it were operating in the Middle East (or directly against the US itself), Washington would immediately condemn as terrorist and counter with an appropriate material apparatus. What this chapter pointedly demonstrates is the inconsistencies endemic in the US anti-terrorism paradigm for, not only (in this case) does America stumble in its definition of what constitutes a terrorist organisation, it is often historically bound by the parameters of the Sri Lanka-US bi-lateral relationship into actively resisting calls for assistance by the island's government to fight the LTTE – forcing it into a situation whereby it is reticent in its support of a country clearly besieged by terrorism, yet claims, in a post 9/11 world, to be the vanguard against such 'evils'. Of course the bilateral relationship is profoundly complex and Washington's approach to the conflict is tightly bound up with American strategic national interest, regional implications of US involvement (particularly vis à vis India), and the clear need to prioritise time and resources in a manner which reinforces the more imperative American priority foreign policy goals, i.e. securing the Middle East and success in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. What makes Sri Lanka's terrorist insurgency such an

interesting case study is that it singularly illustrates the limitations to President Bush's War on Terror by pointing out that a) some countries are more 'deserving' of American anti-terror support than others, and b) that American interest and commitment to stamping out terrorism depends greatly upon the strategic value inherent in the enterprise itself, i.e. what strategic benefit would be gained from dramatically increasing assistance to the Sri Lankan state in order to eradicate the threat, and at what cost to regional stability? Any involvement the US has with Sri Lanka must necessarily be 'traded-off' against these twin imperatives: strategic significance and South Asian regional implications.

Consequently there are a number of issues which help to shape, and thus reveal, how the United States has historically approached the island's troubles. The first is its view concerning the interminably complex origins of the conflict, i.e. how it began and who is responsible. It is abundantly clear that Washington holds the successive governments of independent Ceylon as, if not wholly, then primarily culpable. This understandably colours the perspective the United States holds when it comes to assigning aid and assistance to the Sri Lankan state.

The second issue concerns the actions taken by Ceylon's various governments to counter the domestic strife it is faced with and how acceptable these methods are to American policy-makers. One of the most relevant indicators to the health of the US-Sri Lankan relationship, particularly today, is the level of human/civil rights violations believed to be perpetrated (or at the least sponsored) by the government. A clear, identifiable and hereditary marker of the relationship has become the correlation between the palatability to the Americans of Sri Lankan governmental activity vis-à-vis the conflict and the level of assistance proffered by the US government to help combat the insurgency. In short, if the US believes the island's government too readily commits human/civil rights violations in its pursuit of the insurgents – 'eroding democratic government' – then it will constrict the assistance it offers.

Thirdly, as the struggle becomes a formal entity, with clear and doctrinal groups emerging in opposition to the linguistic, religious and cultural policies pursued by the government, the United States is forced to take a stance in terms of how it views the, often extra-legal, activities of these groups. ‘Condemnation or sympathy?’ is the argument at the heart of early US responses to the ideals and actions of these factions - responses which have become, more or less, basic and persistent truisms in America’s dealing with the issues present on the island – irrespective of the changing administrations in Washington.

Fourthly, once the struggle takes on the contemporary appearance we see today – that of a conflict primarily between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE – how does the United States view its role and what contribution does it make? This last point is essentially the driving force of the thesis – being the self-appointed contemporary global sheriff in the fight against terrorism, how does the US approach a conflict between a democratically elected, though at times highly suspect, government and what, in no uncertain terms, is one of the most advanced terrorist networks currently operating? In short, what support does it offer the Sri Lankan state and what mechanisms does it put in place to limit the activity of the LTTE? The answer to this question will be given in later chapters. This chapter will begin to address the first three issues in the context of the conflict as it emerged and matured in the period 1948 – 1983.

a) America Responds to the Emerging Tension: Assigning Blame

The birth of the American attitude towards the causes of the tensions that have, in one form or another, coursed through the veins of Ceylon/Sri Lanka since independence, left stubborn and clearly identifiable character traits on its current manifestation. Perhaps the most significant and consistent source of information concerning the evolution of Ceylon’s post-independence troubles, as far as the American public is concerned, is the

New York Times. Consequently, this chapter relies substantially upon this source not only to highlight how the events taking place on the island were being reported for an American audience, but perhaps more importantly, to provide a revealing insight into one of the most important (and, in fact, one of the only) sources that helped to shape American attitudes towards the island's developing conflict. As early as 1946 the New York Times was reporting apparent discriminatory constitutional practices against the Tamil (both indigenous and Indian) communities by way of a new constitution formulated to carry Ceylon into and beyond independence. The New York Times reported the president of the Indian Mercantile Chamber of Ceylon, H. M. Desai's, anger that the new constitution,

“...has merely set the final seal of sanction on the discriminatory treatment accorded by Ceylon...by keeping a large majority of them as vote-less serfs without any civic status conferred on them.”²

An article less than a month later in the New York Times reiterated the concern that minority groups within the soon-to-be independent Ceylon were being disenfranchised by the majority Sinhalese:

“All of these groups fear the dominance of the Buddhist Sinhalese who form more than half of the island's 6,700,000 population...the minority groups would like more constitutional safeguards for their communities.”³

In January of the following year at Lake Success in New York Mrs Roosevelt, the former first lady and recently elected chairman of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, was presented as part of her new post with a stern challenge: how to enforce the International Bill of Rights and what to do about the thousands of petitions received by the Human Rights Commission detailing human rights abuses throughout the world. One of the more pressing petitions, according to a contemporary observer writing in the New York Times, raised the question of what was to be done about human rights

² No author, 'New Constitution Hit by Indians in Ceylon', *New York Times*, May 19, 1946

³ No author, 'Ceylon Welcomes New Constitution', *New York Times*, June 3, 1946

abuses being committed in, amongst other countries, Ceylon⁴. Thus as early as 1947, even before Ceylon made the transition to independence, the activities of the island's leaders were drawing interest from notables within the United States and the United Nations.

Despite such early commentary by US observers about the decisions being made within Ceylon in relation to ethno-linguistic, religious and citizenship matters, Washington remained largely uninterested in these decisions. This was due, in part, because as a Dominion within the British Commonwealth, Ceylon was still under the maternal umbrella of the UK and hence issues of internal discrimination were issues firstly for the new government of Ceylon, and secondly (or if at all) for the Commonwealth Relations Office. US interest was slight, also in part, because in terms of the issues deserving of Washington's attention in South and South East Asia, those of newly independent Ceylon, were mercilessly overshadowed by the antagonisms between India and Pakistan, the finding of a solution to the seemingly intractable situation in Korea, the rebuilding and remilitarising of Japan, and the inevitability of French defeat in Indochina. In terms of US priorities in Asia, the activities of Ceylon's new government in the early 1950's simply did not rank highly enough.

And so, despite the UNP, under the guidance of Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake, passing clearly discriminatory legislation⁵ against one of the minorities, the United States, with its attention drawn elsewhere in Asia, essentially left Ceylon and her emerging internal divisions to fester. The discriminatory legislation in this case was directed primarily against the Tamils of Indian origin residing in Ceylon and not against the Sri Lankan Tamils that would form the cause célèbre of the later separatist movements, nonetheless,

⁴ No author, 'Mrs. Roosevelt is Elected Chairman of U.N. Human Rights Commission', *Special to the New York Times*, January 28, 1947

⁵ The Ceylon Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948, the Indian and Pakistani Residents Act No. 3 also of 1948, and the Ceylon Parliamentary Elections Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949

“...the introduction of the majoritarian model of democracy rule in Sri Lanka chosen already during the late-colonial period paved the way for political forms that were undemocratic in the moral sense of the term. In the end this led to violent opposition – and to dismantling of democracy.... The democratic process as a way of handling conflict failed and government rigidity led to violent opposition. The government answered in kind and in the ensuing life-and-death struggle began to manipulate both legislation and the judiciary, presumably to create greater freedom to fight its enemies. By doing so it contributed to further escalation of violence.”⁶

Whilst not necessarily directly related to the political issues at the time, the UN did recognise the need for a certain degree of assistance in Sri Lanka, consequently in 1952 the island became one of the first countries to have a UN development programme.

As earlier commented in Chapter 2, the election of 1956 – de Silva’s ‘watershed’ – heralding the arrival of SWRD Bandaranaike and his Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) coalition, the Maha Eksath Peramuni (MEP), forced a change in the issues all future elections would to some degree be fought over. It also represented the modern beginnings of the island’s cultural and linguistic tensions. Not only did the election usher in an era – unbroken until this day – whereby the Buddhist religion would be combined with Sinhalese nationalism, language and culture into the most valuable political currency, to be fought over in equal measure by the two dominant parties come election time, but it also became the point at which international observers began to take more practical notice of the political landscape being shaped in Ceylon. For so many reasons, this election is remarkable: firstly, the UNP government is toppled in the first general election since it gained power – a trend of electoral vacillation which would continue with near clockwork regularity until the present; secondly, the coalition headed by SWRD Bandaranaike was inherently socialist – openly stating its intention to nationalise key foreign owned properties – and was thus a cause of concern for the US and Great Britain; thirdly, both dominant political parties recognised from this election onwards that to win

⁶ P. Kloos, ‘Democracy, Civil War and the Demise of the Trias Politica in Sri Lanka’, in *The Cultural Construction of Politics in Asia*, ed. Hans Antlov and Tak-Wing Ngo (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000). This reference was originally cited on the website *The South Asian Idea Weblog* in an article entitled ‘Democracy in Sri Lanka’, <http://thesouthasianidea.wordpress.com/2008/02/11/democracy-in-sri-lanka/>

in the future meant to succour the ‘majoritarian’ claims for religious, cultural and linguistic dominance; fourthly, and as a clear consequence of the third issue, this is the point at which the tensions between the majority Sinhalese Buddhists and the minority Tamil communities begin to formalise into institutionally enshrined and politically rigid doctrines – opposing each other in a way that collected both democratic institutions and human beings as collateral damage. This is not necessarily a blanket critical judgment of either SWRD Bandaranaike or his SLFP coalition – quite the contrary in some respects since it is clear that politicians of all kinds exploited the island’s divisions for their own end – it is simply a recognition of the reality that, in terms of the modern origins of what we see today in Sri Lanka, the 1956 election represents its conception.

In an open letter to the New York Times, G. P. Malasekera – the Dean of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Ceylon – attempted to clarify the meaning of the 1956 election for those American observers (the majority it seems) who saw it as a landmark event signalling one or both of the following: the political naiveté of the Ceylonese electorate and its politicians who had opted for an ideologically driven governmental model, wholly unpalatable to Washington, in a fit of pique against the UNP; an election based primarily upon the emotive and dangerous dual issues of a socialist redistribution of resources and opportunity as well as a political promise of exclusory and discriminatory policies that would ‘return’ the Sinhala Buddhists to their rightful position at the top of the political, social and economic pile.

“The understanding of the recent elections in Ceylon requires a realization of the yearnings of the people. It is certainly an error to interpret the Ceylon elections as either a blow against the United States, or a leaning toward the Communists, or an indication that the people of Ceylon are too immature and too illiterate to exercise an intelligent vote...

The Ceylon elections were decided on a few very clear-cut issues. The chief of these was the Buddhist issue. Ceylon is predominantly Buddhist, with 75 per cent of the people following the Buddhist religion.

For nearly five hundred years three European powers did their best to relegate that religion to the background, if not to destroy it completely...The Buddhist system of education was completely abolished and the Buddhists were compelled to go to missionary schools for their education.

When Ceylon won her independence the Buddhists expected that measures would be devised to rehabilitate Buddhism and to restore it to its rightful place in the country. In this they were disappointed.

In 1964 the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress appointed a committee of inquiry to examine the position of Buddhists in the country and make recommendations...The United People's Front⁷ undertook to implement the recommendations. The vast majority of the Buddhist monks naturally supported...⁸

Nonetheless, assurances such as G.P. Malasekera's, did not assuage either Washington's Asian observers, nor the, at times overly cynical, American press. The signs that SWRD Bandaranaike and his coalition represented were strong enough to garner deep concern in the US. Just as much of a concern was that the election was seen by many in America as something of a turning point because it became clear that the issues of language and religion and, more importantly, of a 'restoration' of Sinhala Buddhism to a position of superiority in the island, had become the most valuable political capital. Consequently, both major parties took it upon themselves to out-do the other in terms of stoking the fires fuelling these majoritarian beliefs and convincing (if any convincing was required) those in the electorate inclined in this direction of the absolute realities of these beliefs. Hence, as a result of the 1956 electoral campaigns, and reinforced by the outcome of the election itself, discrimination had become a vital institutionalised component of political success. Democracy, in 'the moral sense of the term', and in the American view, was losing its moral compass in Ceylon. Writing in an open letter to the New York Times, Robert L. Buell, the former American Consul in Ceylon (1933 – 1937, 1943 – 45), commented that the election not only represented a "...surprise and disappointment to American officials

⁷ The United People's Front is the English translation of the Maha Eksath Peramuna (the MEP) – the coalition led by SWRD and the SLFP that won the election of 1956

⁸ G. P. Malasekera, 'Voting in Ceylon', *Open Letter to the New York Times*, May 6, 1956



and to most Americans interested in international affairs”, but also something more impacting on Ceylon’s long term relationship with America:

“If we are to continue to clamor for the end of colonial rule throughout the world as soon as possible, let us also remember that we may be helping children to walk before their legs are strong enough and not be surprised if subsequently they become bow-legged, knock-kneed or have their heads hurt by severe falls. Such encouragement may also estrange long-standing friendship with their parents.”⁹

As patronising as Buell’s comments are, they are particularly useful for two clear reasons: firstly, they give us a unique insight into how those who were part of the American foreign policy network at the time viewed the activities of the politicians, the governments, and the electorate in Ceylon vis à vis the decision to elect a government bent on socialising the country and dividing the populations; secondly, and in some respects more importantly, Buell’s comments plainly illustrate a constant and active ingredient of the US-Sri Lanka relationship – that ultimately, although the US can assist to degrees with finding solutions to the island’s troubles, responsibility ultimately rests on the shoulders of the government and the electorate:

“Let us not be busybodies trying to persuade others how to solve problems that are essentially theirs and not ours.”¹⁰

As soon as the defeat of Sir John Kotelawala and his UNP government became a formality, the press – both local and international – went into convulsions about how the US State Department would respond to this evident erosion of constitutional guarantees for large percentages of the Ceylonese population, as well as the apparent rejection of the American ideological value system by a government coalition containing hard-line Marxists and Trotskyites.

⁹ Robert L. Buell, ‘Ceylon’s Voting Appraised’, *Open Letter to the New York Times*, April 15, 1956

¹⁰ Ibid

An agreement still under negotiation during April (the month of the election) to provide Ceylon with \$5 million in aid instantly became the focus of concern. Rumours, not dispelled by State Department officials publicly expressing derision at the election results, that this aid program was to be cut because of Sir John's defeat, infected the local and international press. Outright anger burned within Ceylon that such a decision would clearly represent the worst in American interference in the democratic processes of Asian countries¹¹ – an attitude which continues to this day, and was very publically displayed during the final months of the conflict. The US State Department found itself in something of a quandary. If it cut the aid program to Ceylon it would look to all the Asian world that the United States was not interested in the ability of countries in Asia to exercise their constitutional democratic right to choose their own government. It would become a source of resentment that might spread through the rest of Asia. However, such an action would send a clear message to Ceylon that neither social and political disenfranchisement nor the socialising of government would find any sympathy in Washington. Ultimately, American Cold War concerns trumped US unease over the majority Sinhalese exercising unilateral dominance over the Ceylonese polity. The US State Department, somewhat reluctantly, faced up to the reality that whilst the emerging propinquity between the Sinhala language, Buddhism, and Ceylonese nationalism was indeed a cause for concern, it would, according to A. M. Rosenthal in his special to the New York Times, have to play second fiddle to the more immediate American fear that,

“...cancellation of the aid program would leave the field open to the Russians, who are expected to come through soon with offers of their own.

Other Ceylonese...are saying that to cut Ceylon off now would be to strengthen the hand of the Far-Left-Wing elements in Mr. Bandaranaike's coalition and make him more likely to bow down to pressure from them.”¹²

¹¹ A. M. Rosenthal, 'Ceylon Hears That US May Cut Off Aid', *Special to the New York Times*, April 12, 1956

¹² Ibid

Although the US would express major concern over the activities of successive Ceylonese/Sri Lankan government as regards the Tamil minority, there would always be a contingent balance to be effected between what the US clearly considered institutionally entrenched racial, linguistic and religious discrimination and the genuine anxiety that using aid as a tool to manipulate the political course of Ceylon's governments would result in local and regional alienation. As long as the Cold War was raging, this would always be a consideration. To interfere directly in Ceylon's politics, by withholding aid and assistance, was not something that the State Department was prepared to do in 1956. In fact, the contemporary feeling, after the shock of the April election had subsided and was replaced by an SWRD Bandaranaike surprisingly convivial to America and her aid programs (despite earlier campaign promises that he would not sell Ceylon out for American dollars), was that by beginning a programme of aid and assistance on the island, more practical influence could be brought to bare from within, as opposed to the overt linking of American demands to aid from without.

And so with the Battle Act¹³ relaxed for Ceylon (for the time being) and the Rice-Rubber Agreement with China explained (to the reluctant satisfaction of Washington) in purely economic terms, America embarked on an aid and assistance program to a country on the verge of irreversible division: a division that caused consternation in US foreign policy circles, but one which nonetheless, was prioritised below the alienation of a strategic partner of influence in South Asia.

Thus America accepted (and in certain respects helped condone) the argument that the leading politicians of newly independent Ceylon were largely responsible for, if not the creation of a division within the Ceylonese polity, then certainly the formalising and institutionalising of one. Once the precedents for the politics of language and religion had been set by the 1956 election, it would only be a matter of time before American attention be forced into a re-evaluation of its approach to Ceylon, as these precedents

¹³ Refer to Chapter 3 for explanation

were built upon by increasingly perilous government ventures into exclusion and discrimination.

b) A Descent into Violence: Communal Bloodshed, State Activity, and the Erosion of Civil Liberties

There had been communal violence before in Ceylon. There had been strikes and there had been hartals¹⁴. Tension between the two main groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils, had never been far from the surface, and had on a number of occasions broken through into public confrontation. However, before 1956, these outbreaks of violence and labour disputes had largely remained isolated incidents, easily explained or diffused by a colonial order able to contain these bubbling tensions through a mixture of stiff paternal instruction and, for the most part, judicious legal force. From 1956 onwards, these tensions were not only allowed to surface but were actively encouraged by politicians within the two main parties and, perhaps more acutely, by the government of SWRD Bandaranaike.

With independence came an unrestrained and emotional push by the majority Sinhalese for a reclamation of what they considered their rightful position within the social, cultural, political and economic fabric of Ceylon, apparently guaranteed by the democratic principle of numbers – they were the majority. And thus through a combination of political complicity, irredentist fervour, cultural repossession, and genuine fear for the future viability of the nation, the government of Ceylon, led by SWRD Bandaranaike and his SLFP, sanctioned, institutionalised and enshrined in law, these majoritarian beliefs. That is not to say that the majority Sinhalese did not have grievances – their economic and social position had deteriorated steadily under the British, and this was argument enough for a redress of grievances. Unfortunately, in their rush to gain favour with the majority, the pre-election campaigns of the SLFP and then

¹⁴ Stoppage of work, business, commerce in non-violent protest

the new government it fashioned, created with a staggering short sightedness a culturally and politically aggrieved minority determined not to be institutionalised out of existence on one side, and a fierce religio-linguistic nationalist majority equally as determined to accumulate for itself the sovereign right to run the country, on the other.

In May and June 1956 any notion of a pluralist Ceylonese nationalism took its first real blow. In response to the government's proposal to elevate the Sinhala language to that of the country's national tongue – essentially bonding Ceylonese nationalism to one specific culture – many within the Tamil community took to the streets. A conservative estimate put the death toll at around 150. This proposal was rapidly passed through the legislature and into law in June. It is at this historical juncture that calls for autonomy in the Western and Eastern Provinces (the Tamil heartlands) within a federalist system, began to be voiced with vigour by the Tamil Federal Party¹⁵. At the same time the island began a decline into economic convulsions caused by the high cost of living and stagnant wage levels. Stoked by leftists both inside and outside the government many within the Sinhala work force – particularly in the Colombo ports – began organising crippling strikes. In 1957 there were 304 strikes and by July of 1958 there had already been 200 with the loss of 804, 493 and 206,000 man hours lost respectively¹⁶.

The deep and widening divisions within Ceylon were, often viciously, reflected in the swathe of new Sinhala and Tamil language newspapers, each demonising the other and calling for even stronger measures to either resist or promote Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. In what would become something of an ironic pattern of future behaviour, Buddhist monks issued pamphlets and proclamations denouncing the Tamils and calling for their annihilation. For their part the Tamil community, angry at their apparent relegation to the position of the state's 'whipping boys' and galvanised by the Federal Party, began calls for a separate state within Ceylon. SWRD Bandaranaike, in typical fashion, shouldered little responsibility for either the strikes or the riots. Instead he

¹⁵ De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, p. 628

¹⁶ Middleton, 'Ceylon's Democracy Faces New Test in Wake of Strife'

unconvincingly laid partial blame for the strikes at the doorsteps of a number of foreign embassies and diplomats¹⁷ whilst at the same time drew the tenuous (but intentionally alarmist) link between the Tamil rioters and the 'We Tamil' organisation originating in Tamil Nadu which, in his own words, sought to embrace "...Tamil communities in southern India, Northern Ceylon, East Africa and Malaya"¹⁸.

American journalist, Drew Middleton, related the twin issues of cultural and linguistic conflict and Ceylonese nationalism to American economic and political concerns for the Asian region when he said:

"The rioting of May and June was the climax of two years of mounting ill feeling between the Sinhalese and Tamils. But the rioting, bad as it was, resulted from only one set of tensions. Others now developing will be as important and from the standpoint of the United States more dangerous.

The chief of these is the conflict between the way of life patterned on the western values and the emerging forces of Asian nationalism plunging ahead toward economic nationalisation and intolerant of the restraints of democratic rule."¹⁹

It is certainly worth noting at this point that the New York Times (from whence the last four footnotes have come) retains a unique historical capacity for illustrating the manner and mood in which the events unfolding in Ceylon were being presented to the American audience. For this reason, among others, this periodical continues to be an invaluable resource.

What Middleton misses in his excellent New York Times article²⁰ appraising the situation in 1958, is that, although he allows for the seriousness of the rioting, he believes the nationalist tendencies exploding in Ceylon (and in many other Asian nations) should take precedence over the Sinhala-Tamil tensions. He ignores the connection, wholly specific

¹⁷ The Criminal Investigation Department of Ceylon's police raised the name of a Soviet diplomat, Alexander Gurionov, as a conspirator involved in the rioting and strikes, *Ibid*.

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ From which the previous four citations have come

to Ceylon, between the nationalism looking ‘toward economic nationalisation’ and the cultural, religious and linguistic pressures driving the emerging conflict. In short what this meant was that, because of the ‘Sinhala Only’ Act (and later legislation) linking language, and consequently culture and religion, to national identity, the Asian nationalism to which Middleton referred and which he believed to be so dangerous to the United States, was inseparable from, and in many cases driven by, the Sinhala Buddhist/Tamil strains. Thus, if America was to be concerned by Asian nationalism, it was, in Ceylon, to be just as concerned, if not more so, about the government’s activities relating to the two communities – ‘intolerant of the restraints of democratic rule’.

Consequently, because of the absence of this subtle connection being presented in US newsprint, American audiences, like Middleton, would not be privy to the complete composite situation evolving in Sri Lanka. Thus, American understanding (that shaped by the reportage reaching across the Atlantic), would be incompletely formed. Middleton is not alone in his incomplete assessment of the situation – much of the information being transmitted to American eyes and ears was, in one respect or another, incomplete. What emerges as a result is that American audiences (in Washington *and* within the general populace) received largely deficient information from limited sources and understandably were only able to formulate, at best, partially accurate attitudes vis à vis the island’s emerging divisions. This ‘narrow’ view of Ceylon’s troubles becomes almost an historical truism, and thus a reason, for prioritising American resources away from the country during the Cold War, and then in subsequent years thereafter. In short, for a number of reasons, Sri Lanka has not, historically, been prioritised high enough by the US to merit direct material assistance, and therefore there is no real precedent for American resources to be channelled into the fighting of terrorism on the island. Despite the fact that the US recognises the LTTE as terrorist – they have neither the interest, incentive, nor the inclination to become actively involved in its dissolution. This is a point driven home in the final chapters of the thesis.

In August 1958, in something of an uncharacteristic admission of error – that he had in fact opened a Pandora’s Box – SWRD Bandaranaike attempted to assuage the Tamil community, and by doing so put the lid back on, with a token piece of legislation that gave ‘reasonable’ use of the Tamil language in administration²¹. This Act was flatly rejected by the Tamils and seen by the extremists in Bandaranaike’s own party as close to an outright betrayal. Regardless, although the Bill was approved by Parliament, “the regulations necessary for its implementation were not passed until 1966 when Dudley Senanayake was prime minister²². The State of Emergency that Bandaranaike had declared in response to the riots and strikes and as a means of maintaining a semblance of law and order was effectively replaced in March 1959 by the amended Public Security Act. This Act “...armed SWRD Bandaranaike with sweeping new powers to outlaw political strikes and put down civil disorders”²³. According to the American journalist, Elie Abel, the Public Security Act served to centralise powers into the hands of Bandaranaike – an accumulation of largely unchecked authority way out of relation to the problem at hand and a direct threat to the civil liberties of the workers and the general population. Amongst some of the powers he amassed were the ability to outlaw any strike he personally believed had no merit, bring in the army and navy to put down whatever he construed as ‘civil disorder’, declare specific areas as being in a ‘state of emergency’ without the “cumbersome machinery of putting the whole country in the same status”²⁴, and, rather oddly for a socialist government, to effectively “impair the bargaining position of Ceylon’s trade unions”²⁵.

In an address to a UN Seminar in 1959, the topic of which was the protection of human rights from the “...Abuse of Administrative Authority”, SWRD demonstrated a startling degree of hubris (although some would say ‘honesty’) when he, not so subtly, attempted

²¹ The Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28

²² De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, p. 630

²³ Elie Abel, ‘Ceylon Gives Sweeping New Powers to Leader Under Security Law’, *Special to the New York Times*, March 13, 1959

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

to justify his own accumulation of power by way of legal and moral relativism. The speech he gave was littered with his own personal presumptions on what human and civil rights were and how protection of them rightfully differs from state to state – depending upon the circumstances prevalent in those states. Of course such postulations are neither original nor necessarily true, however, he then goes on to use this relativistic argument to explain why it is then crucial to understand that it is not only natural, but in many cases vital, that states accrue special administrative power, to which there “...cannot be any appeal at all”²⁶. One cannot help but think that the majority of this speech – prepared and delivered during a time of social and economic disturbance amidst voluble calls for governmental accountability in their exercise of power – is simply a not-so-thinly veiled attempt at justifying his own government’s recent, contentious, actions. His sophisticated rationalisation was exemplified by his ‘conclusive’ argument that, “You just cannot prevent it”²⁷. Thus, arguably, the foundation stone for the Ceylonese state’s relationship to its citizens – of the government using legal and moral relativism to validate and defend its activities – was laid. Such a philosophy of governmental rule helps to contextualise the historically circumspect American approach to providing assistance to a country, it believes, often transgresses the democratically acceptable parameters for governance.

If we examine the total US aid and assistance statistics for the Bandaranaike years they tell a revealing story. From 1956 to 1958 (the years of his election and the outbreak of severe unrest over the language issue) American assistance to Ceylon actually rose substantially from 5.1 million dollars in 1956 to 20.6 million dollars in 1958. This can be explained in a number of ways. Firstly, since Congressional budgets generally take a year or more to calculate and, up until immediately prior to the election day, most American observers were still convinced of a UNP victory, the rise, at least in 1957 to 11.4 million dollars, was very much a hangover from the US approach to the previous government. The figure of 20.6 million dollars in 1958 is explained because, despite SWRD

²⁶ SWRD Bandaranaike, ‘Remedies for the Abuse of Administrative Authority’, in *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 449-255, p. 454

²⁷ Ibid, p. 453

Bandaranaike's campaign stump that he would immediately nationalise certain foreign owned industries, such extreme (to the US and their oil companies in operating in Ceylon) actions did not really materialise. Additionally, despite the Official Language Act passing the legislature in June 1956 its provisions were not fully implemented until SWRD Bandaranaike's widow, Sirimavo, succeeded him upon his death as prime minister and insisted that the 'Sinhala Only' act be put into practice. Thus, it was not really until January 1963 (when Sinhala was made the official language of Ceylon) that the full import of SWRD Bandaranaike's drive to supersede all language and religion by implanting Sinhala and Buddhism into the constitutional framework of Ceylon, was realised. In the two years leading up to this event, Sirimavo's government had nationalised the island's schools (with the obvious consequences for the language of instruction and thus access to education). In response to mostly peaceful Tamil demonstrations against this government legislation (which substituted Sinhala for English as the language of government administration and of courts of law) in areas such as Jaffna, her administration occupied the Tamil areas of the North and the East with the military. From her inauguration in 1961, to the defeat of her government in a general election March 1965, US assistance to Ceylon went into a precipitous decline from \$14.1 million to just \$3.9 million.

Of course the governmental policies regarding language, religion and thus Ceylonese nationalism, pursued so venomously by Sirimavo Bandaranaike, were a major concern to the US and thus aid and assistance was subsequently restricted. However, it is almost impossible to quantify and separate the causes of the decline in US assistance into neat, unfettered issues. For example, in the same years as the acceleration of government activity regarding the Tamil community there was a succession of issues which caused a general discomfort to the US, and on occasion drew harsh criticism and rebuke, followed by swift response. The introduction of the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation Bill in December 1960 – effectively demonstrating Sirimavo's desire to nationalise Ceylon's UK and US owned oil interests – was swiftly followed in 1961 by the Ceylon Petroleum

Corporation Act which began in practice what the Bill had proposed in theory. Largely in response to this seizure of American assets without due compensation, the US Congress passed the 'Hickenlooper Amendment' to the Foreign Assistance Act in August 1962, under the auspices of which the US suspended all aid to Ceylon. In addition, there were a number of other issues which, in combination with the government's Tamil policies, and her nationalisation and socialisation of the economy, came to impact how the US viewed Ceylon²⁸. Consequently, in this period (1960 – 65) there was an intense kiln-firing of the various issues which came to dominate the US-Lanka relationship, and one of the most important of these elements (among a number) for its long term future viability, was the palatability to the US of the measures taken by the Sri Lankan government in regards to the Tamil Community and their grievances.

A Times of London article of June 1961 gave a general but appropriate summation of the policies of Sirimavo Bandaranaike towards the Tamil communities of Ceylon when it commented that,

“...Mrs Bandaranaike has reaffirmed her allegiance to “Sinhala only” in its most categorical interpretations, and has omitted even such gestures towards the Tamils as any democratic Prime Minister of a multi-racial country should have felt bound to make.”²⁹

Interestingly, the point being made in the article is that the actions of the government were out of keeping with the democratic responsibility it had to maintain the successful legal, economic and social protection of *all* of its people and not simply a certain group within the population. Consequently, in the eyes of many in the international community, America included, Sirimavo's government was inherently *un-democratic* and therefore difficult to support. The problem became, however, that all subsequent governments had, in order to compete for the Sinhala majority vote, to demonstrate not so much a willingness but an eagerness to promote, above all else, the primacy 'rights' of their

²⁸ For some of these other issues see Chapter 3

²⁹ No author, 'Mrs Bandaranaike's Last Chance', *The Times*, Tuesday, June 27, p. 13

culture. Obviously this meant pursuing exclusory and ‘undemocratic’ (in the eyes of many onlookers) policies towards the Tamil community or risk being seen as appeasers. This conundrum became something of a ‘Catch 22’ in the evolution of the strife: promotion of the Sinhalese community gained you votes but alienated and then ‘revolutionised’ the Tamil community – thus powering the communal problem; to solve the problem the politicians had largely created they would have to somehow alleviate the plight of the Tamil community. Unfortunately in doing so the Sinhalese leadership would cry foul, seeing the action as a betrayal of their own culture and as a reduction in their own rights and privileges – something to be fervently resisted. No more singular example of this resistance exists than the assassination of SWRD Bandaranaike. Again, this element powered the communal problem. In an earlier Times article the same unnamed author condemned the political parties for their “...moral failure of political leadership”³⁰.

It is this ‘Catch 22’ – faced by every successive post-independence government – that helps drive the tensions and in many respects leads to cries of civil, political and human rights violations by all sides. In their responses to the address of thanks for the speech from the Throne in August 1960, many of those involved in the early incarnation of the troubles handed in amendments to the speech in order that they be debated in the House of Representatives and their views be publicly recorded. It would serve us well at this juncture to highlight some of these views because they help to illuminate the near impossibility of solving the predicament created by those looking for political support, as well as the tricky accusation-counter-accusation environment that continues to constrain viable long term progress. The accusations made on all sides usually orbit around the central themes of civil, political and human rights infringement. According to the Federal Party, the speech showed,

“...no realization of the patent fact that the present unitary system of parliamentary government can function democratically and justly only in a

³⁰ No author, ‘Minority Race In Revolt’, *The Times*, Monday June 26, 1961, p. 11

unilingual and uninational country, and that our present constitution has been imposed most irrationally and unfairly on Ceylon...and has thereby undermined the democratic rights and liberties of 2,500,000 Tamil-speaking peoples who, being a permanent minority, are placed in a position of perpetual dependence on the good will of 6,500,000 Sinhalese people who constitute a permanent linguistic majority, and therefore inevitably suffer whenever their political, cultural, and economic interests are at variance or in conflict with those of the Sinhalese nation.”³¹

However, at the other end of the spectrum the speech was denounced because,

“...it constitutes a betrayal of the election pledges so recently given to the Sinhalese and Buddhist people of this country, and that such a policy will result in the establishment of a Tamil state not only in the northern and eastern provinces but also in other parts of Ceylon...”³²

Meanwhile the United National Party (in opposition) decried the government’s proposals to take control over certain privately held newspaper companies as a step towards “...the setting up of a totalitarian state”³³.

It is almost a truism in Sri Lanka’s post-independence history that with the rise of the island’s tensions came a decline in respect for the rights of the individual, whether those rights be political, human, civil, social, cultural or religious. This decline has been precipitous and well documented and is visible as an indelible blemish on the island’s brief modern evolution. It is a result of the realities of conflict – the *realpolitik* endorsed by successive governments as a means of maintaining control of a civil strife context always in very real danger of engulfing and destroying the order of the state . It is explained (and in some cases justified) by the government *de jour* as a necessary method of countering terrorism and insurgency. However, what is also patently clear is that the state machinery (and more recently the *extra-state* machinery), and often the individual politicians themselves, indulged in the kind of rights violations unconscionable to the

³¹ No Author, ‘Ceylon Government Faced With Many Vital Issues’, *The Times*, Monday August 22, 1960, p. 6

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

international community. These violations have occurred with increasing frequency of late³⁴ and do not always target those from the Tamil community. To paraphrase Mr Dias Bandaranaike, Minister of Finance³⁵, after an attempted coup in January 1962, and in response to outcries over the government's subsequent introduction of a 'coup bill' which would hand a variety of extra-ordinary powers to the government, 'a little bit of totalitarianism would be good for Ceylon'³⁶.

The purpose of this section of the chapter has been to highlight issues which relate to the Sri Lankan state's handling of, and response to, the Tamil community and their grievances (both real and perceived). Consequently, we have examined some of the methods employed by the Sri Lankan state and the reasons for their use, whilst at the same time offered an overview of their historical genesis as well as a judgement as to why the US often feels discomfort in its support for the island's governments, particularly when questions of human and civic freedoms become part of the bi-lateral dialogue. Again, these issues were born in the decades immediately after independence, and have persisted as part of the US-Lanka relationship up to the present. In terms of the issues of human and civil rights violations (by both the LTTE and the State government) the modern manifestation of the relationship is truly a child of these early years and is in fact currently near-dominated by the US concern over state-sponsored rights transgressions.

c) Condemnation or Sympathy? America Positions Itself Towards the Emerging Conflict

Even a brief reading of articles from the last fifty years, whether they be from scholarly journals or American newspapers, will leave readers with the overriding and largely accurate impression that American observers examining the evolution of the tensions on the island, have tended towards the view that the country's dominant political parties, and

³⁴ More detail will be given about more recent, and profoundly serious, examples in later chapters

³⁵ He joined the Cabinet in 1960 and at 29 he was the youngest Finance Minister in the Commonwealth

³⁶ Robert N. Kearney, 'New Political Crises of Ceylon', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 2, No. 4, (1962): pp. 19-27

consequently the governments they formed, are principally responsible for the troubles that emerged. As a result, and as a clear – though fluid – corollary, there has been a great deal of sympathy demonstrated, by both scholars and US politicians, towards those groups seen as being subjugated³⁷ by the Sri Lankan state. Accordingly, what we see over the course of the country's post-independence difficulties specific to the Sinhala Buddhist-Tamil tensions, is a tendency to view (rightly in some instances) the Tamil community, in all of its complex permutations, almost as one homogenous oppressed group. This generally sympathetic view, becomes somewhat complicated, for obvious reasons, by the emergence of the LTTE and the 'formal' outbreak of conflict in 1983. It becomes even more problematic after 1997 when the then US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, proscribed the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. After September 11th and the declaration of the War on Terror by the Bush administration, this view, many would say, became an untenable position.

Although the island's conflict has historical roots prior to the 1970's, the LTTE only came into existence in the mid to late 1970's, and it wasn't really until the formal outbreak of tensions in 1983 that the group began its rise to prominence and the world turned their (often still only casual) attention to the island's strains, with the outbreak of the anti-Tamil riots³⁸. The spotlight was shone on the island with brighter intensity when, in 1987, four years of Indian mediation in the troubles culminated in, what would become, a disastrous intervention by an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). From 1983 onwards we see the systematic radicalisation of Tamil politics and an intensified urgency in calls for Tamil separatism³⁹. This radicalisation ushered in an era of violent competition amongst those groups looking for dominance – a competition that would be won by the LTTE. Consequently, the American view of the LTTE specifically – as an

³⁷ The term 'subjugated' is not the author's own but a reference to the viewpoint often maintained by American observers

³⁸ K. M. de Silva put it best when he said, "With the anti-Tamil riots and disturbances of 1983 a qualitative change transformed Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, from a relatively low-intensity one to an increasingly violent one and from being a generally localized business to a conflict with regional ramifications." De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, p. 695

³⁹ De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, p. 695-697

insurgent faction – did not truly become recognisable and definable until the activities of the group began to show the hallmarks of its more modern-day manifestation – post 1983. Activities like its resistance to the IPKF, assassinations of key politicians such as Ranjan Wijeratne and L. Athulathmudali in 1991 and 1993 respectively, the assassinations of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 and President Premadasa in 1993, and the 1996 bombing of the Central Bank, gave a global public prominence to the group which could not be ignored by the United States.

What can be said, with due caution but no small measure of accuracy, is that until 1983 (and in many respects much later) the US did not maintain a comprehensive, cohesive or fixed position towards the LTTE for almost the simple reason that it had yet to evolve into the terrorist insurgency it would in the decades after. What can be seen however, is that despite this, the historical principles governing the US-Lanka relationship in terms of the conflict (who the US believes is responsible, how and why it originated, American concern with the extra-judicial activities of the state, sympathy for the Tamil community, finite resources, and so on), maintain a strong influence on how Washington has responded to the LTTE and its activities.

The US policy network has been compelled to evolve its stance towards the island's conflict since 1983 in the sense that it has been forced to assimilate two apparently competing strands of perspective: its initial and very simplistic view that the government bore most of the blame and that the Tamil community were victims of state oppression. Once the violence escalated and formalised into, what the US began to term, a conflict between a terrorist network and a sovereign state, it became increasingly difficult for America to retain such an over-simple and Manichean view. Nevertheless, the origins of America's engagement with the island's tensions are such that, despite Washington's global hard-line on all forms of terrorism (particularly after September 11th), there is still a palpable 'sympathy' with the cause (though clearly not the methods) of the Tamil insurgency – a 'sympathy' clearly evidenced by former US Ambassadors in interviews

later in the thesis. Consequently, what this means in real terms is that whilst the US currently and correctly condemns the actions of the LTTE, it doesn't publicly commit any meaningful resources to its defeat. In concert with a number of other vital considerations – the unpalatable activities of the Sri Lankan government, the lack of political will to be seen as interfering in the strategic back yard of India and Pakistan, the cynical view that Sri Lanka holds little of economic or tactical value, and the necessary prioritising of global US resource deployment – the historical sympathy shown by the US to the cause of the Tamils often helps to guide (some say obscure) American policy towards the conflict in Sri Lanka. It is important that this point not be overstated but it most certainly must be given its due attention in combination with other factors already mentioned.

And so we find ourselves in a strange land where, because of the LTTE being given the status of a Foreign Terrorist Organisation by the US, it is illegal for anyone to materially support it or promote it within the United States. By declaring the LTTE as an FTO it is bound by its own political machinery to condemn it and seek its dissolution. However, at the same time, the State Department is restricted in the amount of assistance it can offer Sri Lanka in its battle against one of, if not *the*, most advanced terrorist networks in the world, because of its public concern that the island's governments, are a) historically culpable (in the main) for the conflict, and b) have committed, and continue to commit, widespread abuses over the population it is charged with protecting. Thus, despite its 21st century commitment to rooting out terrorism in all of its forms, the US often finds itself forced to withhold, or at least threatening to withhold, assistance from a government which it deems as a frequent contravener of the democratic standards protecting human and civil rights.

To demonstrate the extreme current relevance of America's concern for state sponsored human and civil rights violations in contemporary⁴⁰ Sri Lanka as a contingent factor in the US-Lanka relationship, one need only to look at the very recently proposed House

⁴⁰ Contemporary at the time of writing this chapter meaning mid 2008

Resolution 1338⁴¹. This resolution, sponsored in the House Committee on Foreign Affairs by Congressmen Brad Sherman (California), Frank Pallone Jr. (New Jersey) and Jerry Weller (Illinois) is a damning indictment primarily of President Mahinda Rajapakse's Government and their conduct vis à vis the conflict. Although the resolution calls upon the US Government to condemn the LTTE and their tactics, it principally targets the Sri Lankan government for criticism.

Amongst the resolution's criticisms levelled at the Sri Lankan government are: that the state should be castigated for pursuing a military solution to the conflict with no regard to the possibility of a political settlement; that this military resolution has "...led to increased numbers of disappearances and been used to justify severe restrictions on humanitarian aid workers"; that the TMVP, a former paramilitary group now allied with the government, "...continues to commit serious human rights violations" such as the recruitment of child soldiers "and criminal acts with impunity"; that it denies "...adequate humanitarian aid to the civilian population and attacks on the media with impunity"⁴².

Perhaps the most significant proposal in the resolution (and implicitly the greatest criticism of the Sri Lankan government) is that the Government of the United States should,

“...support a transition to sustainable peace in Sri Lanka by encouraging an international human rights monitoring presence, protecting the work of civil society and media, facilitating access of humanitarian operations, and retaining democratic principles in which rule of law and justice pervades”.⁴³

To put this suggestion – that an international human rights monitoring mission be sent to Sri Lanka – into some kind of context, some of the countries that currently have such

⁴¹ House Resolution 1338, 110th Congress, 2D Session, July 10, 2008

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

missions in them are Haiti, Iraq and Sudan. This is not to say that such a suggestion has not been made before by either the UN or Human Rights Watch, but the fact that in 2008 such a proposal is being sponsored in the US Congress is abundant evidence that the subject of civil and human rights is a major dynamic in the US-Lanka relationship. Many would say that these issues are the primary determinant of the bi-lateral connection because, now that the Cold War is no longer a concern and with a balance of trade heavily in favour of the US, there is little else that so obviously defines the US relationship with Sri Lanka other than the island's conflict and the state's methods of approaching it. Of course this became a crucial policy consideration once the War on Terror was declared, necessitating a more clearly defined US strategy towards the conflict in Sri Lanka.

US newspapers have begun to carry more and more text on the abuses committed by the Sri Lankan government – in a manner which reflects and reinforces the historical American perspective – to the extent that the operations of the LTTE, ironically, seem to come second in importance to US observers. The Boston Globe carried one of many such pieces in August 2007, just as fighting resumed in full force, which outlined the importance of holding the Sri Lankan state accountable for its transgressions, and placing these transgressions in an historical pattern of abuse that, it contended, continues to stymie efforts to bring the conflict to a successful resolution. The article was highly critical of the “downward spiral” of “Successive Sri Lankan governments” which “have become famous for pledging to investigate abuses, setting up commissions, and then failing to hold abusers accountable.” The author went on to detail a series of recent abuses apparently sponsored by the state:

“Today Rajapaksa is Sri Lanka's sixth president, leading a government accused of egregious human rights abuses. Since fighting between government forces and the Tamil Tigers resumed in full vigor in mid-2006, civilians have become the primary target – not just in direct clashes but in the insidious "dirty war" fought by both sides.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Charu Lata Hogg, ‘Scruples Fade in Sri Lanka’, *The Boston Globe*, August 20, 2007

The following is a list of some of the accusations levelled at the current government by the author of the article:

- Security forces have subjected civilians to "disappearances," indiscriminate attacks, forced displacement, and restrictions on humanitarian aid.
- Critics of the government – as Rajapaksa was in the 1980s – have been threatened and demonized as national traitors and terrorist sympathizers.
- Since it resumed serious military operations against the rebels last year, 315,000 people have had to flee their homes because of fighting. The government has forced some to return in unsafe conditions.
- Since January 2006, more than 1,100 disappearance cases have been reported. Almost all of the disappeared are Tamil men between the ages of 18 and 50, and in a majority of the cases witnesses allege complicity of security forces.
- One year ago, gunmen killed 17 local workers from the Paris-based group Action Against Hunger. Despite evidence linking soldiers to the deaths, the government has failed to hold anyone accountable. The same goes for two Red Cross workers slain in June.
- The government has arrested journalists, Tamils, and Sinhalese under recently reintroduced emergency regulations that allow authorities to hold a person for up to 12 months without charge.
- Eleven media workers have been killed since August 2005. The government has arrested no one for those crimes.⁴⁵

Whilst it is not the goal of this chapter to delve too deeply into issues relating to the post September 11th aspect of the relationship (which will be discussed in much greater depth in later chapters), what is crucial at this point is to demonstrate the link between the historical American approach to the conflict (and the groups involved) and the current

⁴⁵ The author has simply taken the text of Hogg's article and placed in bullet point form

principles which govern just how the US positions itself towards the LTTE. Since this position is determined in symbiosis with its orientation to the government, it is extremely difficult to separate distinctly the two. In fact what we find is that the US, quite correctly in many respects, approaches the conflict, the LTTE, and the Sri Lankan state, with necessary circumspection because of the challenge involved in separating the truth on the ground from the obfuscation, propaganda and, outright untruth propounded by all sides. Consequently, and almost absurdly, the history of American involvement in the ethnic tensions of the island has been largely restricted to highly contingent financial assistance and limited military training because, whilst the US State Department condemns the actions of the terrorist organisation, it at the same time finds it difficult to fully support the state machinery of a country that has historically displayed, quite publicly on occasion, its unwillingness to protect all of its citizens in accordance with, either the internationally recognised standards of human and civil liberties or, even more worryingly, the country's own laws.

The State Department's annual Country Reports on Human Rights invariably describe a gloomy scenario of competing transgressions by both sides. The thread of US concern at, not simply the activities of the LTTE and its forerunners, but the successive Sri Lankan governments, runs right through the weave of the modern American-Sri Lankan relationship. When Jimmy Carter called on the UN General Assembly not to re-elect Sri Lanka to the Human Rights Council in 2008 because of the country's "...deteriorating human rights record...", he was proving two things: firstly that, for many international observers, the actions of the island's government frequently overshadow both the activities of the LTTE and the pressing needs of the people to have the conflict resolved; secondly, that the historic American view of the island's problems holds fast and firm today⁴⁶. Further complicating an already complex scenario is the historic sympathy the US holds towards, what it sees, as an excluded and heavily subjugated demographic of the Sri Lankan polity: the Tamil community. Many go even further, claiming simply that,

⁴⁶ Press Release, 'Statement From The Carter Center on Upcoming U.N. Human Rights Council Elections', *The Carter Center*, 16 May, 2008

“...the United States does not monitor the Tamil Tigers either, because they are not considered a threat to the United States or to American citizens in Sri Lanka”⁴⁷. This viewpoint – that American reluctance to become involved more directly against the LTTE and its network is based on the presumption that the terrorist organisation is not a threat to the US – is examined more closely in chapters 7 and 8.

And so, despite their evolution into arguably the most ‘successful’ and proficient terrorist organisation in the world, the United States, through a mixture of political and strategic ambivalence, prioritisation of resources away from the island, dismay at the activities of the Sri Lankan state, and a general sympathy for the position of the island’s Tamils, historically finds it difficult to commit the kind of support to defeating the LTTE that it does to other insurgent networks.

Of course there have been shifts and developments in the relationship post 1983 *and* 2001 in respect of the conflict (which will be explained in later chapters), however, despite these modifications, the central determining themes of the relationship continue largely intact and can be traced historically back through the decades to independence. Perhaps President Truman’s conditional criteria for receiving unwavering American support remains, even as the conflict escalates, the greatest historical obstacle to a more prolific bilateral relationship.

⁴⁷ Raymond Bonner, ‘Tamil Guerrillas in Sri Lanka: Deadly and Armed to the Teeth’, *New York Times*, March 7, 1998

CHAPTER 5

1983: Formalising the Conflict

It is important, before the thesis leaps into the events of 1983 and the consequent trajectory of Sri Lankan history from that year, that a brief examination of the issues which helped shape the island's ethnic trouble immediately prior to this period is given. There are a number of reasons for this, not the least of which is the fact that the years directly preceding 1983 are crucially formative to the state-terrorist narrative that developed and which now dominates the country's national resources and attention. In addition, the actions and decisions of the government and those claiming to represent the Tamil communities, in the years leading up to 1983 have such an impact on the course of the ethnic issue that it forces the international community to reappraise and reposition their attitudes towards the troubles. In a sense, what occurs in these years is the formalising of the island's tensions into a legally recognised and internationally reviewed civil conflict, the results of which draw ever increasing attention from countries now forced into a re-examination of their position in relation to it, including of course, the United States.

a) Setting the Scene

In July 1977 Junius R. Jayawardene of the UNP comprehensively defeated the SLFP of Sirimavo Bandaranaike in, what is now considered, a landmark general election. Bandaranaike's plan to socialise Sri Lanka's economy had resulted in skyrocketing unemployment and a stagnant private sector. The general election was something of a double edged sword for Jayawardene because, whilst the UNP were celebrating their victory and he his Prime Ministership, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) were

equally jubilant at their convincing gains in the Tamil areas of the north¹. This was problematic for the newly elected Jayawardene because of the pressures immediately brought to bear on his new administration by such TULF victories. The reason for these pressures was that in May 1976, at its national convention held at Pannakam in the north of the island, the TULF leadership unanimously passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a separate state – Tamil Eelam – for the Tamils of Sri Lanka. From this point onwards, the goals, both political and otherwise, of those claiming to represent the Tamil communities in Sri Lanka became interminably bound to the issue of separatism. Consequently, for Jayawardene and the UNP, the election came with a built in predicament: how to deal politically with a legitimate and popularly supported entity (now the main opposition party in the legislature) that advocated the division of the country. Naturally, Jayawardene could not simply ignore the gains and consonant demands of the TULF, but neither could he be seen to be acknowledging the right of the Tamils – represented by the TULF – to form a separate state within the island. To even acknowledge separatism as part of the political discourse would be tantamount to political suicide at a time when the Sinhala electorate, having dumped the SLFP out of power, were nonetheless jealously protective of the gains they had made under the party. Any dilution of these accrued advantages would instantly weaken the support base of the newly reorganised and re-energised UNP.

When asked in September 1977 whether or not the subject of a separate state would be allowed on the agenda, or the issue raised at the upcoming All Party Conference on Tamil grievances, Jayawardene sternly replied that there would be “...no question of a separate state. That is outside the forum of discussion”. He went on to reveal the reality of his predicament when, in response to a question of whether he could foresee offering the Tamils self-determination, he bluntly stated, “No, I would not be allowed to by the people”². Jayawardene’s statements came in the midst of an upsurge in violence between the two communities. In August 1977 anti-Tamil riots erupted leaving, according to the

¹ The Federal Party evolved via the Tamil United Front into the TULF

² Richard Wigg, ‘Sri Lanka rules out separatism for Tamils’, *Times of London*, September 3, 1977, p. 5

official death toll, 97 Tamils, 24 Sinhalese, 1 Muslim and 3 unidentified persons dead³. The new language of separatism and the violence of August had a two-fold effect: firstly it proved to the leadership of the Tamil community that, for its own safety, the Tamil population needed a land of their own otherwise they would live lives of fearful refugees; secondly, it hardened the attitudes of the Sinhalese, fearing that any concessions given to the Tamils would be one step closer to a permanent division of their homeland – something to be resisted with all necessary means.

In November 1977, Jayawardene's government introduced a budget to parliament which effectively overturned the previous administration's calamitous socialist economic policies and acted as a statement of intent on the behalf of the UNP to move towards economic reconciliation with the West. Although the government had, only a month earlier, sent a delegation to Peking to renew the Trade and Payment Agreement between Sri Lanka and China, this was of little concern to Washington – America's relationship with China had already taken on a more relaxed and productive character after the Shanghai Communiqué, and the breakdown of the Sino-Soviet alliance. In early 1978 Sri Lanka consolidated its u-turn in economic fortunes and strengthened further the weakened relationship she had with the West with the establishment of The Greater Colombo Economic Commission (GCEC). The GCEC was essentially designed to promote investment in export related developments and to formulate incentive packages to promote foreign investment⁴. This renewed liberalisation of the economy generated a vigour (albeit a vigour almost instantly tempered by the demands of the open conflict which began in 1983) which transformed the country's export base from agricultural to manufacturing products⁵, stimulating export growth and revitalising the stagnant private sector. Jayawardene's government presided over a period of economic growth and, crucially for this study, of a renewed American interest in closer ties with the island. After the open hostility shown by the previous government – for which there is abundant

³ Ibid

⁴ Rocio Castro and Shantayanan Devarajan, *Unleashing Sri Lanka's Potential*, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, www.cbsl.gov.lk/pics_n_docs/02_prs/_docs/lecture/publec_20060629.doc

⁵ Ibid

evidence for ready consumption⁶ – the Jayawardene administration’s readiness to conciliate with the West was greeted with a quick favourable response by America. Barbara Crossette, the New York Times Bangkok Bureau Chief, and later the Delhi Bureau Chief and Chief South Asia Correspondent (covering the period 1984 – 1991), recalls that as a consequence of the more western orientation of Jayawardene’s government, the information being channelled through the embassy was of a higher quality and the American diplomats, as a consequence, were much better informed⁷. The knock-on effect of this was that there was a greater diplomatic connection between the two countries. Consequently, USAID, which had from 1968 to the end of 1974 only offered a total of 5 million dollars in aid, began establishing projects and transferring assistance with a trusting rapidity. In 1977 USAID delivered 20.9 million dollars in aid and assistance and this figure had risen to 50.7 million by 1983. Total US aid and assistance almost doubled from 1976 to 1977 and rose from 35.7 million dollars in 1976 to 80.3 million dollars in 1983⁸. From 1977 onwards USAID was involved in a number of projects ranging from the Sri Lanka Malaria Control Project, the Rice Research Project, the Agricultural Education Development Project, the return of the Peace Corps (after being unceremoniously dumped out of the country by Sirimavo Bandaranaike in 1970), the Low Income Shelter program, and the impressive Gal Oya Water Management and Mahaweli Environment Projects. In addition to the re-energising of USAID activities in Sri Lanka, the government courted a positive relationship with the West in general. The Asia Foundation, the World Bank, and the IMF began a more affirmative discourse with the Jayawardene government. The Asian Development Bank, with the direct support of the USA (amongst other countries) wrote off 34 million rupees worth of debt in 1982. Symbolic of this new friendship between the US and Sri Lanka was the five day visit paid

⁶ In Karunadasa’s, *Sri Lanka and Non-Alignment* he makes reference to the Political Declaration of the 5th Non-Aligned Summit Conference, held in Colombo in August 1976, which lauded ‘people’s victories’ against ‘imperialist aggression’ from countries such as the US. At the same summit an action Programme for Economic Co-operation re-affirmed the concept of economic self-reliance among members. The Secretary General presiding over the NAM in Sri Lanka was William Gopallawa who served under Sirimavo Bandaranaike and her SLFP

⁷ Personal correspondence between the author and Barbara Crossette, May, 2009

⁸ Source: USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)*. Note: these statistics are for USAID and Predecessors only, and NOT for Economic Assistance to Sri Lanka

by several American navy ships lead by the U.S. Admiral of the Western Command of the US Navy, Admiral Eugene P. Foster, delivering books and medical supplies. Not only did Jayawardene present no objections to the American military base on the tiny Indian Ocean island and British protectorate of Diego Garcia, but he also allowed American ships to refuel at the eastern port of Trincomalee. The presence of the US military in Sri Lanka, let alone in the Indian Ocean, would have been unheard of (or at the very least vocally condemned) under Sirimavo Bandaranaike.

Unfortunately, while Jayawardene was attempting a certain restoration of the Sri Lankan economy and a rebuilding of the relationship the island maintained with the West, domestic vicissitudes were such that the issues between the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil leadership were driving the country into a bi-polar division which would formalise the tensions and create the final ingredients for conflict. The US response to these events is crucial to the orientation Washington has evolved towards the island's problems, ultimately affecting the position it has in the War on Terror.

In 1972 Sri Lanka adopted a new Constitution which, as K. M. Silva suggests, "...unequivocally consolidated the 'Sinhala Only' policy of the late 1950's and emphasised the subordinate role of the Tamil language"⁹. In February 1978, the Jayawardene government proposed and then inaugurated (in September of the same year) another Constitution which, amongst other things, renamed the country, the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. In accordance with the Second Amendment to this constitution, Jayawardene became the country's first President. Ranasinghe Premadasa (UNP) became the new Prime Minister. With greater Executive powers, Jayawardene set about pursuing a number of, generally well-manoeuvred, "policies of conciliation" including such things as the constitutional recognition of Tamil as a national language and the reversal of the UF government's discriminatory university admissions policies¹⁰.

⁹ De Silva, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, p. 166

¹⁰ Ibid

As a reaction to the violence in August 1977, the Tamil youth groups of Jaffna began to develop a more extreme set of operating principles, indulging in carefully selected acts of terrorism and violence designed for maximum symbolic impact. The LTTE, through a process of violent elimination and fearful intimidation, began to emerge as the chief perpetrator of the brutality during this period and now saw themselves as the aggressive arm of the TULF, promoting separatism through violence while the leadership of the TULF promoted it in parliament. De Silva accurately points out the constitutional ambiguity of the TULF's position and the challenge Jayawardene now faced as regards to it. How could a major political party, involved at the highest level in a constitutional democracy call for a terminal division of that democracy *and* apparently sanction terrorism and violence as a legitimate method of achieving it? Naturally, Jayawardene chose perhaps the only realistic option he had, and on the 22nd May 1978, Parliament approved a bill proscribing the LTTE as terrorists. From this point onwards the conflation of the Tamil cause with unconstitutional calls for separatism and terrorism sets the conflict on a course which sees it become an almost intractable clash of language, ideology, territory, and politics set, not only in a small Indian Ocean island, but also in a legal international framework where battles are fought by both sides for the material support and emotional sympathy of the rest of the world.

b) The Dashing of Promise and the Language of Separatism and Terrorism

In their article, *Liberation Struggle or Terrorism? The Politics of Naming the LTTE*, Nadarajah and Sriskandarajah, provide invaluable insight into the politics as well as the benefits and dangers inherent in declaring the LTTE terrorists¹¹. For the Sri Lankan state, conflating the Tamil cause with terrorism and separatism provided the government with a legal framework within which to combat the terrorists using extraordinary means and methods. Additionally it meant that, once the conflict became truly international (which using the language of terrorism inevitably helps to do anyway), the state is able (if it is

¹¹ Suthakaran. Nadarajah and Dananjayan. Sriskandarajah, 'Liberation struggle or Terrorism? The Politics of Naming the LTTE', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2005): pp. 87-100

sufficiently forward-thinking) to legitimise its own actions in the eyes of the world, while demonising those of the insurgents. Consequently, the battle for international sympathy, and thus support, is fought as much in the arena of language, as it is on the frontlines. Long before George W. Bush refashioned the lexicon of terrorism, the Sri Lankan state was trying to name the LTTE into a corner, and isolate it internationally, by combining the Tamil struggle with the politico-linguistic issues of terror and the division of sovereignty. Meanwhile the LTTE were attempting to resist being given such a label, going on the propaganda offensive not only for the benefit of those countries with an interest in Sri Lanka, but also for the far-reaching Tamil diaspora that would spread throughout the world following the watershed year of 1983. According to the arguments of both sides, the LTTE were resisting their attempted subjugation by the majority Sinhalese, whilst the Sri Lankan state were resisting the illegitimate demands of the TULF and the terrorism of the LTTE. The danger is of course that the labelling of any organisation as terrorist means that any political or negotiated settlement is near impossible as long as the name remains. Whilst naming the LTTE as terrorist brings into the Sri Lankan state's armoury an altogether more expansive set of weaponry, it also makes for a suitably intractable solution to the problem – neither side willing or even able to give a quarter for fear of alienating those that provide the crucial public support base for either side¹².

As pointed out by Nadarajah and Sriskandarajah, Sri Lanka's fragile economy requires constant assistance by the international community, particularly, for our purposes, the US. Consequently, countries such as the US, who are frequently petitioned for aid and assistance by the Sri Lankan government, and who also provide the island with vital markets for her exports, find themselves "important actors in the 'internal' conflict"¹³. What this means essentially is that there is an economic factor which plays a pivotal role in the nature of US involvement in the conflict, alongside other countries economically

¹² For further comment on the propaganda battle between the two sides see Lawrence Saez, 'Sri Lanka in 2000: The Politics of Despair', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 41, No.1 (2001): pp. 116-121

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 94

tied to Sri Lanka. Whilst it is by no means an exclusive consideration when the US deals with Sri Lanka and the conflict, the amount of interest and tangible assistance proffered to the island will depend to a certain degree upon the success of the semantic battle being waged in the international media by the two combatants. If there is any legitimacy to the Tamil cause (and we have seen that the US sees that there is) then how does the US relate to the fact that it is now so closely (and consciously – as far as the island’s government is concerned) entwined with terrorism? Of course what this and the following chapter will examine will be the US proscription of the LTTE in 1997 as terrorists – the motivations, the meaning and the consequences. Later chapters will examine exactly what this designation, in concert with the War on Terror, meant for the Sri Lanka state/terrorist conflict in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Of course, this decade would also turn out to be the final decade of the conflict.

Through the previous chapters it has been clearly demonstrated that there is a rich history of US-Lanka economic relations and thus economic considerations have always affected the way the two countries respond to one another. This is never made clearer than when a brief examination is undertaken of the ease with which Washington and Colombo begin restoring their bond on the back of the liberalising economic measures immediately commenced by Jayawardene after his election in 1977. However, the development of the tension into a formal confrontation between terrorist and state re-contextualises the relationship, for now any sympathy the US might have towards the Tamil cause has inevitably to be filtered through the constitutional framework that has now declared public discussion of separatism illegal (via the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution) and proscribed the LTTE as terrorist.

c) 1983: The Explosion of Terror and American Hesitancy

As pointed out, with no small degree of melancholy, by Stanley Wilkin Rabindranath de Alwis Samarasinghe, in his article, ‘Sri Lanka in 1983: Ethnic Conflict and the Search for

Solutions', the years 1982 and 1983 held great promise for the Jayawardene government and thus Sri Lanka¹⁴. Jayawardene had achieved two significant successes in 1982, with a victory in the Presidential polls in October, and winning in a referendum to extend the life of parliament for another six years. This, according to Samarasinghe, should have given the Jayawardene administration political breathing space to be able to address the mounting economic problems. Unfortunately, "events proved otherwise"¹⁵.

The events of late July 1983 must be placed in the context of an incremental escalation of violence and counter-violence because, although the explosion of hostility that engulfed many parts of Sri Lanka in this month (a month we now use as something of a marker beyond which the ethnic divergence modulates into open conflict), it is necessary to see it in its immediate historical context so that we lose none of the complexity of the issue. In the months leading up to July there had been an obvious worsening of the island-wide security situation and a concurrent rise in tension between the Sinhalese and Tamils¹⁶. In 1982 and the first half of 1983 there were ten terrorist attacks on security personnel resulting in nine deaths, three assassinations of Tamil United National Party politicians in the North, numerous attacks on government property, and racially motivated violence at the University of Peradeniya and in Trincomalee. Consonant with this escalation of terrorist-led or ethnically driven violence, was an evident increase in the violence perpetrated by the armed/security services operating in the North of the island – a trend the TULF vehemently condemned and used against the government as evidence of Sinhalese oppression¹⁷.

Set against the backdrop of the state of emergency declared by the government in May and still in operation in July, a series of events sparked by the ambush and killing of thirteen Sinhalese soldiers in Jaffna, evolved into mass mob rioting, looting and killing.

¹⁴ Stanley W. R. de Alwis Samarasinghe, 'Sri Lanka in 1983: Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Solutions', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1984): pp. 250-256

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 250

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 251

¹⁷ *Ibid*

The anti-Tamil riots erupted first in Colombo and her suburbs, rapidly spreading to many areas across the island. Tamil businesses, property and lives were the targets of the Sinhalese mob. Estimates vary depending upon the sources used, but the Tamil death toll is estimated at anywhere between 400 – 600 people. There were approaching 10,000 cases of arson and half as many cases of looting¹⁸. One of the more long term effects of the July riots was the mass displacement of people. Within the island refugee camps were established to accommodate the almost 100,000 displaced, but perhaps even more significant was the beginning of a mass movement of Tamil people out of the country, initially and primarily to India but ultimately across the world, creating the basis for one of the most influential Diaspora populations on the planet. The obvious connotation of this migration of Tamil people across the world is that the Sri Lankan state-terrorist struggle becomes internationalised. From this point onwards the network of the Tamil Diaspora develops into a powerful lobby group of world opinion, often used by the LTTE for material and emotional support, but also mobilised internally to court political advantage from the institutions of their adopted nation in favour of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. The international dimension is key to viewing the conflict as less an ‘internal’ conflict and more a conflict that has trans-national implications – and should ideally be approached as such by other countries.

One of the reasons for the exodus of Tamils from the island was the belief among the community that the anti-Tamil riots of July signalled the beginning of a shift within the Sinhalese polity towards a more permanent and violent discrimination. This was, in part, a realistic assessment of the week’s disturbances as being something outside of the control of the government and, in many cases, directly organised by elements supposedly under the constitutional authority of Jayawardene himself. By any objective analysis, the riots and violence involved a number of elements within the security forces who either stood by as the mob went about its business, or actively participated in the brutality.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 253

Barbara Crossette was damning in her appraisal of Jayawardene's handling of the events of 1983, acknowledging his contribution to the conflict which followed when she said,

“Jayawardene, in my opinion – and I interviewed him several times – was inexplicably oblivious to the mounting danger. He allowed Sinhala chauvinists too much space (as in 1983) and he rarely expressed any regret or even human sympathy when atrocities occurred on either side. He lived in a world of his own, often seemingly out of touch with reality”¹⁹.

What is key for the study at this juncture, is how these events were reported in the US. The New York Times, which has been one of our prime sources thus far, carried a number of articles that either largely condemned the government for their inactivity, complicity and in some cases both, or placed the events of July in an historical context of Tamil-Sinhala rivalry whose recent incarnation did not reflect well upon the human/civil rights record of the Sinhala dominated state. An eye witness report published in September 1983, was scathing in its appraisal of the government's handling of the events of July as well as its inability to control the behaviour of the security forces in the preceding months. In short, this article actually goes as far as to blame the actions of the armed forces for contributing to the events which led to the July unrest.

“The actions of Sri Lankan army units in the Jaffna district, under stringent martial law since the shooting of a soldier outside a polling booth on March 18, were largely responsible for the chain of events leading to the July upheaval. Following the shooting, army units ran amok in the neighborhood, plundering houses and raping women. The Government tacitly admitted the atrocity when it disbanded one of the army units involved.”

The article went on,

“As the situation developed into a nation-wide crisis, Sri Lankan security forces were involved in the two most flagrant atrocities of the period, the shooting of 20 Tamils pulled off a bus in Jaffna in retaliation for the 13 soldiers killed in the ambush, followed by the slaughter of 52 Tamil prisoners in Welikada Prison in

¹⁹ Personal correspondence between the author and Barbara Crossette, May, 2009

Colombo. Many of the prisoners were allegedly Eelam separatists. The warden of the prison explained to the press that Sinhalese prisoners had surprised him and stolen from him the keys to the Tamils' cells. Imagine how such a story would go down if, say, 50 black activists were killed in a South African prison.”

Perhaps the article's greatest criticism of the events was reserved for the government's handling of what it called, the 'pogrom':

“The Government reaction was a stunned and disorganized silence for four days after the beginning of the turmoil.”²⁰

What this and other reports suggest to the American reader, is that the creeping Tamil separatism emanating from the island was actually becoming justified in the sense that, “Sri Lanka's Tamils will be safe only when they have a state of their own”²¹. Regardless of whether this argument carries with it any veracity, the point of the matter is that these were the tenor of arguments being put to American audiences.

Other reports were equally as critical of the government, the security forces or the causes of the violence. They described how Sri Lanka's “...democratic liberties have been jettisoned”, blaming Jayawardene for failing to act in time (though giving him his due for his economic achievements)²². In May 1984 one New York Times article dedicated itself almost exclusively to the murder, arson, rape, slaughter and destruction of property being carried out in the northern city of Jaffna by locally stationed government soldiers. The article goes so far as to describe these atrocities as part of an historical and ...”well-documented pattern of behavior by the police and the armed forces”²³.

In a deliberately affecting story published in August of 1984, the New York Times tells of one Gamani Navaratna, a Sinhalese editor of the only English-language newspaper in

²⁰ C. L. Ames, 'How Violence Nurtures Separatism in Sri Lanka', *New York Times*, September 13, 1983

²¹ Ibid

²² W. K. Stevens, 'Rioting Reduces Sri Lanka's Hopes for a Stable Democracy to Ruins', *New York Times*, August 4, 1983

²³ W. K. Stevens, 'In Sri Lanka City, A Tale of Army Terror Unfolds', *New York Times*, May 2, 1984

the Tamil dominated northern city of Jaffna. Navaratna is pilloried by the Sinhalese community and threatened by the local army and police outposts because he defends the Tamils by reporting abuses carried out by government forces. “I am fighting for press freedom and human rights”, Navaratna exclaims, going on to explain how, “The danger will come from the police and the army and not the Tamils”. The core of the problem in Jaffna in the early eighties, according to Navaratna, was that neither the local military commander (who he names as Brig. Nalin Senaviratne) nor President Jayawardene could control their troops. Consequently, and quite realistically, Navaratna tries to warn the Sinhalese dominated polity from the inside, that “The more civilians (Tamil) they harass and kill, the more tigers they create”²⁴.

However anecdotal the above story may seem, the fact of the matter is that from 1983 onwards, violence and discrimination becomes part of the political landscape of Sri Lanka and the fight between the two sides for the moral high ground quickly ensues. Unfortunately, for the Sri Lankan state, the fight is lost early on. Barbara Crossette revealed an interesting duality to the nature of this loss. She believed there were two elements working in concert: the well-documented, far more sophisticated and dedicated public relations operation of the Tamil support networks overseas (“not to mention forced fund-raising”), as well as the less discussed fact that the “government didn't realize until quite late (and then apparently only briefly) how they were losing the propaganda war. There was an odd combination of official arrogance and indifference in Colombo despite the efforts of civil society”²⁵. As already determined in previous chapters, Washington has historically had a sympathetic view of Tamil grievances. The American Ambassador at the time of the riots, John H. Reed, made it clear that Washington had a “degree of sympathy for the Tamil cause”²⁶. Largely critical of the establishment forces that have seemingly given birth to the post-independence inter-ethnic and linguistic divisions, America has tended towards a hesitant role in attempts at active participation in the

²⁴ S. Hazarika, ‘Editor Angers Fellow Sinhalese in Sri Lanka’, *New York Times*, August 30, 1984

²⁵ Personal correspondence with Barbara Crossette, May 2009

²⁶ Interview conducted with former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, John H. Reed, via e-mail, April 2009

search for solutions precisely because of their ambivalence regarding who is rightly to blame. Ambassador Reed reinforced such a concept when he lamented the failure of previous governments to act responsibly, arguing that had they done so, “the problem could have been peacefully solved”²⁷. Sensitive to international analysis, and the broadly negative press the Sri Lankan government received concerning its handling of the events of 1983, there was a concerted (if belated) effort by the state to begin “salvaging Sri Lanka’s tarnished image abroad”²⁸. To a degree, this canvassing of international opinion had an impact – Ambassador Reed not hesitating to condemn and deplore the LTTE as terrorist in the recent interview – yet the sophistication of the political and propaganda network of the Tamil Diaspora also had (and continues to have) substantial success in colouring world opinion against the Sri Lankan government. Of course, since the events of 1983, the emergence of the LTTE as a proscribed terrorist network, the ideological call for separatism, and the development of a full-scale war, the issue has become ever more complicated. There are two broadly competing themes in the modern US-Lanka relationship: America is attracted by more liberal and westward orientated Sri Lankan governments, however, these governments (indeed all of the recent governments) are often highly criticised for their approach to the conflict vis à vis their human rights record. Again, Ambassador Reed, recalling the period of his tenure, explained in answer to the question of whether the embassy had concerns that human and civil rights were being violated by the government or forces supposedly under its control, that there was a “...view that civil rights were being violated”²⁹. The goal of US foreign policy is to somehow reconcile these two strands into a consistent and practical approach to the developing conflict.

Added to these two competing strands are the regional pressures exerted by India on Sri Lanka whenever Western involvement (particularly American) grows or looks possible and imminent. In fact, one of the prime reasons why the United States, has been less than

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Samarasinghe, ‘Sri Lanka in 1983: Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Solutions’, p. 253

²⁹ Interview with Ambassador Reed, April 2009

forthcoming in terms of a more direct contribution to the conflict, is that, regardless of the degree to which Washington sympathises with the Sri Lankan government of the day, they simply do “... not want to irritate other powers like India, in the region”³⁰. Barbara Crossette was more candid when she said, “The Indians would have gone wild”³¹. India is hyper-sensitive when it comes to foreign involvement in its small neighbour. In fact, as already discussed in earlier chapters, India has frequently condemned foreign navies for their presence in the Indian Ocean – firmly seen as territory under her protectionist umbrella. As Samarasinghe pointed out in his appraisal of the events of 1983, India has an ongoing concern that “...political instability in Sri Lanka could lead to “outside” interference or military presence in the country, and is a threat to Indian security”³². The vocal and negative reaction of India to Casper Weinberger’s visit to Sri Lanka (see below) is ample evidence of this sensitivity. Indeed, a tendered proposal by an American firm, initially agreed to by Jayawardene, to lease oil farms located in Trincomalee, was cancelled due to Indian protestations. Perhaps one of the most radical and disputed forms of Indian involvement in Sri Lanka was the providing of material support and military training to Sri Lankan Tamil militants by RAW³³, under Indira Gandhi³⁴. Add to this the ethnic, cultural and linguistic connection between the Tamil populations of southern India and those in Sri Lanka, and it becomes clear that, as India sees it, the only major power offering assistance of any real substance to the solution to the conflict, should be herself. This of course becomes blatantly obvious in 1987 when India sends a peace keeping force to the island in a disastrous attempt to disarm the LTTE (discussed later in the chapter). And so, from the outset, American contributions to resolving the conflict are hindered not only by the government transgressing civil liberties and human rights, but also by complex regional contingencies. One New York Times journalist perhaps encapsulated the character of early American activity regarding the conflict perfectly,

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Personal correspondence between the author and Barbara Crossette, May, 2009

³² Samarasinghe, ‘Sri Lanka in 1983: Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Solutions’, p .254

³³ The Research and Analysis Wing is India’s external intelligence agency, something akin to the CIA

³⁴ Rohan Gunaratna claims that this was done in response to the perception that Western counter-terrorism assistance to Sri Lanka amounted to an anti-Indian build up on her southern flank. *Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Crisis and National Security*, p. 20

describing how US policy offers 'discreet nudges' rather than overt interaction³⁵.

Ultimately, the issue to be addressed is whether 'discreet nudges' are consonant with the stated goals of the War on Terror.

Of great strategic value to any nation with influence on the island, Sri Lanka has always generated interest within the United States, whether that interest be in the natural east-coast deep port of Trincomalee, the use of the country as a fulcrum in its maritime transport from the west to the east, or as a part of an Indian ocean military strategy. That interest has been apparent on a number of occasions, particularly during times of Cold War regional conflict (Korean War, Vietnam War, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan etc.), and was highlighted by the visit of Casper Weinberger, Secretary of Defense, in October, 1983. Accompanied by Colin Powell and Richard Armitage (later to become Secretary of State and Deputy Secretary of State respectively under George W. Bush) Weinberger had come to Sri Lanka for a number of reasons, the primary of which was in response to the government's request for military assistance after the 1983 disturbances. Despite historic interest in Sri Lanka and, in 1983, interest in the successful management of the escalating conflict, the United States showed little eagerness to provide military assistance or personnel to advise, train and support the country's infant military.

One of the more interesting developments of this time, and one which reinforces the notion that the United States displays an historic reluctance to become actively involved in the conflict, or even a provider of substantial military assistance to the Sri Lankan government, is the involvement of Israel in the training of Sri Lanka's soldiery. This is perhaps peculiar for two reasons: firstly, as pointed out by *The Economist* at the time, the natural instinct of the Sri Lankan state should have been to look to Britain and then America for assistance, "...which, it assumed, would wish to help a pro-western government keen on free enterprise." Unfortunately, neither Britain nor America,

³⁵ No Author, 'Tiger Hunting in Sri Lanka', *New York Times*, September 4, 1984

“...showed any eagerness... So Sri Lanka appealed to Israel”³⁶. Secondly, at this time, the Sri Lankan governmental position vis à vis Israel was of public disassociation. Sirimavo Bandaranaike had closed down the Israeli Embassy after coming to power in 1970, due to Israel’s treatment of Palestinian Arabs. Popular Sri Lankan sentiment was deeply supportive of Palestine and thus largely approved of the government’s Israeli disconnection. Thus for the government to actively enlist the support of Israel and, more unusually, to invite members of the Israeli armed forces into the country to organise her own military, was a dangerous political gamble (which is why it remained a largely secret operation until it was revealed by a loose lipped member of the government, Douglas Liyanage, who, in embarrassment was moved to resign). In short, and with no measure of exaggeration, the Israeli training of Sri Lankan troops smacked, to a degree, of desperation on the part of the Sri Lankan government. This was reflected in a comment made by the Defence Minister of the time that, “Israel was Sri Lanka’s last resort”³⁷. There is a third consideration which compounds the ‘peculiar’ nature of the matter of Israeli military advisers on Sri Lankan soil. Israel has a long-standing agreement with the United States which essentially prohibits the Israeli state from assisting other countries with their security issues unless Israel’s national security is deemed under threat. The rationale used to justify Israeli military personnel training Sri Lankan soldiers was that members of the LTTE and other Tamil radical groups had been trained by the PLO in Lebanon³⁸. Consequently, Israel was, in a very circuitous fashion, protecting its national security. Israeli intervention was thus sanctioned by America, and this approval, one can’t help thinking, allowed Washington to rationalise its own lack of involvement with reassurances that it was assisting, albeit it indirectly, the Sri Lankan government. In fact, according to the same Economist article (although Ambassador Reed was unsure of this), the American General, Vernon Walters, helped to draft the agreement between Sri Lanka and Israel. Thus America, despite viewing the LTTE as a terrorist organisation³⁹, was

³⁶ No Author, ‘Call in the Professionals’, *The Economist*, September 15, 1984

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Although America Proscribed the LTTE as terrorist only in 1997, Ambassador Reed stated in the interview that there was no equivocation, the US viewed them as a terrorist organization in 1983

able to stay uninvolved “...in the Sinhala-Tamil conflict...but remain friendly” to the Sri Lankan government⁴⁰.

d) The Legacy of 1983: American Observations and Economic Imperatives

From this point onwards, Sri Lanka found itself embroiled in a cycle of violence, where aggression and counter-aggression became a ritual and regular part of the island's evolution. The LTTE insurgency developed into a sophisticated network of training, procurement, recruitment, innovation and, of course tragically, application. The insurgency was largely concentrated in the North and the East but, over the course of the years following 1983, the LTTE was able to strike at targets in the heart of Colombo and its surrounding suburbs to devastating effect. The period after 1983 found the Sri Lankan state in a full-scale conflict with Tamil insurgents and, consequently, it is easy to trace the catastrophic programme of violence and recrimination, peppered occasionally by largely unproductive peace talks and less than literal cease-fires. There is no need to explore every violent action, either by the insurgents, the security forces or the civilian populations that took place during this period, but it is important, in order to give a flavour of the deadly predicament gripping the island, that we highlight some of the more significant issues and events so that we may examine more effectively how events were reported abroad and, consequently, the American response.

From 1983 onwards there was an escalation in violence, a widening of the conflict to embrace the entire country, including the heart of the capital, Colombo, the internationalising of the conflict through Indian involvement (at times petitioned for by the Sri Lankan government and at times angrily rejected and condemned), the evolution in sophistication of the insurgent's modus operandi, and a naturally concurrent creation of a better trained and better equipped Sri Lankan military. Military spending by the Sri Lankan government skyrocketed. In the mid-eighties, the International Institute for

⁴⁰ Interview with Ambassador Reed, April 2009

Strategic Studies revealed the paltry state of the air force branch of the armed services: only two combat aircraft, Bell Model 212 Attack helicopters, and a small ad hoc squadron of 11 transport aircraft. In 1983, government military spending as a percentage of the Sri Lankan GDP, stood at a mere 1.4%, yet by 1987/8 this had risen to almost 5% – amounting to 14.3% of total government spending – in real terms, a quadrupling of total military expenditure⁴¹. The burdens of such costs are not easy to bear for a less developed country such as Sri Lanka. Consequently, because of Sri Lanka's economic woes, exacerbated by the financial encumbrances of the conflict, the Sri Lankan government is a constant conduit for foreign aid and assistance. What this means in reality, is that the situation in Sri Lanka is closely observed by those in the international community being petitioned for such aid. It also means that those countries who dominate the island's export markets (the US is the largest single importer of Sri Lankan goods and one of the biggest aid donors) are potentially able to influence government policy, in terms of the leverage they wield, vis à vis the conflict. In fact, international pressure through economic conditionality has often compelled the Sri Lankan state to negotiate with the insurgents, at times when it might ordinarily not have wished to do so – a pressure soundly ignored by President Rajapakse in his prosecution of the war!

What quickly becomes clear from 1983 and onwards, is that international interpretations of the conflict and the government's handling of it, become key (along with imperatives already discussed) to their association with it. Compounded by the economic realities which help shape the international community's view of, and thus involvement in, the conflict, is the rise in international attention that came as a corollary with the sharp escalation of fighting and the flood of refugees (both forced and voluntary) from the island, which created the dynamic and powerful Tamil Diaspora. Reports such as those carried by the New York Times raised the awareness of the international community (specifically the US) and, perhaps more fundamentally, helped mould that awareness with vivid accounts of the escalatory violence and bloodshed. Consequently the New

⁴¹ Figures taken from website, *The International Centre for Ethnic Studies* website: 'Sri Lanka: Cost of War', http://www.ices.lk/sl_database/ethnic_conflict/cost_of_war.shtml

York Times (and other newspapers like it) is of supreme value to our understanding of the prism through which US attention is focussed and attitudes created.

It is also important to note that, because the birth of the conflict is organic and tentative, then one would expect any American response to be similarly tentative. What these reports give us, once again, is a clear barometer of the evolution of American sentiment related to the episodes transpiring in Sri Lanka through the nature of the writing. In addition to this, we can more easily understand, by using sources such as these, why it is many Americans, including of course those in policy-making circles, responded to the conflict in the manner they did – with unsurity, ambivalence and, sometimes, indifference, even ignorance.

In 1984 and 1985 alone there were a substantial number of articles carried by The New York Times which covered the escalating and violent events of the conflict. All of them maintain a certain set of identifiable characteristics: all are dramatic in their re-telling of the events; all are graphic and uncompromising in their accounts of the violence; all are earnest in their evaluation that neither the Tamil insurgents nor the government security forces are blameless in their contributions to the brutality. Emanating from these reports is a vivid picture of the malaise engulfing the island – ‘retaliation’, ‘revenge’, ‘provocation’, ‘denial’, ‘recrimination’ and ‘counter-recrimination’, are words commonly used to describe the situation. Because of the frank observations that both the terrorists and the government are blameworthy in the cyclical violence, as well as America’s historic view that the current problems are traceable directly to unwise and discriminatory policies carried out by previous governments, it can be understood with greater clarity the dilemma facing America in terms of what role it should play vis à vis the conflict. One telling piece of supporting evidence for this notion that America feels it best to keep this conflict at arms-length, despite the fact that it legally acknowledges the LTTE as a terrorist organisation, will later proscribe it in 1997, and will then wage a universal, War on Terror, is former Ambassador Reed’s response to the question, whether the LTTE-Sri Lankan state conflict should have been placed higher on the agenda of George W. Bush’s

War on Terror: “I do not believe the Sri Lanka-LTTE conflict should have been put higher on Bush’s War on Terror. This is an *internal* conflict and must be solved internally”⁴². In May 1986, an LTTE bomb ripped through an Air Lanka Tristar at Colombo airport killing mainly foreigners. This, according to Rohan Gunaratna, an expert on terrorism and security, was the LTTE’s first “...major act of international terrorism”⁴³. The ‘*internal*’ conflict was taking on an increasing and distinctly international flavour. In the later chapters we will use this statement to help demonstrate that, often what the US judges to be a country involved in an internal conflict and thus to be left largely to their own devices, as opposed to a country which it determines is involved in a *non-internal* struggle against terrorists and thus worthy of a greater US involvement, is often a very grey area indeed.

Two New York Times reports from 1985 (May and September respectively) used in conjunction with one another, help illustrate the push-pull nature of the predicament faced by the US in regards to involvement. One carries news of an atrocity where 86 civilians, including children and Buddhist nuns, were massacred by Tamil guerrillas in the Sinhalese dominated historic city and religious pilgrimage site of Anuradhapura⁴⁴. The American response to this tragedy was, of course, outright condemnation and support for the government. However, a second article describes how 34 Tamils were burned alive in a bus by a Sinhalese mob⁴⁵. The American response to this tragedy was again, of course, outright condemnation of the perpetrators and an urging of the government to act and restrain those within the Sinhalese population bent on violence. The government promised to investigate, but information about the investigation and the application of prosecution was soon lost in a sea of obfuscation. Thus, in a journalistic ‘nutshell’, we find the heart of the problem for the US: how does America support a legitimate government, with whom they have deep political, historical and economic links against a recognised terrorist threat, whilst at the same time censure that very same government for

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Crisis and National Security*, p. 22

⁴⁴ No Author, ‘86 Civilians Killed in Sri Lanka Rebel Attack’, *New York Times*, May 15, 1985

⁴⁵ No Author, ‘Bus Atrocity Reported in Sri Lanka’, *New York Times*, September 9, 1985

an inability to ensure the basic safety and rights of some of its citizens? The answer is: a sustained, cautious and highly contingent, but also highly limited and, key to this thesis, *distant*, support. Again, Barbara Crossette delivered great clarity on this issue of whether the US should have done more to assist the Sri Lankan government as regards the conflict: “No. Not until the Sri Lankan government had clearer strategies, and then not with military help”⁴⁶. Because of this, Crossette, drawing on her first-hand relationships with those in the American foreign service during this period, recalled,

“There was never the sense that the US should or would get involved beyond diplomacy. Not a few diplomats were disgusted with the shallow thinking and short-sightedness of some of the people they had to deal with in government, and would not have urged Washington to intervene beyond economic assistance”.⁴⁷

The reports of the New York Times continue unabated throughout the course of the next decade, transmitting the horror and brutality that rapidly spread throughout the island and became the primary descriptor of the modern history of Sri Lanka. These reports give us a traceable, primary insight into the evolution of the conflict whilst simultaneously demonstrating the tenor of American attitudes to it. American journalists such as Barbara Crossette, are crucial barometers of the opinions of those Americans who took an interest in the conflict through their detailed, dramatic and nuanced accounts of the spiralling cycle of bloodshed and extremist behaviour. In April alone, Crossette filed a number of reports describing the almost daily horrors of terrorist atrocities. These explosions, massacres and beatings were almost always followed by a highly pressurised government attacking insurgent strongholds in the north and east – with the inevitable and radicalising collateral (Tamil civilian) damage.

A terrorist massacre of 127 innocent Sinhala civilians on three buses, two trucks and a private van was the “worst act of violence in nearly two years”⁴⁸. This was followed four

⁴⁶ Personal correspondence between the author and Barbara Crossette, May, 2009

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Barbara Crossette, ‘Survivors of Attack in Sri Lanka Tell of ‘Calm, Disciplined’ Killers’, *New York Times*, April 20, 1987

days later by the car bombing of the main bus station in Colombo which killed at least 105 civilians. Crossette was nearby when the blast occurred:

“... horrifying scenes at the Colombo bus station, the site of the worst bombing in the city's history. Under a tropical sun, fragments of bodies were stacked near the charred ruins of buses and shops”⁴⁹.

Over concerns that the urban Sinhala population would seek revenge for these attacks, the government imposed a curfew. Their fears were partially realised when, the next morning the curfew was lifted for four hours in order for people to buy food, and an angry, violent Sinhalese mob descended on Pettah (a neighbourhood where a large portion of the population are Tamils) looting and throwing stones at the police. Reminiscent of public protests in Vietnam at the Saigon government, a Buddhist monk threatened to set himself on fire if punishment was not meted out to those responsible for these atrocities. Gamini Iriyagolla, a spokesman for the Federation of Sinhalese Organisations (a hard-line Sinhala Nationalist group) reminded the readership of the *New York Times* of the deep and polarised vehemence involved on both sides of this conflict when he stated, “This mass murder is the latest in a series of genocidal attacks by Tamil terrorists against the Sinhalese majority as a matter of policy, in pursuit of racist political aims”⁵⁰. Of course, the government needed to respond, not only because of the natural and legitimate necessity to crush the terrorists, but also because the more hard-line Sinhalese were placing immense pressure on the government to retaliate. And retaliate it did.

Reports of civilian casualties being filed in the US resulting from government military operations in the north and the east, increase perceptibly with each strike. An April airstrike, carried out by newly acquired Italian SIAI-Marchetti S.211 light attack jets, supported by helicopter gunships, killed between 10 – 20 Tamil civilians (depending

⁴⁹ Barbara Crossette, ‘105 Sri Lankans Die As Bomb Rips Into Bus Station’, *New York Times*, April 22, 1987

⁵⁰ Barbara Crossette, ‘Tougher Line is Urged in Sri Lanka After Attack’, *New York Times*, April 19, 1987

upon which set of statistics one uses) and wounded over 150 more⁵¹. Another such operation in June 1987, resulted in between 200 to 500 civilian deaths as well as over a thousand more injured, with only around 50 insurgents killed⁵². Of course such reports not only illustrated just why support for the Tigers in these Tamil-dominated areas began to increase⁵³, but also why America, indeed much of the international community, felt (and still feel) an ambiguous set of emotions towards the Sri Lankan state.

One of the local international actors whose sympathy was largely with the Tamil civilians caught in the government offensives was India. So adamant was India that the Tamil civilians of the north and east were being subjected to a pogrom by the Sri Lankan government, that Rajiv Gandhi ordered an air drop of humanitarian aid into the north of the island, brazenly and openly violating Sri Lankan airspace. Diplomats at the highest level condemned the Sri Lankan government's 'carpet bombing' of Tamil areas. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi worried other international observers (and Sri Lanka itself) over plans for a possible Indian intervention on the island, when he made statements such as, "By mercilessly bombing a defenseless people and spreading misery, on the basis of only ethnic difference, Sri Lanka is itself putting its unity and integrity in jeopardy"⁵⁴. This concern was supported by people such as the Indian High Commissioner in Colombo, who bluntly stated that the actions of the Sri Lankan government against the Tamils had forced India into a "basic review" of her Sri Lanka policy and that New Delhi would "consider all options available"⁵⁵. This, once again, demonstrates the complexity of the conflict and the regional nuances of that need to be taken into account with any investigation. According to Sri Lankan officials at the time, one of the options was actually being played out – a flotilla of aid being readied for shipment from the south Indian port of Rameswaram, to be escorted by the Indian navy and delivered, against Colombo's severest warnings, to Jaffna, whilst Indian warships moved to within sight of

⁵¹ Barbara Crossette, 'Sri Lanka Bombs Rebel Bases a 2nd Day', *New York Times*, April 24, 1987

⁵² Barbara Crossette, 'Colombo Campaign a Military Success', *New York Times*, June 12, 1987

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ S. R. Weisman, 'Sri Lanka Says Guerrilla Area is Almost Secured', *New York Times*, June 1, 1987

⁵⁵ Ibid

Sri Lankan territorial waters in the Palk Straits. This, according to S.R. Weisman of the New York Times, was seen by Sri Lankan officials as a pretext for invasion⁵⁶. Barbara Crossette remembers how these events were merely a “dangerous coming out in the open” of an India policy long since established by Indira Gandhi of “...secretly fostering Tamil separatism as a way to undermine the Sri Lankan government”⁵⁷. The complexity and volatility of the Indian-Sri Lankan connection in the early days of the conflict led many international observers, including of course the US, to take caution in their approach to Sri Lanka and her troubles.

In early May 1987, President Jayewardene gave an interview in which he said that in order to defeat the terrorism of the Tamil rebels, he would welcome foreign assistance “from the devil himself”⁵⁸. Given that India had intermittently provided refuge to the terrorist insurgents in Tamil Nadu, had allowed them to establish training camps, funded them, violated the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and condemned that government’s conduct in the Tamil areas of the island, it would appear that India might have been just that ‘devil’. On 29th July, 1987 an Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) arrived in Sri Lanka after an accord signed between the two countries whereby, amongst other things, the IPKF would protect Tamil civilians and disarm the militant groups. Direct Indian direct involvement in Sri Lanka would prove to be disastrous, not only because of the tragic – comedy which played out – the LTTE refusing to disarm, the IPKF then fighting a war against the LTTE, the Sinhalese population protesting (understandably) at their presence in their country at every opportunity, then, most remarkably of all, the LTTE being covertly armed by the very government (Sri Lankan) it was trying to destabilise as a means of countering the IPKF!⁵⁹

⁵⁶ S. R. Weisman, ‘Sri Lanka Threatens to Halt Indian Boats Bearing Tamil Relief’, *New York Times*, June 3, 1987

⁵⁷ Personal correspondence between the author and Barbara Crossette, May, 2009

⁵⁸ No Author, ‘Sri Lanka President Vows to Recapture Tamil’s Stronghold’, *New York Times*, May 3, 1987

⁵⁹ For an in-depth analysis of this catastrophic misadventure see Rohan Gunaratna’s, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: The Role of India’s Intelligence Agencies*, (Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict Research, 1994)

Ultimately, the India – Sri Lanka Accord would have a major impact in a number of areas. Substantial and direct Indian assistance to the island meant that aid and assistance from other donors, particularly the US, was less forthcoming. In the years from 1987 to 1990 (the years during which the IPKF remained in Sri Lanka), total aid and assistance from America dipped into the 50 million dollar bracket for the first time since 1979, and for only the second time since Jayawardene came to power in 1977⁶⁰. After the departure of the IPKF, American assistance rose dramatically to unprecedented highs of 129.7 and 148.1 million dollars in 1992 and 1993 respectively⁶¹. All forms of American assistance would collapse to virtually zero after 1994, coinciding with the election of Chandrika Kumaratunga Bandaranaike, the daughter of SWRD and Sirimavo Bandaranaike. The Indian intervention would also have a wider impact on the region as well as the international community as the LTTE, angered at Rajiv Gandhi's attempts to neutralise it, succeeded in assassinating him in May 1991. Consequently, India proscribed the LTTE as terrorists in 1992. The insurgency had arrived unequivocally on the international scene.

The next chapter will examine America's response to the LTTE, as it grows into an animal dangerous enough in the eyes of the international community, for America to proscribe it. We will examine the reasons for American proscription and explore what, in quantitative and qualitative terms, this meant for the relationship between a Sri Lanka now governed by the next in the Bandaranaike dynasty, after a return to power of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

⁶⁰ Source: USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)*

⁶¹ Ibid

CHAPTER 6

America Proscribes the LTTE: Bombs and Bandaranaikes

This chapter has a narrower focus than some of the previous ones because the issues to be investigated are constricted into a few years and the themes are more readily identifiable. At its heart, this chapter will examine three main issues: firstly, the arrival on the political scene of the next in the Bandaranaike dynasty, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. Supported by the thoughts and views of a number of American observers (official, professional and personal), the chapter will discuss the impact of her arrival at the highest office in the country on the US-Sri Lankan relationship. Secondly, and as a corollary to the first issue, it will detail her government's handling of the conflict (prior to 2001), particularly in those areas which have historically tended to impact Washington's willingness to assist the state in their efforts to combat the LTTE: human rights, ethical conduct and governmental impunity. Thirdly, and most crucially, the chapter will study the American proscription of the LTTE in 1997, both its causes and consequences. Essentially what this chapter aims at is providing a modern reinforcement of the posits forwarded in the previous chapters in terms of the historical dynamics which help govern and shape the US-Lanka relationship, and perhaps more importantly as the study progresses, to provide a qualitative and quantitative indicator of the modern American relationship to the island's terrorism from which a comparison can be made with the era directly following George W. Bush's declaration of the War on Terror.

The chapter makes use of a pre-eminent source to underline the arguments put forward throughout the thesis and to give an unprecedented insight into the impact personal relationships at the highest level of government have had on the bi-lateral ties between the US and Sri Lanka in this period: an interview with former Prime Minister and President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. Some of the more interesting, indeed 'colourful', material in the entire thesis derives from this peerless primary source. Taken

in concert with interviews of former US Ambassadors it becomes clear that much of the ‘friction’ seen between the two countries was often a result of the, occasionally abrasive, relationships between the individuals in the US Embassy and those in the Sri Lankan government.

a) **President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and the Americans:**
Part I

“Pleasant, correct, personally quite warm but often frustrating... charming, pretty smart, but hopelessly disorganized as a manager, inefficient, micro-manager...”¹

“Still, it is a grave misconception to see terrorism as only, or even mostly, an American problem. Indeed, it is a clear and present danger to tolerant and open societies and innocent people everywhere. No one in this room, nor the people you represent, are immune.”²

In August 1994, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga led an SLFP driven coalition of parties (known as the People’s Alliance, PA) to a slender parliamentary victory, thus ending 17 years of unbroken UNP rule. Just three months later, in November 1994, she became the world’s first female Executive President by winning a landslide presidential election against Srimala Disanayake, the widow of Gamini Disanayake³. The ‘Chandrika Factor’, as Howard Schaffer puts it, was the key to the beginning of a new era of hope for many Sri Lankans who believed that she embodied the best chance of ending the civil strife which had ravaged the country, in essence, since the 1950’s⁴. President CBK, as she affectionately came to be known by some, is the daughter of two stalwarts of socialist government and Sinhala chauvinism: SWRD Bandaranaike, the assassinated founder of the SLFP and the person many blame for the creation of the tragic ethno-linguistic difficulties that have held the country’s progress to ransom almost since independence;

¹ Interview conducted with former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Shaun E. Donnelly, via e-mail, May, 2009

² President Bill Clinton’s address to the 53rd UN General Assembly, September 21, 1998

³ Gamini Disanayake had been the UNP presidential candidate until he was assassinated by an LTTE suicide cadre just a month before the election. His wife was selected by the UNP to run in his stead.

⁴ Howard B. Schaffer, ‘The Sri Lankan Elections of 1994: The Chandrika Factor’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35, No. 5, (1995): pp. 409-425

and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the world's first female Prime Minister who, for the majority of the 1970's, oversaw the mass scale socialising of the Sri Lankan economy, to disastrous effect. Despite this illustrious, yet highly polarising lineage, the election of President Kumaratunga by an overwhelming majority in 1994, represented the choice of an electorate tired of the exhausting conflict, distressed by the human and civil rights violations that had characterised the latter years of UNP rule, and disgruntled by the blatant corruption rampant in all levels of government.

Upon examination of the total value of aid and assistance given to Sri Lanka by the US in the early years of the 1990's we see that there is a dramatic collapse from 1993 to 1995⁵. Whilst this collapse coincides with the return to politics of the Bandaranaike dynasty, and to this issue the thesis will come in due course, it is crucial that the impact of the previous UNP government on the levels of aid and assistance given by the US, is not omitted. Despite being ideologically close to America, the gross and very public transgressions of the Premadasa/Wijetunge era (and the latter years of the Jayawardene presidency), in terms of human rights and corruption, inevitably led to a re-examination of the aid and assistance proffered by Washington. According to Graeme H. Wilson, author of the rather tepid biography, 'CBK', the international community, particularly the World Bank, had taken a 'step back' from Sri Lanka as fallout from the UNP scandal of aircraft purchases for Air Lanka spread to all levels of government. Wilson called the aircraft deal, "...the nation's biggest graft scandal"⁶. In the latter years of UNP rule, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) postponed a previously agreed payment to the country and the official aid group meeting scheduled for early 1994 was called off due to serious concern over the Air Lanka/Airbus deal⁷. The UNP leadership had come to exemplify those who had become too comfortable in power: threatened by no political foe for nearly 17 years and, disdainful of the electorate, feeling little urge to even feign accountability. Corruption had become, after the conflict and the abridging of human

⁵ Source: USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)*

⁶ Graeme H. Wilson, *CBK*, (London: Media Prima, 2005), p.157

⁷ Gamini Keerawella and Rohan Samarajiva, 'A Mandate For Peace', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35, No. 2, (1995): pp. 153-159, p. 159

sovereignty, perhaps the single-most pressing problem facing the Sri Lankan democratic system.

The JVP insurrection of the late eighties, driven by an ultra-Sinhalese nationalism born as a reaction to the arrival of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF), which had been invited by President Premadasa into the country to disarm the LTTE, led to disturbing levels of violence⁸. The JVP, livid at any action perceived to be a violation of Sri Lanka's territorial sovereignty, and suspicious of Indian motives, began terrorising the civilian population and the state almost into submission. In response, the UNP government embarked on a programme of extra judicial brutality that left human rights organisations, and the majority of Sri Lankan people, horrified. The New York Times carried a number of stories throughout this period which cast a disturbing shadow over the UNP's declining levels of democratic governance. The expression, 'death squads' and the term, 'mass grave' became common nomenclature for those reporting from the island. One such article by London Bureau Chief of the New York Times, John F. Burns, gave a dramatic summation of the cumulative effects of the conflict, the JVP insurrection and the government's brutal attempts at maintaining order, on the island's population. After running through the horrors of 'assassinations', 'dead-of-the-night disappearances' and 'mass graves', he makes the following assessment of life in Sri Lanka:

“...but in Colombo and other cities businessmen, human rights workers and politicians shelter in homes guarded by high steel gates and snarling guard dogs. Most middle-class families have guns, and those who can afford them drive in heavily armored cars. Emigration has soared, with foreign embassies in Colombo besieged by people hoping to settle in Europe or the United States.”⁹

In putting down the organised violence and near revolution of the ultra-nationalist JVP, the UNP, by most objective accounts, presided over the deaths or disappearances of almost 60,000 Sri Lankan citizens. Former President Kumaratunga described how

⁸ For an excellent account of the JVP see Rohan Gunaratna's, *Sri Lanka, A Lost Revolution*, (Colombo: Institute of Fundamental Studies, 1990)

⁹ John F. Burns, 'After Years of War, Hope in Sri Lanka', *New York Times*, August 24, 1994

President Premadasa's cohorts "...just went on the rampage – killing all their enemies", going on to detail some of the atrocities against "...a lot of very young people...dump(ing) their bodies in the main roads with their faces burned so that you can't recognise them". Kumaratunga also alleges that Premadasa used the insurrection as a cover to murder some of the leadership from his own party "...who were openly, publically against Premadasa". Her personal connection to these events grows ever deeper when she also accuses the Premadasa regime of being behind the assassination of her husband¹⁰.

However, despite the rampant transgressions of the UNP governments, it is more likely that the return of another SLFP government, with its historical record of socialism, Sinhala chauvinism and antagonising western powers, is what prompted this spectacular drop off in aid and assistance, from a record high of \$148.1 million in 1993, to just \$13.4 million in 1995¹¹. When the question was put to President Kumaratunga, why she thought this drop off in aid coincided with the arrival of another Bandaranaike in office and the return of the SLFP, and why the Americans did not share the optimism of the Sri Lankan electorate, she was very candid. She believed that there were two major factors that impacted the US approach to her new government. The first was historical. Kumaratunga is convinced that American aid was less forthcoming throughout her first term as President because of the 'hangover' from her father and mother's SLFP governments:

"I think that at the beginning, they had a fear – as it was an SLFP dominated government that we established – they had a fear that, you know, like the previous SLFP regimes, they felt we would be closer to the left. And anti-US.¹²"

She went on to target her mother's SLFP governments of the 1960's and 70's as historical reasons for the American reticence of the mid 1990's. President Kumaratunga pointed to specific actions undertaken by her mother's SLFP governments which angered and offended Washington. One such action, as already detailed in earlier chapters, was

¹⁰ Interview conducted with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

¹¹ Source: USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)*

¹² Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

her mother's nationalisation of American owned oil and gas companies. This caused major problems in the US-Sri Lanka relationship because it not only strained the diplomatic bond ideologically (the nationalisation was part of the SLFP's socialist policy platform) but it also appeared to Washington that the companies were being targeted because they were American. Hence it was not difficult for the Americans to reach a conclusion which appeared obvious to them – that the SLFP were *anti-American*. Kumaratunga does not necessarily agree, believing the nationalisation of American owned assets was not an act born out of anti-Americanism but as part of a general set of economic policies. She does, however, admit that her mother did go on to make bold statements that *were* anti-American in her many years as Prime Minister. She also believes that, in many respects, her mother had good reason to make such statements. Kumaratunga claims that, despite still being a young student herself, she remembers that there were very loud voices alleging that, during the nationalisation process, Shell Oil Company¹³ – one of the American companies being nationalised – was heavily involved in generating anti-SLFP publicity abroad and, more significantly, played a clandestine financial role in dumping the SLFP out of power.

“Shell mainly – and they were very angry about it and the companies, private companies, quite definitely, they did a lot of publicity even in Sri Lanka and abroad and made it look as if my mother's government – that it was against the US.

And Shell did finance the UNP campaign to topple that particular government of my mother's, one year before its term was over. They got 14 members of the parliament to cross over to the UNP. And they were heavily funded, paid, you see? Bribed. And apparently the money came from Shell. And maybe there was suspicion that the US government might have had a hand in it. I don't know – that was the general talk amongst our government. I was then young and still a student.”¹⁴

The veracity of these claims notwithstanding, what Kumaratunga is adamant about is that, when the American Embassy tried to protest the nationalisation of US owned assets

¹³ Shell Oil Company was (at the time) the largely independent American subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell

¹⁴ Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

on the island, her mother told them to, "...go and fly a kite" and sent the Ambassador "...packing". This, she readily admits, made the Americans "...very angry"¹⁵.

Although Kumaratunga challenges the interpretation that her mother's governments were fundamentally or narrowly anti-west and anti-American, believing that this specific action of her mother's was not anti-American but simply part of a socialist economic policy, she freely admits that this spectre of anti-Americanism continued to haunt the bilateral relationship during her tenure as President¹⁶.

The second factor, according to Kumaratunga, which impacted upon the US approach to her new government, was the American Embassy's close relationship with the UNP. She thoroughly believes that much of the concern driving American hesitancy with regard to her PA government was generated by the UNP leadership, including Gamini Dissanayake, "...carrying tales to the US Ambassadors, telling them 'Oh, beware of them (the PA)', and this kind of thing"¹⁷.

What President Kumaratunga provides us with at this juncture in the chapter, is a crystal clear reinforcement of one of the central arguments of the thesis – that there are certain historical issues which have shaped, and continue to shape, the US – Sri Lanka relationship. In this case, the American caution in assisting the government of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga against the terrorists is born partly from an identifiable parameter: the historical baggage associated with the SLFP.

To Kumaratunga's credit, whilst she identifies previous incarnations of the SLFP as highly impacting on the US-Sri Lanka connection, she does not use it as a simple blanket justification for laying blame on Americans for engaging too much with the past. In short,

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

she is not bitter. In fact she remains philosophical about the American SLFP ‘hangover’ – going so far as to absolve the Americans from blame on this particular issue:

“And, on the other hand... I must say, they did not know what we would be like. We could have been exactly the same as previous SLFP governments and I had not had time to prove my vision or policy... So they were very wary. And you say they had reduced our aid... That definitely was due to their fears”¹⁸

Nevertheless, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga won the presidential election on a twin platform of a more equitable distribution of the country’s wealth so as to include the poorer majority class of the country, whilst at the same time calling for an end to the conflict through a mixture of constitutional changes allowing for a greater degree of autonomy for the Tamil regions of the north, and concessions designed to appease and convince the LTTE to abandon their armed struggle and join the political process. Of course, there were those within the Sinhala power base who decried Bandaranaike’s rapprochement with the LTTE and her constitutionally framed federal approach to the Tamil issue. These voices clearly carried with them the ever-present threat to the President and her family, for it was these same voices that had murdered her father, SWRD Bandaranaike, in 1959 and her husband, Vijaya Kumaratunga, in 1988.

Alongside this courageous approach to resolving the conflict, she also promised a more pragmatic approach to the economy, relying less on the rigid socialism of her mother’s SLFP and more upon a flexible mixture of privatisation, a necessary degree of government management and a liberal streamlining of government spending. Among some of her early achievements were the minimising of ministerial portfolios (her first cabinet contained 22 members – a massive reduction from the previous UNP cabinet), a lowering of food and fuel prices throughout the country, and the cancellation of a UNP-initiated and highly controversial arms deal.¹⁹ An early major accomplishment was the establishment of a cross-party supported permanent commission on bribery and

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Keerawella and Samarajiva, ‘A Mandate For Peace’, pp. 153-159

corruption²⁰. One of Chandrika Kumaratunga's most difficult tasks, in terms of economic re-invigoration, was to convince foreign investors – both privately held companies as well as nations looking to expand into the region – to place their confidence and, more importantly, their wealth into the care of the Sri Lankan state. Unfortunately, there were (and in fact still are) three major obstacles that have historically stood in the way of investor confidence in Sri Lanka. One of the obstacles is ideological – the socialising of the economy, particularly during the SLFP regimes (most disastrously during the 1970's) meant that foreign investment of any sought had little guarantee of safety from government appropriation (perhaps most notably, in terms of American interests, during the late 1950's and the 1960's). Secondly, the escalation of the conflict brings with it a set of unfortunate concomitants negatively affecting business confidence – that of danger to property and person, the absence of guaranteed long – term prospects, a crippling lack of stability of even the most basic kind, and the natural inclination of markets to depress at times of heightened military and terroristic activity. Added to this is a third obstacle – the seeming willingness of some Sri Lankan governments to impulsively create new legislation and/or overturn existing legislation in times of financial strife, in order to raise revenue quickly to meet whatever shortfall has been created by whatever cause (usually related to the war and occasionally to economic mismanagement). This has often resulted in higher than agreed rates of taxation, impossible increases in utility costs and, in some cases, the abrupt abrogation of deals made with foreign investors. Being that Kumaratunga's mother and father had both caused foreign investors to abandon the island during the rule of past SLFP governments, it was no surprise that the possibility of the daughter of SWRD and Sirimavo Bandaranaike returning the SLFP to power, caused understandable nervousness among the international business community. To her credit, Kumaratunga did much to provide a salve to these worries. In her inaugural address, as she assumed the office of the

²⁰ Schaffer, 'The Sri Lankan Elections of 1994: The Chandrika Factor', p. 421

Presidency, she made a point of addressing these fears, guaranteeing that, “Foreign investment will be encouraged and protected”²¹.

b) Chandrika and the LTTE

Arguably Chandrika Kumaratunga’s most attractive campaign position was her promise to engage the LTTE in a dialogue that would form the basis for a permanent truce and an incorporation of the LTTE leadership (including Prabhakaran) into the proposed redrawing of the political landscape. Rather remarkably Kumaratunga, had led a mission with her husband in 1986 to Madras, India, to meet with the LTTE leadership and other militant Tamil organisations in order to elicit some acknowledgement of the need for a peaceful and, just as important, swift end to the conflict. Back in 1984, Chandrika and her husband Vijaya had split from the SLFP created by her late father and formed a new political party, the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya (SLMP). Un-tethered from the bipolarism of traditional Sri Lankan politics, this new party sought a more flexible approach to the conflict. Of course, in doing so, the SLMP garnered the unadulterated ire of extremist Sinhala nationalists and the UNP leadership which would, in only four years’ time, be brought violently to bear upon Vijaya. Nevertheless, the two leaders set upon what was, by any objective standards, a courageous course of direct negotiations with ‘the enemy’ abroad, whilst defending against the, often vicious, public attacks by their opponents at home. The two leaders made unprecedented inroads into the search for a political solution, meeting with Prabhakaran on a number of occasions in India. Not to overstate the importance of these meetings, but for the first time in recent memory there was a more optimistic feeling, in some circles exhausted by war, that both sides were viewing this as a unique opportunity to try and develop an acceptable method of solving the Sinhala-Tamil conflict. And thus, the Kumaratungas had personalised a path to peace in the same way that so many politicians before them had personalised the path to conflict. No matter the events which transpired between these meetings and her becoming

²¹Text of Inaugural Address taken from, Graeme H. Wilson, *CBK*, p. 176

the leader of the country, Chandrika Kumaratunga, at least for a brief period of time, would symbolise to the electorate a person for whom honourable peace with the LTTE could be more than just electioneering. What did transpire between these years was, as previously discussed, a tragedy of errors and misjudgements. The Indian Peace-Keeping Force was invited into Sri Lanka to facilitate a truce and the disarming of the LTTE. This led to major uprisings from the Sinhala nationalist parties, including the ultra-nationalist JVP, the catastrophic failure of the IPKF to contain the LTTE who went on an all-out offensive against the Indians, the reversal of policy by the government and the clandestine arming of the LTTE by the Premadasa government, the 'disappearing' of thousands of Sinhala youth, and ultimately the assassinations of Vijaya Kumaratunga (perhaps by dark elements within the UNP government) as well as Gamini Dissanayake and Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE.

Although this new party did not survive the death of Vijaya Kumaratunga, the SLMP had positioned itself as an alternative to those diehards who saw only two outcomes of the conflict, either the division of the island and the creation of Tamil Eelam or the creation of a Sinhala-only dominated state. The goal of this new party was to unite the general population behind the idea of sincere dialogue with the LTTE so that a solution to the ethnic issue, involving a devolution of power, could be implemented. Despite the collapse of the SLMP this initiative continued and came to be embodied in CBK. It was partly because of what Chandrika Kumaratunga symbolised to the electorate – a woman who had suffered the tragedies of having two loved ones taken by the conflict, a politician prepared to take courageous steps to solve the island's endemic problems of corruption, violence and ethnic division, and a citizen who believed that new thinking was required in order to address Sri Lanka's old and, thus far, intractable problems. The idea was based on a genuine belief in the increasingly unlikely scenario that the Sri Lankan military machine could deliver a victory, or that such a victory could produce a lasting and viable peace. It was also based on an accurate assessment of the character of the electorate – the majority of people were exhausted by the apparently endless cycle of

violence and bloodshed. When they voted for Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga in the presidential election, the people were voting as much against the UNP as for the SLFP (the party to which she had now returned), but on this issue, they were also voting for a person who seemed to offer an authentic exit strategy out of a helplessness born from ceaseless fighting.

When the SLFP/PA came to power, and Chandrika declared the runaway victor of the Presidential elections, she claimed that the twin elections were a referendum on her plans to end the conflict and that she now had a mandate to follow the plan she had outlined in her campaign. Little time was wasted in opening a dialogue with the LTTE. In her first speech to parliament as President in January 1995 she declared an unconditional ceasefire with the LTTE as a prelude to the opening of peace talks. What is remarkable about the landslide presidential election is that the people voted for her planned talks with the separatists *despite* the LTTE assassination of Gamini Dissanayake, and the polling day attack by the terrorists on a military base 180 miles north of Colombo. Whether one buys into the notion that ‘Chandrika Fever’ was sweeping the country or not, it would appear blatantly obvious that President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga’s peace proposals were uppermost in the minds of the electorate when they chose her to lead the country.

Of course it would have been naïve of contemporary observers to believe that the elections of 1994 would automatically bring the 11 year-old conflict to an immediate end. In fact, despite the much lauded steps Kumaratunga took, it was clear from various New York Times articles that most international diplomats remained cautious, particularly since peace talks had collapsed as recently as 1991²². Indeed Kumaratunga, when asked the question of how the US responded to her overtures to the LTTE and her attempts at conciliation for peace, she firmly stated, “Very cold”²³. However, with the easing of the economic embargo on Jaffna, which Prabhakaran called, “a kind gesture”, and the

²² John F. Burns, ‘Sri Lankan Rebels and New Government Agree to Talks’, *New York Times*, September 5, 1994

²³ Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

curbing of the emergency powers of search, arrest and detention that had been in place since the early 1970's and used, according to various human rights groups, as a cover for "widespread...killings and disappearances", it did appear that progress was being made²⁴. In one of his New York Times pieces, John F. Burns reported that contemporary diplomats were encouraged and surprised by Prabhakaran's language, calling his praise of Prime Minister Kumaratunga (as she was until the November presidential election), "unusually conciliatory"²⁵. Re-organised security forces had, according to a number of independent human rights groups and diplomats in Colombo, managed to create a new, less abusive and violent, image of themselves, which spoke a less vicious language to the Tamil community²⁶. And so, whilst the elections of 1994 can in no way be seen as markers of tranquillity (the death of Gamini Dissanayake and the bombing of the army camp still fresh in everybody's minds) there was, for an all-too-brief period of time, an emboldening of optimism enshrined in the goals of Kumaratunga and her coalition, People's Alliance (PA), government. Unfortunately, this optimism lasted only as long as the fragile accord between the LTTE and the government held. That is to say, it lasted only a couple of months.

Despite the unprecedented and unilateral concessions made by President Kumaratunga's government to the LTTE (the lifting of the embargo etc.), Prabhakaran demanded more. Among these demands was the call for the dismantling of a Sri Lankan military base, which would have greatly improved the tactical situation of the separatists. In his detailed deconstruction of the collapse of the accord and the fallout, former US Ambassador to Bangladesh and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Howard B. Schaffer, correctly asserted that the LTTE appeared to be forcing President Kumaratunga into choosing between the peace process and her own armed forces²⁷. The military was already, and quite understandably, opposed to any such unilateral concessions to begin

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Barbara Crossette, 'Sri Lanka Chief Sees Decisive Battle Soon', *New York Times*, October 27, 1995

²⁷ Howard B. Schaffer, 'Sri Lanka in 1995: A Difficult and Disappointing Year', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 36, No. 2, (1996): pp. 216-223

with, and for the president to have ignored their opposition would have been tantamount to political suicide. Of course, the LTTE leadership would have been more than aware of the situation they were placing her in, and would not have realistically expected the president to dismantle the base, leading many observers to make the plausible charge that the LTTE was not fully committed to the peace negotiation, and was in fact looking instead for ways to prolong discussion as a tactic to cover the consolidation of their position. Schaffer even goes so far as to say that the overtures from the Kumaratunga government were so attractive to the careworn citizens of Jaffna that the LTTE saw a future where they themselves ceased to exist. Consequently,

“Seen in this context, the Tigers used the peace process for what it was worth. They extracted supplies for the beleaguered Jaffna peninsula, and were able to replenish and improve the position of their military in the East, which had suffered substantial setbacks earlier.”²⁸

Schaffer does not absolve the government or the Sri Lankan state from blame over the collapse of the truce, pointing to the error of “over-promising and under-delivering” supplies to the north²⁹. He does, however, make it clear that the long-standing mistrust permeating the dialogue led the LTTE erroneously to see the “bureaucratic sluggishness” typical of Sri Lanka, and the unhelpful actions of certain individual officials, with a cynical, conspiratorial and suspicious eye³⁰. Schaffer’s insights into the mechanics of the peace initiative are of supreme value, in part, because he held significant US Foreign Service posts in the South Asian region³¹, but also because his wife, Teresita Currie Schaffer was US Ambassador to Sri Lanka from 1992-1995. This ‘two for one’ package allows us a significant insight into an official US view of the events of 1995, the breakdown of the peace process and the record of President Kumaratunga.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 218

²⁹ Ibid, p. 217

³⁰ Ibid, p. 217

³¹ He was Director of the Office of Indian, Nepalese, and Sri Lankan Affairs, US Ambassador to Bangladesh, Political Counselor in Pakistan (1974-77) and India (1977-79) and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State responsible for South Asian Affairs

On April 19th the LTTE destroyed two gunboats of the Sri Lankan Navy in a sneak attack which obliterated, in spectacular and dastardly fashion, the peace process. As stipulated by the terms of the truce, any return to hostilities would be preceded by a 72 hour notice period. This stipulation was not followed by the LTTE. What did follow, and which is why Schaffer's piece is entitled a 'Disappointing Year', was the collapse of the peace talks, the systematic rejection by key elements within the Sinhalese polity of the devolution package offered by President Kumaratunga, and the return to terrorist violence and full-scale military offensives.

c) The International Dimension: American Re-Orientation?

The tragedy and the failures of 1995 must be put into a more international context so that American responses to the increased carnage of the years following 1994 can be examined. In October 1995 the United Nations celebrated its 50th birthday and heads of states from her membership gave a variety of speeches lauding the UN's achievements but warning of its future challenges. Two heads of state who gave speeches which focussed on interlocking themes and appeared to support one another, were President Bill Clinton and President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. President Clinton's speech lasted 14 minutes – half as long as Fidel Castro's and to less than half his applause (a fact Barbara Crossette of the New York Times seemed to enjoy pointing out) – and dealt very specifically with the issue of terrorism³². Clinton's emphasis, when discussing the issue of terrorism, was clearly and firmly rooted in the need for international co-operation as the main tool for its successful combat. Had Clinton's speech been written by CBK herself, it could not have been more appropriate or timely for drawing a spotlight onto the descent back into bloodshed that Sri Lanka was enduring.

President Clinton made specific mention of how terrorism, international criminal behaviour and a loss of hope were linked to the issue of poverty. He stated his belief that

³² Barbara Crossette, 'The UN at 50: The Overview; Hope and Disappointment Mingle at UN Celebration', *New York Times*, October 23, 1995

in the new "...global village, too many people remain vulnerable to poverty, disease and underdevelopment", and that whilst the very nature of a global village provided great opportunities for peoples to work together, it also created opportunities for 'trouble' to spread quickly too. In a sentence mixed with American frontier language and biblical reference, President Clinton summed up how the dangers affecting one part of the world, no matter how remote, could rapidly consume others elsewhere: "trouble at the far end of town soon becomes a plague on everyone's house"³³. Elsewhere in his speech he clarifies the nature of this 'trouble' as, "...ethnic and religious hatred, the reckless aggression of rogue States, terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction"³⁴. US commitment to eradicating these 'troubles', Clinton goes on, will come in the form of greater cooperation in creating "sustainable development... for all nations", the creation of,

"...new initiatives to fight international organized crime, drug trafficking, terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction – initiatives we can take on our own and others we hope we will take together."³⁵

President Clinton's 14 minute speech covered the issues and concerns of many countries throughout the world, but few countries could have had their troubles, and the solutions to these troubles, more fittingly described in those few sentences, than Sri Lanka. In fact, the speech that President Kumaratunga later gave at that special meeting of the UN could not have fitted more perfectly to the themes detailed in Clinton's speech if the two heads of state had sat down and written them together. President Kumaratunga echoed President Clinton's point that all forms of conflict, "...whether they take on religious, racial or other forms... stem from poverty and social inequality". She highlighted the urgent need for the international community to build the "foundations of peace...on economic and

³³ Full text of President Clinton's speech at the Special Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.

http://www.undemocracy.com/generalassembly_50/meeting_35">General Assembly Session 50 meeting 35 of 1995-10-22

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

social stability.” President Kumaratunga, also criticised the UN for spending too much time and too many resources on “politico-military operations”, to the detriment of development priorities. One thing she does acknowledge, and it is one of the reasons given by Ambassador Donnelly for the lack of aid and assistance given to Sri Lanka during the first eight years of her tenure as president is that, despite being a comparatively poor country, Sri Lanka rates relatively highly on the index of human development³⁶. Donnelly believed that because Sri Lanka always had “relatively strong basic social indicators on health, education etc.”, and that there was always “competing priorities for scarce resources”³⁷, that the island didn’t necessarily warrant the assistance. Although in a general sense this must be true – basic economic principle denotes that it is the near-infinite competition for finite resources that drives the distribution of wealth – it is difficult to ignore the obvious relationship between the assistance Washington gave to one government (the UNP) and the incredible lack of assistance it gave to the following government (the SLFP). The question that requires a more considered, and less general, answer is this: why, from one Sri Lankan government to the next, do we see sustained and unprecedented levels of US aid and assistance flooding into the country and then almost none? Did ‘competition for scarce resources’ suddenly and incredibly increase? The UN peace-keeping operations in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia and the former Yugoslavia certainly drained resources, but major operations under the UN Protection Force had largely ended by 1995. Nonetheless, although Sri Lanka did, and still does, rate relatively highly in certain social and economic indexes, the nature of the terrorist threat undermining the state should more than have helped garner the required assistance to combat it. Unless, of course, the issue is slightly more complex than Ambassador Donnelly explained.

³⁶ Full text of President Kumaratunga’s speech at the Special Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.
http://www.undemocracy.com/generalassembly_50/meeting_35>General Assembly Session 50 meeting 35 of 1995-10-22

³⁷ Interview with Ambassador Shaun E. Donnelly, 21 May, 2009

And so it must have been with some relish that President Kumaratunga listened to President Clinton's speech as he seemed to address the very issues she was looking for support on. Not only was he acknowledging the need to support developing countries in their battle to solve social and economic problems, he was also committing to a heightened cooperation on defeating terrorism abroad by cutting off the finances and strangling the political networks of these groups. President Kumaratunga called for foreign governments (and by foreign she was really referring to those powerful enough to effect any substantive change, i.e. America, Great Britain etc.) to stop "...sterile philosophical debate about the nature of terrorism", and start implementing "practical measures to combat terrorism". These 'practical measures', she said, should involve countries making greater efforts to stop the LTTE from fund-raising on their soil, stymie their illegal business network of drug trafficking, illegal arms dealing and human smuggling, and coerce them into renouncing violence³⁸. Apparently, President Clinton was, at this special commemoration of the UN, speaking directly (although perhaps not consciously), to the problems of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and Sri Lanka, when he said,

"Nowhere is cooperation more vital than in fighting the increasingly interconnected groups that traffic in terror... These forces jeopardize the global trend towards peace and freedom, undermine fragile new democracies, sap the strength from developing countries and threaten our efforts to build a safer, more prosperous world."³⁹

Prior to the UN celebrations, in April 1995, First Lady Hillary Clinton visited Sri Lanka as part of a five-nation tour of the region. Although her trip was largely centred on the social and economic conditions of women and children in the region, and was rather informal in nature, the First Lady's visit to Sri Lanka can be taken as evidence of the growing interest the Clinton administration was beginning to show in South Asia.

³⁸ President Kumaratunga's speech at the Special Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations

³⁹ President Clinton's speech at the Special Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations

Immediately upon his wife's return to the states, President Clinton, speaking at the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Dallas, Texas, began discussing what would become something of a policy trend towards assigning the region a greater degree of importance. He had wanted his wife to go to South Asia,

“...because that part of the world is a very important part of the world to us. And for various reasons, we have not been as closely involved, even with the democracies there, as we might have been, largely as a legacy of the Cold War.”⁴⁰

Karl Inderfurth, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs (1997 – 2001), recalls how, upon her return from South Asia, Hillary Clinton began petitioning the President for greater US involvement in the region⁴¹. Of course, a new American interest in the region is not to be solely attributed to the First Lady's private discussions with her husband, however, we do see that by 1997 an invigorated American policy with the region was being implemented. Inderfurth went on to say that, “When I arrived in '97, a National Security Council review of our policy towards South Asia was underway. It resulted in a directive approved by the President to establish a policy of "greater engagement" with South Asia”⁴². This ‘greater engagement’ was re-iterated in the National Security Strategy for a New Century 1997, whose mission statement for the region was, “Our strategy is designed to help the peoples of that region enjoy the fruits of democracy and greater stability by helping resolve long-standing conflict and implementing confidence-building measures”⁴³. It was re-stated in subsequent National Security Strategies that the stability of South Asia was a major foreign policy priority, and in fact it was a source of close agreement between President Clinton and President Jiang of China at a summit meeting in 1998, that it was within their “shared interest” to

⁴⁰ President William Clinton, ‘Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Dallas, Texas’, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=51198>

⁴¹ Interview with Karl F. Inderfurth, ‘The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training’, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field\(DOCID+mfdip2004ind01](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field(DOCID+mfdip2004ind01)

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ *A National Security Strategy for a New Century, 1997*, Part III, Integrated Regional Approaches

maintain a “peaceful and stable South Asia”, as they “agreed to continue to co-ordinate their efforts to strengthen peace and stability in that region”⁴⁴. It was clear that President Clinton had overseen a paradigm shift in US foreign policy-giving greater attention to the troubles of South Asia, so that American economic and strategic security be assured. To this end

“We seek a climate where the global economy and open trade are growing, where democratic norms and respect for human rights are increasingly accepted and where terrorism, drug trafficking and international crime do not undermine stability and peaceful relations.”⁴⁵

Of course Clinton’s re-appraisal of South Asia, and US interest there, has at its heart the pre-eminence of the immensely populous nuclear antagonists Pakistan and India. However, Sri Lanka, with her embattled history of an unprecedented extremist insurgency, undoubtedly warranted a position in this new approach to the region. Hence it should be taken that when Clinton said the following, he was not thinking about an international coalition that would include only the two giants from the region:

“I now invite every country to join in negotiating and endorsing a declaration on international crime and citizen safety. That declaration should include, first, a no-sanctuary pledge so that we could say together to organized criminals, terrorists, drug traffickers and smugglers, “You have nowhere to run and nowhere to hide”.

It should include, secondly, a counter-terrorism pact so that together we would urge more States to ratify existing anti-terrorism treaties and work with us to shut down the grey markets that outfit terrorists and criminals with firearms and false documents.”⁴⁶

And so, with the decisive words of the world’s most powerful head of state discussing the need for a new and more appropriate response to the troubles created by social and economic deprivation and the growth of terrorism, President Kumaratunga could have

⁴⁴ *A National Security Strategy for a New Century, 1998*, p. 44

⁴⁵ *A National Security Strategy for a New Century, 1997*, Part II, Advancing US National Interests

⁴⁶ President Clinton’s speech at the Special Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations

been forgiven for expecting something of a 'windfall' in terms of support from the Clinton administration. Of course, this windfall did not really materialise.

The optimism that carried Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga into the presidential residence was quickly and tragically lost as the country slid back into war. As the Tigers went on the offensive, embarrassing the government with a series of deadly attacks on both civilian, military and police targets, President Kumaratunga was forced to act. Her devolution package, became only one aspect of a more aggressive three part strategy for securing what was euphemistically termed, 'The Battle for Peace'. Alongside the genuine, and constitution-changing, offer of devolution, the Sri Lankan military were put into action on a full-scale war footing, raising the Sri Lankan flag over Jaffna town by December of that year. The third point in the strategy involved the preparation of measures of relief and rehabilitation for the Tamils in newly liberated areas⁴⁷.

On 19th April 1995, the United States suffered an unprecedented domestic terrorist attack when a massive truck bomb exploded, destroying the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. The impact of this incident is clearly seen in the State Department's 1996 annual 'Patterns of Global Terrorism' report. In the 1995 report, it is made clear that acts of domestic terrorism (i.e. that which only destroys the property or lives of those within the host country) will not be covered, yet in the following year's report it is stated early in the introduction that, "...domestic terrorism, in countries such as... Sri Lanka... appears to be growing and is more serious, in gross terms, than international terrorism"⁴⁸. Accordingly, domestic terrorism becomes an issue dealt with in subsequent reports. Arguably, the tragic event in Oklahoma, combined with President Clinton's wish to see 'greater engagement' with South Asia, helped lead his administration into a re-examining of its anti-terrorist strategies – to include a greater emphasis on domestic terrorism. The 1996 report gives us a dual insight into the level of terrorism taking place in Sri Lanka and the US government's greater willingness to assist

⁴⁷ Schaffer, 'Sri Lanka in 1995: A Difficult and Disappointing Year'

⁴⁸ *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 1996*, <http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1996Report/year.html>

in the battle against *all* forms of terrorism, regardless of whether American citizens or interests are directly affected. Firstly, the report details two interesting statistics: that out of the 311 people killed by international terrorists in that year, 200 of those were by the hands of the Tamil Tigers; the two biggest attacks in the world during 1996 were the Central Bank bombing in Colombo's financial district, killing 90 people, and the blowing up of a commuter train killing 70 – both carried out by the LTTE. These incidents, combined with others detailed in the report, help to contextualise the conflict for Americans, who could quite readily draw stark comparisons contained in the report between the exploits of the LTTE and all other terrorist organisations. In terms of the level of violence, the number of casualties, and the frequency of attack, the LTTE were quite clearly, in a league of their own⁴⁹. Secondly, combined with the coverage of the activities of the LTTE and the commitment to include domestic terrorism in the annual report, it also summarises Clinton's new tactics to be employed to combat the levels of terrorism throughout the world. In 1996 President Clinton signed into being Public Law 104 – 132, more popularly known as the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act. Amongst the many provisions of the act were that it paved the way for the prosecution of terrorist organisations seeking to fundraise in the United States, as well as for the exclusion and deportation of those connected with terrorist groups from America. The groups designated as terrorists would be decided by the Secretary of State who, as of December 1996, was Madeleine Albright. Albright would go on to proscribe the LTTE in 1997. What this meant, we will discuss later in this chapter.

President Clinton was overseeing a systematic paradigm shift in two areas: the US relationship with South Asia, and the manner in which the United States viewed and prosecuted terrorism. And so with all of this in mind, what did the US do to assist against what, by Washington's own admission, was clearly the most deadly terrorist organisation in the world during the period of the Presidency of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga?

⁴⁹ Ibid

Over the entire period of President Kumaratunga's tenure in the highest office (1994 – 2005), the United States provided her government with a mere \$2.5 million worth of IMET (International Military Education and Training), and just over \$4.7 million in FMS (Foreign Military Sales)⁵⁰. Sri Lanka did receive just over \$8 million in DCS (Direct Commercial Sales) in the same period, but these military sales are negotiated privately between US companies and foreign buyers. Of course there is government oversight to these DCS, but they are not driven, as with FMS, wholly by the specific policy initiatives emanating from Washington. Whilst Sri Lanka received a small amount of assistance in terms of IMET and FMS, they received no FMF (Foreign Military Finance) in the entire period, 1990 – 2004. Foreign Military Finance is congressionally appropriated grants to finance the purchase of American made weapons, services and training by foreign governments. Occasionally these grants are used to fund IMET and FMS, but this was not the case for Sri Lanka in this period as no FMF was apportioned to the country. To make sense of these figures we, once again, need to place them in context. In the same period (1990 – 2005) Uganda received almost \$12.5 million in FMF, Nepal received nearly \$22 million, Indonesia \$25 million, the Philippines received over half a billion dollars-worth of FMF, and Israel topped the pile at well over \$32 billion. Even Burundi, and Angola received more than Sri Lanka between the years 1990 – 2003⁵¹. Whilst it is not within the scope of this investigation to question the amount and type of military assistance and financing America offers other countries, it is worth following the comparison between what Sri Lanka has reluctantly been given with that which seems so readily given to others, because the comparison is stark in the extreme. Of course the US are not obliged to assist the Sri Lankan government in a military sense (or in any sense for that matter), however, given Clinton's new approach to terrorism and the region, in conjunction with the fact that the LTTE had only recently been re-confirmed by the US government as the

⁵⁰ Foreign Military Sales are government to government military sales negotiated by the Pentagon

⁵¹ All DCS, FMS, IMET and FMF statistics found in *U.S. Military Assistance to 1460 Report Countries: 1990 – 2005*, Center for Defense Information, April 3, 2004.

deadliest terrorist group in the world, one might expect a greater effort to assist the Sri Lankan government against the LTTE.

Clearly, President Kumaratunga, proved very early in her tenure that she was not the socialist spectre Washington might have feared she would be – her record in finance and economy, whilst not always a success, certainly demonstrates her commitment not to return to the economic disasters of her leftist mother. So, why was there, and why does there continue to be, such an open and obvious discrepancy between the way the US views terrorism, the Clinton administration’s self-proclaimed and renewed interest in South Asia, and the glaring lack of commitment to assist in the fighting against the most fearsome terrorist organisation currently operating? Why was it that, even after President Kumaratunga personally petitioned the US and other countries at the UN anniversary celebrations for help was she still left lamenting that, “Most governments have not taken sufficiently serious action against them”⁵². The New York Times South Asia Bureau Chief, Barbara Crossette, echoed the Sri Lankan president’s calibration of the situation – that the rebellion could be weakened if the international community, particularly the US, attempted a “Closer scrutiny of Tamil’s raising money abroad, especially through illegal activities”⁵³.

Even after two suicide explosions in 1995 targeting Sri Lankan army headquarters, less than a mile from the official residence of the President, and continued threats to the lives of Kumaratunga and her family by the LTTE, the US still, when petitioned for military assistance, refused. Ambassador Donnelly was adamant that no military assistance would have ever been forthcoming because the US concern over state-sponsored human rights violations and the government’s basic treatment of civilians was simply too big an

⁵² Crossette, ‘Sri Lanka Chief Sees Decisive Battle Soon’, *New York Times*

⁵³ Ibid

obstacle to overcome at that time⁵⁴. They did, however, provide Secret Service agents to “...advise on Mrs Kumaratunga’s personal security”⁵⁵.

In response to the direct question as to whether there was any quantitative or qualitative change in Washington’s preparedness to help solve the conflict after President Clinton gave his address at the 53rd UN General Assembly, at which he had put forth his re-invigorated approach to battling global terrorism, Ambassador Shaun Donnelly stated unequivocally, “Not to my knowledge”. In fact he qualified the statement by insisting that “managing US policy towards Sri Lanka with its anti-terrorist aspects as well as its HR, ethic, impunity aspects as well was always a challenge”. When asked to answer the question of why direct military assistance against the LTTE was not forthcoming, yet assistance to, say, Nepal against the Maoists, was substantial, Ambassador Donnelly refused to be drawn on such comparisons⁵⁶. He simply re-iterated his point that the failings of the Sri Lankan government in terms of human rights violations, treatment of civilians, rule of law, civil society etc. prevented any real and meaningful assistance being proffered by Washington⁵⁷.

President Kumaratunga has different recollections of the issues relating to human rights violations. She categorically denies that Donnelly’s assertion of endemic human rights transgressions under her government is true, going so far as to say that such statements are,

“Rubbish. Absolute Rubbish...He was one of the most useless Ambassadors they had...No, that’s not true, the US Government congratulated us... Human Rights Watch brought out a special report on us in 1995...congratulating us, sort of. They didn’t say congratulations but saying it had improved hugely and congratulating me personally, by name I mean. Because one of my major electoral pledges was

⁵⁴ Interview with Ambassador Shaun E. Donnelly, 21 May, 2009

⁵⁵ John F. Burns, ‘Sri Lanka’s Leader Presses Drive to Take War to Rebels’, *New York Times*, November 13, 1995

⁵⁶ Nepal had, between 2002 and 2005, been the recipient of nearly \$22 billion of Foreign Military Finance

⁵⁷ Interview with Ambassador Shaun E. Donnelly, 21 May, 2009

improving the human rights situation. It was terrible before we came in. And we did – it took a lot of action to improve it.”⁵⁸

The Human Rights Watch report to which Kumaratunga was referring is actually the Human Rights Watch World Report, 1996⁵⁹. Whilst the section of the report devoted to Sri Lanka does contain some positive appraisal of her government’s handling of the human and civil rights violations apparently endemic on the island, it also makes a convincing case for the argument that, as far as violations and lack of punitive consequences for such violations was concerned, it was by and large ‘business as usual’. For example, the report draws attention to the establishment of the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF), the creation of a commission to examine the number of detainees under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the arrest of a number of Special Task Force members accused of torture and murder, and the forced retirement and detention of a number of law enforcement officials accused of rape and murder, as evidence of an improvement in the human rights condition. However, the overriding sentiment of the report is one of indictment: “the abuses that occurred during the year, though only a fraction of those committed in previous years, were strikingly similar to crimes committed under earlier governments”⁶⁰. The report goes on to discuss how 1995 saw the “...re-emergence of death-squad-style killings by members of the Sri Lankan security forces”, renewed efforts to “...restrict freedom of expression”, frequent killing of civilians by air raids, arbitrary arrests, kidnappings and torture of Tamil civilians and so on⁶¹. The report’s findings were reflected clearly by then US Assistant Secretary of State Robin Raphael who, at a press briefing in Colombo, reiterated the American refusal to sell lethal weapons to Sri Lanka because of remaining concerns about human rights. She did, however, note that improvements had been made by the new President⁶².

⁵⁸ Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch World Report, 1996

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid

Thus, President Kumaratunga was correct in her assumption that the international community had indeed praised the efforts she had gone to in order to improve Sri Lanka's human rights record, yet the extent of this praise was clearly limited and, once the war began again in earnest, this praise became an even rarer commodity. She went on to contest the American Embassy's assertion further, challenging the Ambassador to, "quote instances – actual facts – of where the US government worried about human rights situations during my regime. Quotes. Clear facts."⁶³ The former President used the human rights record of the previous UNP government and the current SLFP dominated government under President Mahinda Rajapakse, to illustrate just how much progress she believed her government had made on this issue:

"We changed the situation dramatically in the south, for the better. I took action also to do likewise in the north, because the soldiers were running riot – you know, raping people, robbing, marching into their houses on the pretext of searching their houses looking for the LTTE cadres and just taking their jewelry and their money and all this kind of thing.

So I did all kinds of things, put in various programmes to train the soldiers there... have specific groups of soldiers who would do the search operations. I always wanted to stop the war and resolve it through dialogue. So I selected... educated young men at middle level and sent those people... I spoke to them myself...like training them. I had others speaking to them and then sent them to talk to the soldiers in the north, in the war zones, you know, to change their attitudes – that you can't behave like this... and the fall-out that there would be for all of us if they do that. And the situation changed dramatically in the first few months"⁶⁴.

According to Kumaratunga, there were only two major human rights concerns that marred her rule: the rape and murder of Krishanthi Kumaraswamy by SLA soldiers, over which, "...I took immediate action", and the discovery of the Chenmanni mass graves in Jaffna. The Chenmanni graves are a now an infamous issue over which all sides involved in the conflict have fought. Over four hundred Tamils had been buried in an area of Chenmanni, near Jaffna and were discovered a number of years after the Sri Lankan

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

Army had re-taken Jaffna from the LTTE. The Tigers, along with many in the Tamil community, blamed the Sri Lankan Army for the atrocity and the Sinhalese community blamed the LTTE. President Kumaratunga ordered an investigation:

“... there was a huge investigation and I didn’t have fraudulent investigations like Mahinda Rajapakse’s government – we had a proper investigation. We invited foreign experts from abroad... and the UN agencies sent their forensic experts and the investigation... was inconclusive because they didn’t have enough proof to show *when* they died. It could have been at the time we took Jaffna ... or it could have been people who were killed before my government came in, who were buried.

We couldn’t establish whether it was, if at all... during my government... it couldn’t have been established.”⁶⁵

Of course, in certain respects, comparing your rule to that of your predecessor and successor is valid for it presents readily identifiable markers of improvement. Schaffer certainly highlighted this comparative politicking by confirming as correct the PA’s allegations that “...in their period in power, the UNP’s successive governments had seriously degraded Sri Lanka’s democratic institutions”⁶⁶. This comparison also begs the obvious question, ‘why was so much aid forthcoming from the US to the previous UNP government despite its horrific abuses of the civilian population?’. However, it also lends itself to a certain relativism, i.e. transgressions certainly did occur under President Kumaratunga’s regime, but just because there were less than under President Premadasa, does that make it more acceptable? President Kumaratunga certainly thinks that her regime must be viewed through the lens of historical comparison or else how can judgments concerning progress be made? And in her opinion, her government had made substantial progress in clamping down on abuses:

“The whole world said it was much, much, much, much better. And that is why the whole world began to listen to our requirements and proscribed the LTTE – the US proscribed, the UK proscribed. Canada didn’t proscribe the LTTE but they

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Schaffer, ‘The Sri Lankan Elections of 1994: The Chandrika Factor’

banned the collection of funds for the LTTE. Public meetings and collection of funds in Canada, and the US and UK banned.”⁶⁷

Despite the Kumaratunga government’s assertion that human rights violations had been sharply curtailed since the PA took over the reins of the country, and despite a number of independent human rights groups and Colombo diplomats confirming this, the US remained firmly circumspect on the issue. Unfortunately, for the incumbent Sri Lankan government, what has become a matter of public record, is that there evolved a clear correlation over time between the rising intensity of the new phase of the conflict and the reports of human rights abuses being carried out by the security forces. The US Department of State’s Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996, makes for grim reading as it details the numerous extra-judicial killings allegedly perpetrated by the Special Task Force (STF)⁶⁸, the hundreds of abductions of civilians in Jaffna, Colombo and elsewhere, the torturing of prisoners and so on. Perhaps the report’s greatest condemnation is reserved for the legal and judicial system of the island which, it reports, appears largely reluctant to make any attempt at holding perpetrators accountable⁶⁹. Although the report does highlight some of the achievements of the Kumaratunga government in its steps to control the abuses, such as the establishment of a Permanent Human Rights Commission, the prosecution of soldiers involved in particular incidents of murder and rape, as well as the government attempts to limit the number of civilian casualties during its military offensive, the report is largely and highly condemnatory of the situation in the country.

Another of the State Department’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the same year makes for much the same reading – a litany of extra judicial killings (many more than reported in Sri Lanka in the same year), disappearances, torture and so on. However, this particular country report was for the Philippines, and the US government

⁶⁷ Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

⁶⁸ The STF is an elite special forces unit of the Sri Lanka Police

⁶⁹ US Department of State, *Sri Lanka Country Report on Human Rights Practices, 1996*, http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1996_hrp_report/srilanka.html

gave it \$1.25 billion in all types of military assistance over the period 1990 – 2005. In the financial year 1998, democratic Sri Lanka received just under \$1.3 million in Military Exports from the US, whilst a decidedly *undemocratic* Saudi Arabia, topped the global list with nearly \$4.5 billion⁷⁰. Whilst the country to country comparison may be a little glib it is merely intended to serve as a reminder that the US-Sri Lanka relationship, with regard to the conflict, is based on a more complex set of governing principles than simply a US aversion to human rights transgressions. Of course the issue of human rights is, quite correctly, an important pillar upon which American aid and assistance is contingent, but as we have seen over the course of this study, there are a number of other historically recognisable principles operating upon the bi-lateral relationship. If human rights concerns were the only, or even the primary, concern of Washington then it would appear absurd that it would continue to supply large sums of aid and assistance to the UNP governments that preceded President Kumaratunga's, despite their well-documented and, at times, atrocious violence against their own citizens – in particular the government of President Premadasa – and yet cut it entirely when Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, with her new devolution package and plans to curb human rights abuses, becomes the leader of the country. Of course, the investigation has already explained some of the other reasons for the frosty early relationship with President Kumaratunga – it has shown how the SLFP of her mother and father cast a long shadow over the rule of the PA in the 1990's, and we have demonstrated quite clearly that the ideologically more familiar UNP generally gain more from Washington than other governments.

d) Personality and Policy

There was, in the first few years of the 1990's, another issue which caused tension between the Sri Lankan government and Washington. The dispute was over the placement of a Voice of America broadcast station in Iranawila, in the North West of the island. A substantial grass roots protest emerged against the station on the grounds that it

⁷⁰ D. Lochhead and J. Morrell, 'Arms Trade: U.S. Outsells All Others Combined', *Center for International Policy*, <http://www.ciponline.org/oldiprarms.htm>

was a disruption to the local fishing economy, it was a threat to the pristine environment of the locale, and that the station itself represented an unwanted intrusion by the American propaganda machine into the country. Bernard Edirisinge, of the Iranawila People's Solidarity Forum (IPSF) was quoted as saying, "Is it only music transmissions the VOA will be dishing out? Is it because we refuse to dance to such music that our garment quotas are to be cut, our flour restricted and our aid sliced?"⁷¹. Upon being questioned about the VOA issue, President Kumaratunga was quick to point out that the Americans were given permission to place the broadcast station on the island by the previous UNP government. The problem had arisen once the Indian government began demonstrating their concern that the station would be used "...to tap messages and, you know, communications in India"⁷². This incident, once again, demonstrates the implications of India's regional significance – and the prominence that any country with designs in the region should assign to the sensibilities of the local giant. As a result of this episode, the UNP, conscious of upcoming elections, delayed making a decision on the issue. This, quite naturally, caused consternation in the US Embassy. Ambassador Schaffer, met a number of times with the President and her Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, in order to express this concern. There were postponements of construction and (largely cosmetic) government inquiries into the matter. Local media at the time enjoyed stoking rumours that the American Embassy had issued ultimatums to the government that if construction did not resume, the US would cut aid and trade⁷³. Of course there may be a correlation between the VOA issue and the dramatic withholding of aid and assistance after 1994, but since the broadcast station has since been built, and the 'falling out' between the two governments over the issue was perhaps more exaggerated than substantial, it is difficult to see that one directly caused the other. In fact, President Kumaratunga sees the issue from a different vantage point – she considers her personal resolution of the issue as an achievement that should have demonstrated

⁷¹ Kathryn Hamilton, 'Sri Lanka Village Takes on Voice of America', *Green Left Weekly*, 8 May, 1996.

⁷² Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 2009

⁷³ Kathryn Hamilton, 'Sri Lanka Village Takes on Voice of America'

early on her commitment to a more convivial relationship with the Americans than perhaps the US Embassy may have been expecting⁷⁴.

Part of the problem, as already touched upon and clearly recorded in various New York Times articles, appears to be the personal approach President Kumaratunga took towards the difficulties of the country – that whilst she was rightly applauded for her bold political approach to solving the conflict, her “...combative personality...could be her Achilles heel”⁷⁵. Many contemporary onlookers, including Ambassador Donnelly, have pointed to certain of her personality traits as reasons why her government was often criticised for inefficiency, and therefore a substantive cause for the lack of confidence Washington had in her administration. Ambassador Donnelly quite clearly found it hard to “... engage the GSL given its unique character with President CBK personally dominating many decisions”⁷⁶. Barbara Crossette, somebody who has highlighted the challenging circumstances Kumaratunga had to face, still commented that, “As for her organisational skills, I wouldn’t say they were very good. I know from accounts by Sri Lankan officials I have talked with that she veered from micromanagement to absence on important issues”⁷⁷. The return to war that took place in the first year of Kumaratunga’s presidency evolved into, what many critics called, a “personal crusade”⁷⁸. The apparently personal manner in which the President prosecuted the war reflected poorly upon her international reputation, which was done even more harm by the impact of the war on a number of areas of civil life in Sri Lanka. According to John F. Burns of the New York Times, her personal failings were bound up with the military strains placed upon the country at the time. The war-footing she had placed the country on “...almost doubled the military budget, with effects for the civilian economy that have included crippling Government deficits, an inflation rate close to 20 percent and rising unemployment”⁷⁹.

⁷⁴ Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

⁷⁵ A senior Sri Lankan government official quoted in, John F. Burns, ‘Torn by War, Sri Lanka Faces Deepening Despair’, *New York Times*, January 19, 1997

⁷⁶ Interview with Ambassador Shaun E. Donnelly, May 21, 2009

⁷⁷ Personal correspondence between the author and Barbara Crossette, May, 2009

⁷⁸ Burns, ‘Torn by War, Sri Lanka Faces Deepening Despair’, *New York Times*

⁷⁹ Burns, ‘Torn by War, Sri Lanka Faces Deepening Despair’, *New York Times*

Of course, there is also no escaping the historical view that Washington has maintained towards the two previous Bandaranaiques and their SLFP – this weight of history bearing down upon the relationship between President Kumaratunga and US policy-makers is, whilst not decisive, definitely formative. The ‘push-pull’ nature of the American-Sri Lanka relationship vis à vis the conflict, leads to a ‘schizophrenic’, and often frustrating set of policy parameters. As policy, the US wants to assist countries combating terrorists, yet to be eligible for such assistance countries clearly need (and quite rightly so) to fulfil certain criteria. What creates a certain degree of frustration and/or confusion is the flexibility of the application of those criteria. It would appear that there are too many variables, from country to country, to be able to determine a rigid set of policies as regards who is and is not deserving of aid to combat terrorism. Sri Lanka seems to deserve assistance by virtue of it being terrorised by arguably the world’s most dangerous organisation, yet receives very little in this particular period, based upon the human rights record of the Kumaratunga government. Yet, the previous UNP governments, internationally condemned for their notoriously poor record, saw unprecedented levels of aid, whilst countries, apparently maintaining similar if not worse statistics than Sri Lanka, receive staggering amounts of assistance, both military and civilian. America was adamant that it was not prepared to assist, materially, the PA government against the LTTE, but what the US government was prepared to do, however, was to proscribe the LTTE as terrorist in 1997.

e) The US Proscribes the LTTE: Little of Substance

Under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1996, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright designated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO). In a briefing the Secretary gave in October 1997, explaining the reasoning behind the designation as well as the implications such a designation would have, Albright stated that there were three main consequences to being identified as a FTO:

“First, as of today, it is a crime to provide funds, weapons or other types of tangible support to any of the designated organisations.

Second, members and representatives of these organisations are hereby ineligible for visas to enter the United States, and are subject to exclusion from the United States.

And third, any funds that these organisations have in our country will be blocked.”

Reinforcing President Clinton’s stated belief that terrorism was arguably the most direct threat to global peace since the death of the Cold War, Albright made it clear that US policy was now centrally targeting the international activities of terrorist groups such as the LTTE on its own soil. What 1997, and the designation of the LTTE as an FTO represented, was a fundamental policy recognition of the president’s wishes as stated in 1995. What Washington was now planning to do was, as metaphorically stated in the very first paragraph of the Department of State’s ‘Patterns of Global Terrorism’ report of 1999, to “drain these swamps”. By ‘draining these swamps’, the Department of State meant that it was seeking,

“...to limit the room in which terrorists can move, plan, raise funds, and operate. Our goal is to eliminate terrorist safe havens, dry up their sources of revenue, break up their cells, disrupt their movements, and criminalise their behaviour... these... groups have turned increasingly to other sources of funding, including private sponsorship, narcotrafficking, crime, and illegal trade.”

The report, rather revealingly, goes on to state that,

“Another trend is the shift eastward of the locus of terrorism from the Middle East to South Asia.”⁸⁰

Supporting this apparent modification of the American approach to its security in South Asia was the National Security Strategy For a New Century, 1999, which stated:

⁸⁰ US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1999*, p. 1

“Our strategy for South Asia is designed to help the peoples of that region enjoy the fruits of democracy by helping resolve long-standing conflicts, implementing confidence-building measures, and assisting economic development. Regional stability and improved bilateral ties are also important for U.S. economic interests in a region that contains a fifth of the world’s population and one of its most important emerging markets.”⁸¹

After criticising and simultaneously petitioning foreign governments to assist more effectively and with greater dedication to the fighting of the LTTE networks abroad and on the frontlines in Sri Lanka (most publically at the UN in 1995), finally, in the few years following 1995, the US appeared to be committing itself to this very task. The US would begin a structured and legal constriction of the LTTE’s resources within America and, perhaps more acutely, it appeared that she would be focussing on South Asia, and hence Sri Lanka, as an area to be given particular attention with regard to security and terrorism. In the years that would close out the twentieth century, President Kumaratunga should have been looking forward to something of a windfall in terms of federal movements towards eradicating the LTTE support network inside the US⁸², as well as in terms of practical military and financial assistance to combat the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. As we have already mentioned, this windfall did not really materialise.

When the question was put to Barbara Crossette why she thought that more aid and assistance was not forthcoming after the watershed proscription, she provided significant insight into the many possible reasons:

“My sense about the chances of more US aid after the proscription of the LTTE is that the two were separate issues. The ban on the LTTE was really intended to put

⁸¹ *A National Security Strategy For A New Century, 1999*, p.44-45

⁸² Just by way of example, in 2006 a number of arrests were made in New York after an attempt by members of the LTTE procurement network to purchase Russian-made SA-18 surface-to-air missiles, missile launchers, AK-47’s and such from an under-cover agent. In the same year a number of arrests were made of people in the US who were accused of fundraising for the LTTE and trying to bribe US public officials in an attempt to get the LTTE removed from the FTO list. According to the unsealed complaints, the defendants had close links with the LTTE leadership in Sri Lanka and many had met personally with LTTE leader Prabhakaran

a stop – when western governments finally realized the danger – of extensive fundraising and intimidation of Tamil communities abroad. But Chandrika, perhaps because of the influence of her mother and the party's economic policies, never had a particularly close relationship with the US.”⁸³

One of the more interesting reasons Crossette gives for American unwillingness to do more after the proscription, and one which has been discussed in previous chapters, was that US intervention in Sri Lanka would have caused major regional disturbances, particularly with relation to India: “But the overriding fact remains that India would have worked hard to block any US intervention”. What makes Crossette’s point interesting is her understanding of why this might be the case. She makes the obvious connections between US movements in Sri Lanka and domestic Indian Tamil political pressures, as well as the issues of Indian sovereignty and strategic regional influence, but she also gives a very personal insight into India’s attitude to Sri Lanka: “India, I always felt, thought that it had inherited the British Empire⁸⁴”.

Less than a week after the US proscription of the LTTE a massive truck bomb ripped through the central business district of Colombo, doing wide scale damage to a number of the five star hotels, particularly the Galadari and the Hilton, tearing through a portion of the just-finished World Trade Centre and killing a substantial number of people. What makes this attack unique is not simply the scale of the destruction it caused, but that it came so quickly after the proscription and clearly targeted foreigners. Historically, the LTTE had avoided, where possible, including foreigners as collateral damage because the leadership clearly recognised two issues: firstly, targeting foreigners would de-legitimise their argument for struggle – that theirs was a struggle against the domination of the Sinhala Buddhist state machinery; secondly, killing foreigners intentionally would damage it’s fundraising capabilities abroad. However, as reported by John F. Burns of the New York Times, once the US proscribed the LTTE, there was a feeling that the

⁸³ Personal correspondence between the author and Barbara Crossette, May, 2009

⁸⁴ Ibid

terrorists no longer felt it worthwhile to maintain their suspension of bombing⁸⁵. It is perhaps a tragic irony – if this argument holds any water – that the American designation actually re-invigorated the activities of the very terrorist organisation it was attempting to curtail. Another argument outlined by Burns in his article about the bombing was that,

“Mr. Prabhakaran, who makes his headquarters in the northern jungles of the island nation, and other senior Tiger officials, have repeatedly warned that Western nations providing military support to Sri Lanka were exposing their citizens to possible attacks by the Tigers.”⁸⁶

With the apparent targeting of foreigners, particularly those who may have been supplying military equipment to the Sri Lankan government, one might expect the US to be more assertive in the conflict. However, for reasons already investigated previously and issues to be discussed below, US military assistance to Sri Lanka in this period was negligible. But not so from other countries. President Kumaratunga recalls some of the countries she received tenders, bids and military hardware from,

“We bought so much but we didn’t buy very much from the US – the US didn’t bid very much. They didn’t bid very much – it was mainly Israel, Britain a lot... Pakistan for certain types of things.”⁸⁷

Although the US offered little to Sri Lanka, in terms of military equipment, Kumaratunga does recall one specific incident where she invited a large US company to supply a particular aircraft, “that we required for the war which they produced – which was supposed to be the best of its kind – and we bought it from them”⁸⁸. However, other than very isolated purchases under the banner of Direct Commercial Sales, the US government was an unwilling partner in this new post-proscription environment. In fact, President Kumaratunga recalls that more often than not the Embassy stymied her government’s attempts to purchase hardware:

⁸⁵ There had been a fifteen month ‘lull’ in bombing

⁸⁶ John F. Burns, ‘Tamil Tigers are Linked to Fatal Blast in Sri Lanka’, *New York Times*, October 16, 1997

⁸⁷ Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

⁸⁸ Ibid

“I was begging the US government – I began during the time of Burley and continued after Donnelly came – for a very particular weapon which could have targeted certain spots in those areas. I was always very conscious of not killing innocent civilians in the war. So these were weapons that could target specific points – you know we knew that the LTTE was operating in certain areas – we could target those. They didn’t respond to that, they just didn’t give it – and we didn’t ask for it free – I said we are willing to pay for it.

They just kept asking, “Why do you want this, why do you want this?” I said obviously we want it to kill the terrorists!”⁸⁹

An interesting and shady post-script to this point is that, after the US said ‘no’ to her requests, President Kumaratunga then went on to petition the French for the same weapon. The French gave a similarly cold response; however, she believes that the Americans had somehow pressured the French into refusing:

“And I tried to buy it from France because I know France also had it. France had much better relations with us because of my French connections... and I have a feeling that, because we kept on asking the Americans for over a year, they may have prevented the French from giving it to us and the French pretended that they didn’t have it. It’s a very secretly kept weapon.”⁹⁰

So, after the apparent paradigm shift under the Clinton Presidency towards a greater focus on terrorism and on American involvement in South Asia; after the watershed proscription of the LTTE in 1997 and the formal recognition by the State Department of the group as the deadliest terrorist organisation operating in the mid and late 1990’s; after the shift in emphasis outlined in the National Security Strategies and the Patterns of Global Terrorism towards domestic terrorism throughout the world, Sri Lanka still appeared as an improbable candidate for more US assistance against the LTTE.

It is at this point that the chapter must reiterate some of the many and complex issues hindering the US-Sri Lankan relationship. The ideological nature of the SLFP and the

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid

historical cultivation of an antagonistic relationship with the US naturally conditioned Washington towards a more cautious approach to this new manifestation of the party under President Kumaratunga. The issue of human rights violations, erosion of democratic institutions and the curtailing of civil liberties created a barrier, warranted or otherwise, between the US Embassy and the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry. The nuances of Indian hegemony in the region, further complicated by domestic political pressures brought to bear by the large Tamil population in southern India, caused a very clear reluctance in American policy making circles to become involved substantively in Sri Lanka against the LTTE. The fact that Washington prioritised aid and assistance away from the island based on the relatively strong socio-economic markers for the country, which seemed to indicate sound and sustainable levels of development, left an obvious hole in the country to country relationship. All of these facets came together and worked in intricate concert during the rule of President Kumaratunga to cast the nature of America's attitude to her government. To these issues we must add an extra dimension: the personal relationships and contemporary episodes that impacted upon the bilateral connection.

The study has already made comment upon the considerable force that the personalities of some of the main protagonists wrought on the dynamics of the US-Sri Lanka relationship – Ambassador Donnelly clearly highlighted some of the challenges involved in 'doing business' with certain personnel in government. Whilst it is important that we do not overstate the significance of individual 'personalities' and personal relationships in shaping the complex foreign relations between countries, it is clearly a major determinant of the 'warmth' of such relations and, therefore, something for scrutiny. To this end we have a peerless source for our 'micro-exploration' into the mid and late 1990's manifestation of the relationship: President Kumaratunga herself.

Former President Kumaratunga spoke very candidly about some of the shortcomings of her government in relation to its connection with the US Embassy in Sri Lanka, as well as

with those higher up the American diplomatic order back in Washington. She was particularly conscious of a personal deficiency in the area of diplomatic public relations. Kumaratunga freely admitted that she did not effectively transmit to the Americans the successes her government enjoyed in the economy. This, she lamented, was something of a missed opportunity to alleviate American concerns that her SLFP dominated People's Alliance would revisit the socialist nationalisation policies of her mother, whilst simultaneously demonstrating a commitment to her campaign pledge, to move away from the rigid ideological strictures of the 'old' SLFP.

“You see, I was also Finance Minister while being Minister of Defence and President and the ‘economic war’, as I called it...and we won it, we did very well economically. Even with the war going on. So... I was concentrating on those things and I didn't have time to be advertising and doing publicity – our P.R....was not looked at all – we were a bit quiet.

So they (the Americans) didn't know all of these things that were going on – all of the things that I was doing. So maybe they were giving us time and watching us...”⁹¹

Had President Kumaratunga been able to devote more time to the publicity seen as key to securing support from the international community then perhaps America would have been more receptive to the overtures of the Sri Lankan state for more direct assistance. If nothing else, what would have been accomplished by a more expert handling of the public relations arm of the state, was that a clearer picture of the policy goals of President Kumaratunga would have been offered to the diplomatic corps. This, in turn, would have done much to assure America that the future of the country would not be held to ransom by a government open to the same ideological seizures as that which brought the country to its knees in the 1970's and that which all but destroyed the US-Sri Lanka relationship in the early 1960's. In short: it would have done much to convince the US that she was not now, and would not become in the future, what they feared: an SLFP 'monster'.

⁹¹ Ibid

In economic terms, this lack of experience publicising financial plans, detailing economic policies and trumpeting successes also did much harm to investor confidence. By her own admission, there was very little done initially to ease the concerns of those investors who were looking to Sri Lanka and waiting for clear signs that any investments they might make would be protected from possible nationalisation and safe from the whims of a government historically notorious for changing arrangements and financial terms of business after investments have been made.

“I mean at that time they were still watching – they were frightened to bring in big investments thinking we may nationalise them later. That was the problem with all western countries, and I don’t blame them. With the past history of the SLFP governments they took a long time to come... The US was very slow in coming.”⁹²

One of the major criticisms levelled at many of the island’s governments, and acknowledged by any number of high ranking Sri Lankan officials, was that the Sri Lankan state was tragically slow to evolve its public relations machinery in order to counter the increasingly sophisticated propaganda of the LTTE. Whilst it is not necessary to examine this issue too deeply for the purpose of the thesis, it is worth noting that, as reinforced by President Kumaratunga, she and others in her government were perfectly positioned to counter any LTTE propaganda personally. The very nature of high level diplomacy affords unparalleled opportunities, via person to person meetings, to canvass for assistance but, perhaps more importantly, to convey justifications for action and motivations behind decisions. The activities of the LTTE and *their* justifications for actions were always framed by their international propaganda as a struggle against racist discrimination and oppression. The government of the country did little to convince the international community otherwise. Once again, Kumaratunga laments that chances were missed to exploit better these unique and potentially ‘game-changing’ openings. In addition to admitting a degree of culpability over this issue herself (because of the constraints placed upon her time by the workload generated from the many governmental

⁹² Ibid

portfolios she maintained), she also pointed the finger at her own Foreign Ministry – “You see, I think we didn’t canvas them enough – there I would blame my Foreign Ministry (don’t ask names)”, and at some of the US Ambassadors occupying the Embassy during her tenure – “And then (I wrote) another letter because I wanted the Secretary of State (Albright) to know how Ambassadors misinform people – so maybe she was misinformed”⁹³.

President Kumaratunga goes on to apportion blame to her Foreign Ministry for failing in two areas. Firstly, she complained that certain individual ministry officials slowed down or hindered her proposals because of their own personal agendas: “And also, maybe, *maybe* in my Foreign Ministry also there were people who had various other agendas – they may not have pushed it enough. I don’t want to say any more about that. ... I’m quite sure they didn’t push it enough”.⁹⁴

Secondly, President Kumaratunga also bemoaned the inability or unwillingness of the ministry to get her appointments with top-ranking officials in the US State Department and with the US President himself, despite her repeated requests to do so:

“Because I kept saying every time I went to the US, I didn’t go that often, I went in 1995 and the next time was in 1997 or something like that. And I must have addressed the UN General Assembly about four times during my eleven and a half years – and Clinton was there, as you say. But he didn’t know me then – and he couldn’t get to know me because I kept telling my Foreign Ministry... “Ask for an appointment with the President”.

I said...before that, we could go to Washington to meet the President or ask for a separate state visit or an official state visit, whichever, and my Foreign Officers would say, “yes, you know we asked but they are still saying it will take time” ...well, I said “forget it”.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Ibid

An interesting consequence which resulted from the apparent shortcomings of some within her Foreign Ministry, and one which President Kumaratunga herself believed important enough to draw attention to as a major determinant of the ‘warmth’ of the US-Lanka relationship during her tenure, was the fact that the US perhaps saw her and her government as arrogant:

“I have a feeling the Clinton administration must have been wondering, ‘why on earth is she not coming to see us?’, and you know, that maybe I was being arrogant. They wouldn’t have known that we kept asking for appointments – not a lot – we asked several times and it was not given, so we just forgot about it. I said, don’t keep asking and humiliating ourselves – just forget it.”⁹⁶

She even goes on to theorise that, because her Foreign Ministry was unable or unwilling to channel her wishes to the correct ears in the State Department, the Americans were unaware of any requirement of aid, or even perhaps that the Americans saw this as an arrogant affront from an SLFP government that was *choosing* not to ask for help because that help was *American* help. Again, the ideological and historical ‘hangover’ from previous SLFP governments was proving to be an ever present facet of the US-Sri Lanka condition.

Although most contemporary protagonists have given sufficient comment to attest to President Kumaratunga’s warm and generous personality (including this author), what is also widely documented is that she maintains a fiercely combative quality. She confirmed as much in her descriptions of some of her encounters with certain US Ambassadors. These “...little tiffs we had with the Ambassadors...played some role” and as a consequence “...not really flattering reports... by the Ambassadors may have also put the State Department off”. Two of the ‘tiffs’ she describes involved, what she called the ‘inappropriate’ overtures made to her by Ambassador.....⁹⁷ . One concerned a meeting to which the Ambassador brought, unbidden, a representative from a private US

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Her Excellency wished the name of the Ambassador not be mentioned

firm who wanted to rebuild areas of Fort that had been destroyed in the Central Bank bombing of 1996. According to Kumaratunga, the issue which caused a ‘tiff’ was that,

“...we were given the impression – the Foreign Minister and I – separately first and then jointly, were given the impression that this gentlemen was being sent by the State Department. Given the impression – he didn’t say it in so many words, but given the impression. So we thought, ‘lovely, they’ll bring us some aid and help us rebuild’. And then we discovered that he was from the private sector – a friend of the Ambassador’s.”⁹⁸

The former President goes on to describe how the US Embassy had also simultaneously been meeting with the UDA (the Urban Development Authority) in Sri Lanka who had apparently been given a similar impression as that given to the President. Additionally, she explains that the UDA may also have been given the entirely false impression that the government – Kumaratunga and the Foreign Minister – “had said ok to this”.

Consequently, the UDA gave a certain commitment to the US company, “not engaging the man’s company but giving some initial agreement that he should go on. They hadn’t signed any agreement...to rebuild – they had only given one assurance in writing on the insistence of the man, saying ‘we are willing to look at this project with you’”. President Kumaratunga was therefore shocked to receive a bill totalling hundreds of millions of rupees from this US company “...for plans and this kind of thing”⁹⁹. Just how much of President Kumaratunga’s recollections surrounding the causes of this ‘tiff’ are owed to Ambassadorial duplicity and how much to a lack of communication in the Sri Lankan bureaucracy, is obviously a topic for debate, however, what is clear is that the ‘tiff’ escalated upwards to involve the US Secretary of State. The former president was frank in her assessment of the fallout: “I have a feeling that at the US State Department level there was annoyance with us.” The ‘annoyance’ was caused because the President initially refused to pay the bill. As a result, diplomatic machinery at the highest levels began operating and Madeleine Albright became directly involved:

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Ibid

“...at that time the Secretary of State wrote me a fairly strong letter..., obviously on the insistence of the US Embassy, here, sort of blaming us. At which point I wrote to her telling her this is what happened – what I told you – but in much clearer terms. And I said, ‘we are not willing to pay’.”¹⁰⁰

Unfortunately, for the President, it later emerged that the UDA had indeed committed themselves (up to a certain level) to the acquisition of this American company’s services. Consequently, President Kumaratunga was pressured into authorising the payment at the insistence of her Foreign Ministry who were “...scared to spoil the relationship with the US – and they were about to proscribe the LTTE – so we paid up”. The President paid the outstanding fee – which she personally thought was more than they should have had to pay – but not before responding to Madeleine Albright’s letter with a strongly worded letter of her own, detailing, what she believed, was the inappropriate behavior of the US Ambassador – “Don’t blame us, ask your Ambassador”¹⁰¹.

In a similar vein to this issue, the former President went on to describe a second ‘tiff’ which involved the US Ambassador trying to make appointments with her for US arms dealers. She criticised what she called these “unsolicited offers”. As befits her apparent combative personality, the President “...wrote them fairly strong letters... saying... quite clearly that I don’t like Ambassadors canvassing me to get appointments because I happen to be the Minister of Defence – and I don’t see any arms dealers at all. I refuse to see any arms dealers”. Her concern was that, by seeing arms dealers personally, she would be carrying on the informal trend which, she contests, was started by the previous government of inviting arms dealers into their homes in order to “... discuss how much bribes they were getting” and then, based on this they would “decide on what they were going to buy”. Kumaratunga’s approach to this issue, she admits, once again “...must have annoyed them”¹⁰². Irrespective of this ‘tiff’ she is quick to point out that the US only

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid

very rarely offered (and then primarily only from private US firms as Direct Commercial Sales) military hardware:

“Our market is so small, it’s like a drop in the ocean for them. The biggest arms manufacturing concerns in the world are in the US, as you know and, I suppose, they think it’s a waste of time and money even canvassing us. Except this once or twice they tried.”¹⁰³

What president Kumaratunga highlights here is a clear historical character-trait of the US-Lanka relationship, and something which will be addressed in more detail in chapters 7 and 8: that Sri Lanka rates relatively low as a foreign policy priority to Washington. Consequently, the administration *du jour* (in this case, Clinton’s) is ‘less willing’ to forego the human rights transgressions, the ideological disconnect between CBK, her SLFP, and Washington, and especially the sensitivities of India, in order that it may contribute more to resolving the conflict. Ambassador Wills clearly stated America’s unwillingness to take more direct action in terms of the conflict, at the expense of ignoring, what he believed to be, the insurmountable and problematic activities of the Sri Lankan state¹⁰⁴. In addition, any strategic significance Sri Lanka might hold for the US pales into insignificance when placed side-by-side with India – particularly when, in 1999 and 2000, there were significant signs that India was mobilising for some kind of re-intervention in Sri Lanka – a mobilisation that, though humanitarian in nature, seemed to be re-inforced militarily¹⁰⁵.

Perhaps the question that should be asked at this juncture – purely hypothetical in nature, though nonetheless relevant – is, what could the US have done, in terms of the conflict, even had it been prepared to forego the problems inherent in such an increased intervention in Sri Lanka? President Clinton’s ‘Humanitarian Military Intervention’

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Interview conducted with former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills, via e-mail, November, 2009. Wills was ambassador from November 13, 2000 – June 17, 2003

¹⁰⁵ Celia W. Dugger, ‘A Wary India Prepares to Step Back Into Sri Lanka’s War’, *New York Times*, May 25, 2000

would have been a disaster in Sri Lanka, and almost definitely, unwarranted – Sri Lanka is not Somalia. In addition, this kind of intervention, regardless of the moralising language inherent in the reasons necessitating such intervention – to ‘prevent evil from overcoming good’ – is still based upon the strategic imperatives of US foreign policy, i.e. human rights abuses, state-sponsored and otherwise, happen all over the world, yet the United States does not intervene everywhere. A natural and strategic prioritising of involvement ultimately shapes decisions regarding where and when the US intervenes, and as we have already shown, Sri Lanka remains a low priority – particularly when the irritable nature of Indian paternalism is taken into account. One thing Clinton did do was to send to the Senate for ratification, a treaty signed in September 1999, that would facilitate extradition of LTTE members to Sri Lanka. Other than the ‘discreet nudges’ – urging Norwegian and Indian facilitation of a negotiated settlement – characterised by the *New York Times*¹⁰⁶ – America was prepared to do little else. Direct military intervention in Sri Lanka’s civil war was clearly unthinkable for an America still ambivalent about its role in Vietnam. There were, and are, still too many obstacles to a greater involvement by America in Sri Lanka – in a meeting with President Kumaratunga, Under Secretary of State, Thomas Pickering, reiterated one of these obstacles as being the state’s human rights record¹⁰⁷.

And so, as the century drew to a close the Sri Lankan government, led by the latest in a polarising political dynasty, found itself deeply involved in an escalating formal conflict with the LTTE and, to a certain degree, at odds with the world’s greatest power. The US had officially recognised the LTTE as a terrorist organisation and had legally proclaimed its commitment to restricting its operation within the borders of the US. More than this, Washington had restructured its national security and terrorist strategy in order more effectively to accommodate the contemporary modulations of the South Asian region. Unfortunately, due to the pressures exerted on the US-Sri Lanka relationship by the historical determinants discussed throughout the thesis, the poor view taken of the

¹⁰⁶ See chapter 5

¹⁰⁷ *Human Rights Watch World Report, Events of 2001*, p. 222

island's new PA government by an American Embassy openly critical of its human rights record, the failings of this new government (self-acknowledged or otherwise), the controversial episodes over which the government and the US Embassy clashed, and the impact of contemporary protagonists central to the shaping of the diplomatic bond, America continued on its path of non-involvement in the conflict. Ultimately, to echo the words of Ambassador Donnelly, America "...should never remain neutral between a legitimate elected government and a terrorist group. But we hold the GSL to standards of conduct"¹⁰⁸. Apparently, the PA government that was guiding Sri Lanka out of one millennium and into another, had yet to raise those standards to a level acceptable to Washington. The 'greater engagement' promised by the Clinton administration was critically conditional. This conditionality is a clear and unmistakable echo from the history of the US-Sri Lanka relationship: Truman's criteria for American 'friendship' are plainly visible in Clinton's South Asian policy paradigm.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Ambassador Shaun E. Donnelly, May 21, 2009

CHAPTER 7

“Therefore we have to look ahead and say, ok, so we'll win the fight we're in but we also have to create a world where we have more partners and fewer potential terrorists.”¹

“The tremendous degree to which the Sri Lankan conflict has become internationalized also became increasingly evident through the year.”²

“(c) Cooperate, particularly through bilateral and multilateral arrangements and agreements, to prevent and suppress terrorist attacks and take action against perpetrators of such acts;”³

Overview

Unlike some of the previous chapters, the final two chapters focus very specifically on a period of time that is clear, punctuated at the beginning and end by two clear and chronologically sequential events. President George W. Bush and his administration provide the last two chapters with their starting point: the 2001 declaration of its War on Terror. The ‘end point’ is to be found through the confluence of two pivotal experiences: the end of President Bush’s second term in office as of January 20th 2009, and with it the end of the War on Terror, followed only a few months later by the Sri Lankan government’s defeat of the LTTE in May. Although the chapters have definite ‘bookends’ which secure the time period under investigation, the argument is not limited to a simple run through of the events of this final phase of the thesis, but instead relies upon a more comparative approach to its investigation. The analysis will focus on an examination of the modifications and modulations of the US-Sri Lanka relationship in the immediate post-War on Terror environment. This will be achieved by using evidence embedded in the chapter immediately preceding this one and comparing it to that put forward below, to determine and calibrate the impact of the Bush Administration’s

¹ Former President Clinton speaking at Georgetown University, November 2001

² A. Shastri, ‘Sri Lanka in 2002: Turning the Corner’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43, No. 1, A Survey of Asia in 2002 (Jan-Feb., 2003), pp. 215-221

³ UN Security Resolution 1373 (2001), 3 (C)

decision to pursue a globally interventionist anti-terrorist foreign policy, on Sri Lanka and her fight against the LTTE. This examination details the quantitative and qualitative changes wrought by President Bush's War on Terror on the Sri Lankan state with regards to the island's conflict. In short, the chapters will reach a thoroughly substantive conclusion, based upon detailed information evidenced by a set of primary source materials, as to whether the War on Terror represented a 'turning point' in the relationship America maintains with Sri Lanka. The thesis will also place this question in its rightful historical context, thus demonstrating the central posit of the thesis – that, despite the contemporary variables which graduate the bi-lateral relationship at any given time, there remains a set of contextualising 'governing principles', rooted in the historical bond between the two countries, that reach out from posterity to mould its genuine character – e.g. the ideological nature of the government *du jour* has a major impact on the relationship precisely because of the historical 'baggage' that comes with either an SLFP or a UNP electoral victory.

a) Sri Lanka's War on Terror: America's War on Terror?

"Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.

Terror unanswered can not only bring down buildings, it can threaten the stability of legitimate governments."⁴

"In this season of global terrorism, few people even know the name of the man who possesses one of the world's worst records for suicide bombings and other attacks on civilians. He is Velupillai Prabhakaran"⁵

In late 2001 two events occurred, one in the US and one in Sri Lanka, both of which, it was hoped by many, would lead to an improvement in, or resolution of, Sri Lanka's decades-old civil conflict. One, of course, was the declaration by President Bush of a global War on Terror after the al Qaeda terrorist attacks of September 11th. The other was

⁴ Transcript of President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night, September 20, 2001. <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>

⁵ No Author, 'Tentative Hopes in Sri Lanka', *New York Times*, Monday, April 22, 2002

a watershed general election held in December at which the UNP, led by Ranil Wickremasinghe, was able to defeat, albeit narrowly, the beleaguered PA government of President Kumaratunga. "Promising free markets and peace talks", (something President Kumaratunga found it increasingly difficult to deliver) the UNP gained 109 seats in parliament to the PA's 77⁶. These two singularly different events would unexpectedly bind themselves quickly to the political consciousness of many within Sri Lanka. When President Clinton professed a desire to see Washington more actively involved in the region in the mid to late 1990's, hopes had been raised among the island's political leadership that a resolution to the conflict might be more than just wistful dreaming. Despite these hopes being quickly dashed, they were once again raised with President George Bush's proclamations following September 11th. Coupled to the arrival in government of a re-invigorated and, most importantly, America-friendly UNP, the War on Terror succeeded in causing many in positions of authority on the island to begin a feverish anticipation of the anti-terrorist bounty of assistance that was sure to be making its way from American shores to those of Sri Lanka. It would be no mean statement to say that the expectations of those walking the corridors of Sri Lankan power had been raised to an agitated level by the prospect of the world's most powerful country putting its full weight behind efforts to resolve the island's, thus far, intractable conflict. President Kumaratunga herself commented that the attacks of September 11th should be seen as a "wake-up call" to America "to end its double standards on terrorism" and that as a result of the subsequent War on Terror, "...we would certainly...expect these countries to help us"⁷.

The impact of President Bush's declaration combined with an ideologically more approachable UNP had an almost immediate and, some would say unexpected, effect on the man at the epicentre of the troubles: Velupillai Prabhakaran. The prospect of a world outside of the narrow confines of those with a vested interest in the outcome of the

⁶ A. Shastri, 'Sri Lanka in 2001: A Year of Reversals', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 1, A Survey of Asia in 2001 (Jan. - Feb., 2002), pp. 177-182, p. 181

⁷ Interview with Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga on *CNN*. The interview aired 30th October, 2001. Transcript of the interview taken from <http://www.uthr.org/Statements/cnn%20transcripts.htm>

conflict (i.e. those who stand on either side of it), where the LTTE would be placed in the same category as al Qaeda and Prabhakaran spoken about in the same manner as Osama Bin Laden; where those affiliated in any way with the terrorist LTTE would be hunted down and held accountable by a new anti-terrorist world order; where the financial and procurement network of the group would be targeted and dismantled as a matter of urgency in return for country to country solidarity in the War on Terror, was a prospect naturally worrying in the extreme for Prabhakaran. Added to this, the arrival (return might be a more accurate word) of a politician who had proven to be a great proponent of a liberal economy and a clear critic of Sri Lanka's failed experiments with socialism, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, reacquainted Sri Lanka with a more sympathetic and willing United States. Wickremesinghe's election platform was based in part on a promise to negotiate with the Tigers in the hope that some form of peaceful settlement could be arrived at. Of course, such negotiations and their resultant failures had become a recurrent and sad theme of Sri Lanka's recent history, but never had these overtures coincided with such a global paradigm shift in the recognition of, and approach to, those on the terrorist spectrum. In a turn of events that the *New York Times* called "extraordinary and hopeful"⁸, the notoriously reclusive and cagey Velupillai Prabhakaran emerged from his jungle hideout, just a few months after President Bush declared it America's highest global priority to rid the world of terrorists, in order to announce his support for a cease fire and a return to the negotiating table. This was the first interview he had given since 1995. The last time he held a news conference was in 1990. Bearing in mind the carnage that had been left in the wake of the conflict in recent months, this was a truly remarkable turn of events. There is, of course, the argument that Prabhakaran was merely looking for a respite for his organisation at a time when the fighting between government forces and the LTTE was taking its toll – both sides suffering heavy losses. With the benefit of even a brief examination of previous LTTE calls for negotiation this would, of course, seem to be an accurate appraisal of the situation. Yet it does not tell the whole story. In the melodrama of the jungle press conference, Prabhakaran still refused to

⁸ No Author, 'Tentative Hopes in Sri Lanka', *New York Times*

commit to an abandonment of the LTTE's single most important condition for lasting peace: Eelam. However, the tenor of the conference, as encapsulated superbly by the New York Times journalist Somini Sengupta, was not combative, defensive or belligerent, it was almost conciliatory. As did most observers, Sengupta noted the symbolic shift in tone and appearance of the feared Prabhakaran:

“The leader... appeared at the news conference in a light gray safari suit, instead of the camouflage uniform and cyanide-tablet necklace in which he has long been pictured.”⁹

Speaking in Tamil, through his interpreter – LTTE chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham – Prabhakaran expressed a telling desire to set the international community (meaning primarily America and regional giant India) straight about the goals and strategies of the terrorist organisation¹⁰. In revealing language, he explained how the position of the LTTE was ‘misunderstood’ by observers and that “We wanted to express very clearly and coherently what we stand for and that we stand for peace”¹¹. The timing of this unprecedented news conference, the fundamental and symbolic altering of his image, the apparent shift in emphasis from the language of aggression to that of reconciliation, and the seemingly imperative need to clarify the position of the LTTE to international observers, should not be solely attributed to the organisation's need to recover from an escalation in fighting. Of course, they had made noises previously about peace and had entered into negotiations on a number of occasions, all with the same result. Even the most recent announcements made by Prabhakaran (November 2000) that the Tigers wished to negotiate peace were seen by most for what they were – largely attempts to stall the advance of the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and allow time for the LTTE to regroup. This time was different, because the world in which they operated was different. The LTTE had been on the back foot many times before, and in much weaker states than they were currently in, yet nowhere in their history had such an obvious attempt to ‘appear’

⁹ S. Sengupta, ‘Sri Lanka Rebel Voices Hope for End to 18-Year War’, *New York Times*, Thursday, April 11, 2002

¹⁰ The conference also simultaneously helped to reassure the Tamil Diaspora

¹¹ Ibid

less terroristic been made. In addition, all questions about past LTTE bombings, assassinations and killings were met with the same, almost plaintive obfuscation about a desire not to revisit the past. Nowhere was this clearer than when Prabhakaran was asked to comment on the widely held belief that the LTTE were responsible for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. He simply answered that, “It is a tragic incident that happened 10 years ago.”¹² The ‘new Prabhakaran’ and the ‘peace-striving’ LTTE, no matter how superficial, were a clear and obvious response to the developments dominating the anti-terrorist foreign policy strategies pouring out of Washington. Other than a brief lull in its activity immediately prior to the US proscription of the LTTE in 1997, Prabhakaran had never really felt the need to respond to non-regional international pressure. In part this was because such pressure was historically light weight (particularly from the Americans, as already discussed) but also because it was a rare thing indeed for the LTTE to directly antagonise western powers. As with most strategically motivated foreign policies, as long as the LTTE didn’t target American interests, then they would not be prioritised as a threat to national security – a sort of implicit, and naturally never spoken of, ‘don’t bother us and we won’t bother you’ accord. US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills indirectly reinforced this notion when he said that he believed Sri Lanka “... got the priority it deserved. It would have merited higher priority if, for example, the LTTE started attacking foreigners will nilly”¹³. Apparently with the declaration of the War on Terror still being digested by foreign policy experts, Prabhakaran felt, perhaps for the first time, a priority target of the US State Department. It appeared that it was no longer enough simply to avoid disturbing prioritised American interests, the LTTE would have to adapt to the new world of George Bush’s America, and distance themselves from the nomenclature of terrorism. All forms of terrorism were now, according to President Bush, a direct threat to American national security. With this in mind one can understand perfectly the timing of Prabhakaran’s first news conference in over ten years, and one can appreciate his change of clothes! Just nine months after the LTTE attacked Sri Lanka’s international airport, destroying half of the country’s national

¹² Ibid

¹³ Interview with former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills, November, 2009

carrier fleet, wiping out military jets and helicopters, and killing almost 20 people in the process, it appeared (albeit thinly) that the Tigers were trying to camouflage their stripes. According to former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Jeffrey J. Lunstead, in the post September 11th atmosphere “there was a judgement that it was good policy to take a harder line vis à vis the LTTE”, and that any peace process would most certainly have to “...have some sticks as well as carrots”¹⁴.

The timing of the change helps us understand the pressures brought to bear on the LTTE by the US declaration of a global war against all forms of terrorism, and it also helps us understand why it was that Sri Lanka’s War on Terror looked to many hopeful observers at the time like it was to become America’s War on Terror.

b) President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and the Americans: Part II

In the period immediately preceding the declaration of America’s global War on Terror, Sri Lanka, particularly the government of President Kumaratunga, was suffering. Since her initial bold attempts at conciliation with the LTTE back in 1995 had been derailed by, among other things, Tiger intransigence, she had concluded that the only language Prabhakaran understood was the language of the battlefield. Consequently, her government had embarked upon, what she euphemistically called, a ‘Battle for Peace’. Since then the continued escalation of the conflict brought with it the natural corollaries of a war fought against arguably the most advanced guerrilla force currently operating, namely, economic uncertainty, political instability, horrific acts of brutality (perpetrated by both sides), uncertainty and trepidation amongst the public and, at times, the bewilderment of the international community. Escalating military expenditure – the New York Times put the figure for arms procurement at \$350 million dollars for the year

¹⁴ Jeffrey J. Lunstead, *The United States’ Role in Sri Lanka’s Peace Process, 2002-2006*, (The Asia Foundation: Colombo, 2007), p. 16

2000¹⁵ – and an escalation in the deadliness of the conflict helped drive a negative growth rate the following year in most areas of the economy¹⁶. Worse still, such expenditure dramatically increased the following year. If one examines the UN Register of Conventional Arms for 2001, one can see a massive year-on-year increase in the procurement of military hardware when compared to the previous year. In 2001 alone, the Czech Republic, Russia, Ukraine and Israel exported a quite remarkable combined collection of military hardware to the tiny island of Sri Lanka: 25 battle tanks, 57 Armoured Combat Vehicles, 8 heavy artillery systems, 4 attack helicopters and 2 combat aircraft¹⁷. For a country with a population of around 20 million, where the GNP per capita in the year 2000 was less than \$835, and the balance of payments for the same year was -12.7% of GDP, one can easily see the economic and social consequences of a worsening war and, some observers would say, an inefficient government. Sri Lanka did enjoy a solid GDP growth rate in 2000, thanks in part to a general upturn in the economic fortunes of those countries in the East and South Asian regions, as well as to a talented and liberal-minded Foreign Minister – Lakshman Kadirgamar, but this was tempered by a collapse in tourism (particularly after the 2001 LTTE attack on the airport), military spending, and massive inflation¹⁸.

Even the briefest summary of the many issues negatively impacting Sri Lanka in the two years leading up to the declaration of the War on Terror and the elections that put Ranil Wickremesinghe's UNF coalition in control of the parliament, will give us the necessary understanding of the situation in the country as it emerged into the optimistic glare of President Bush's spotlight on terrorism. This account begins therefore in 2000: the year of George W. Bush's controversial election to the American presidency.

¹⁵ C. W. Dugger, 'Leader of Tamil Rebels Says he is Ready for Peace Talks', *New York Times*, Tuesday, November 28, 2000

¹⁶ Asian Development Bank, *Asian Development Outlook 2002: II Economic Trends and Prospects in Developing Asia: South Asia: Sri Lanka*, <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/ADO/2002/sri.asp>

¹⁷ 2001 UN Register of Conventional Arms

¹⁸ L. Saez, 'Sri Lanka in 2000, The Politics of Despair', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 41, No. 1, A Survey of Asia in 2000 (Jan-Feb., 2001), pp. 116-121

At the turn of the 21st century, Sri Lanka remained in the continued grip of an escalating conflict. President Kumaratunga entered the new era wounded, shaken and blind in one eye – having narrowly survived an attempt by an LTTE suicide cadre to assassinate her. Though not directly accepting responsibility, the LTTE did use the event in the north and the east to declare that the bomb had actually caused irreparable brain damage to the embattled President – thus adding humiliation to her wounds. Cross-party talks with the UNP opposition in order to examine possible resolutions to the conflict came to nothing. Having set a date for a general election in October, Kumaratunga, on the eve of the election, dissolved parliament, but not before introducing a slew of significant legislation relating to constitutional reform in the run up to parliament's close. The introduction of the Constitutional Reforms Bill caused major divisions on the political scene, not only because of the timing of its introduction but also because its content dealt with controversial issues of regional autonomy and decentralisation. In addition, she invoked emergency ordinances which gave wide powers to the security forces. Both issues tested heavily her popularity, the fragile PA coalition and the little progress that was being made in the cross-party talks.¹⁹ The October election took place and was characterised by a heady mix of violence and voting irregularities. Ultimately the PA emerged with 45% of the votes to the UNP's 40% which, while making the PA the largest party in parliament, was insufficient for control of the legislature – thus forcing it into unstable coalitions with smaller parties such as the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and the highly polarising Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

Events on the battlefield were equally and intractably tragic, with the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army trading victories and defeats. Between the LTTE's taking of Elephant Pass and their securing of the Jaffna Peninsula, and the SLA's re-invigorated efforts to retake it, the country experienced countless tragedies and bore witness to lost opportunities for peace. Increased terroristic activities throughout the country and a litany of abuses, including mass murder and torture, ascribed to those within the government security

¹⁹ Ibid

forces, left the country scarred and reeling. The ‘institutional decay’ that Neil DeVotta agrees began decades earlier and helped create the conditions for a cycle of suspicion, paranoia and violence between the two warring communities, continued apace in turn of the century Sri Lanka²⁰. Immovable political and religious positions preserved and promoted by the Sinhala nationalists, the activities of self-interested and ‘power crazy’²¹ politicians, and the brutal attacks carried out by the subordinates of a career terrorist, combined to create a ceaseless and bitter see-saw of reprisal and counter reprisal. As Sri Lanka’s ‘institutional decadence’²² allowed for gross abuses perpetrated by the security forces to go largely unpunished, the LTTE’s continued use of suicide bombings created an atmosphere in which neither side could remotely hope to trust the other. Consequently,

“... the good will and political capital necessary to recreate the requisite civil society and institutions that would guarantee a united Sri Lanka continue to be eroded.”²³

Attempts at negotiation, most notably in December 2000 when Erik Solheim, Special Envoy to Norway’s Foreign Minister, met with Prabhakaran and managed to reach an agreement whereby the LTTE declared a unilateral ceasefire, ended with almost, but not quite, the historically predictable outcome. President Kumaratunga, with the attempted assassination and the memory of her previous attempts at negotiating with the Tiger leader, still fresh in her mind, responded to the offer with an extraordinary military offensive against LTTE positions. President Kumaratunga’s response to the unilateral declaration was clearly a product of the “palpable culture of suspicion and distrust”²⁴ pervading the discourse of solutions to Sri Lanka’s conflict. Whilst it is possible to empathise with President Kumaratunga on a personal level – she had more experience than most of the effects of the conflict and is the only Sri Lankan head of state ever to

²⁰ N. DeVotta, ‘Control Democracy, Institutional Decay, and the Quest for Eelam: Explaining the Conflict in Sri Lanka’, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 73, No.1, (Spring 2000), pp. 55-76

²¹ DeVotta is quoting President Kumaratunga here, *Ibid* p. 74

²² *Ibid*, p.74

²³ *Ibid*, p.74

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.74

have actually met Prabhakaran face to face²⁵ – and one could clearly reason that this LTTE offer was simply another attempt to gain a breathing space for the Tigers at a time when the SLA were squeezing them tight, it was, however, an act that a number of observers in the international community found a very “peculiar opening response to LTTE overtures”²⁶. Such actions – to greet a unilateral ceasefire with a military response – frustrated the Americans and did nothing to quell the overarching concern that Ambassador Wills summed up when he said,

“We were somewhat reserved in our attitude toward the CBK government... we doubted her and her government's ability (or inclination) to implement serious change that would make peace possible.”²⁷

As the old century turned to the new, the condition in which Sri Lanka found itself was fittingly described by Saez as a “miasma”²⁸. The general feeling of the public, reflected by the press corps, was certainly that of a people (Sinhalese *and* Tamil) unsure of its path to peace and success because its leadership (including those in opposition), extremist political elements and the activities of the LTTE had created an obfuscating fog through which very little of coherent substance could be seen. Political power struggles²⁹, constitutional confrontation and, as Celia Dugger atmospherically described in one of her New York Times articles, the continuing “feeling of menace that hovers over the capital”, contributed to a pervasive and, almost fatalistic, unease across the country³⁰. The ever-present reminder of this unease were (and in fact still are – even after the conclusion of the war) the “Armed sentries (that) dot the cityscape, on the lookout for suicide bombers”³¹. A consonant deterioration of civil liberties and press freedoms, with great swathes of local newsprint blacked out by the government censors, did nothing to clarify

²⁵ When she and her husband met him in India

²⁶ Saez, ‘Sri Lanka in 2000, The Politics of Despair’, p. 118

²⁷ Interview conducted with former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills

²⁸ Saez, ‘Sri Lanka in 2000, The Politics of Despair’, p. 117

²⁹ For an excellent insight into the complex political machinations of both major parties, including defections, short-lived ‘marriages of convenience’ and constitutional challenges, all aimed at maintaining control of parliament, see Amita Shastri’s ‘Sri Lanka in 2001: A Year of Reversals’

³⁰ Celia W. Dugger, ‘As Peace Plan Falters, Sri Lanka’s War Has No End in Sight’, *New York Times*, Tuesday, August, 15, 2000

³¹ *Ibid*

either the situation in the north (vis à vis the conflict and the plight of the Tamil civilians) nor the government's plans for a resolution to the conflict. A New York Times article carried in mid May 2000 gave a useful summary of the deteriorating circumstances:

“Like many governments at war, governments in this democratic nation have periodically clamped down on the press during the long campaign against the rebels... But the new regulations are more far-reaching and include harsh new penalties.

...last week it (the government) imposed what journalists here said was the harshest censorship of the press ever. It also banned public rallies and trade union strikes that are deemed contrary to national security, as well as "seditious" words, defined as those spoken or written to try to create discontent among the citizenry.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has chosen to censor those who have most consistently warned about the shortcomings of the war effort at a time when all the military gains made during her six years in power are in danger of coming undone.”³²

The media restrictions were also imposed on foreign journalists operating out of Sri Lanka. Again, the New York Times is used as an invaluable resource because it has provided a continuum of reportage over the decades of this study, from government to government and bomb to bomb, and also because it reminds us of the perception being shaped, by this particular media source, of Sri Lanka and her issues back in the States. It also reminds us of the inescapable dynamic of politics: that the electorate needs to be shown results to justify the erosion by the government of their quality of life. The New York Times went on to highlight this dissatisfaction of the voters over the decline in their civil liberties. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that the author of this thesis experienced first-hand the disintegrating quality of life. The government largely eliminated the channels of effective media communication; economic mismanagement and the cost of the war caused the collapse of many basic services – eight hour rolling power-cuts twice a day due to electricity short-falls, as well as severe water shortages; claustrophobic restrictions on movement as the number of security check-points grew and

³² Celia W. Dugger, 'Joining Sri Lanka's Sword: Might of Censors Pen', *New York Times*, May 11, 2000

spread to oppressive levels. It is no overstatement to suggest that these were dark days indeed for people living on the island.

It merits reiterating the correlation between the worsening war and its socio-economic impact on the country because it helps remind us of the dialectical nature of American involvement in Sri Lanka – on the one hand recognising the need to provide aid and assistance to a country whose people were in desperate need of relief, but on the other recognising, quite rightly, that Sri Lanka’s government needs to accommodate certain basic modes of behaviour in order to qualify for such relief. According to Ambassador Wills, President Kumaratunga’s government was struggling to modify its behaviour to a standard acceptable to Washington. Echoes of President Truman’s criteria for unwavering American ‘friendship’³³ are clearly audible in the modern form of the bi-lateral relationship. In the interview with Ambassador Wills, he discussed two revealing issues: One was that the human rights transgressions of the Sri Lankan Military in combination with what he saw as President Kumaratunga’s “...apparent unwillingness to adopt policies and positions that would draw Tamils toward some sort of settlement that would keep the country united”, was *the* major stumbling block in the relationship. The other was a perfect demonstration of the aforementioned correlation between assistance and state accountability – saying that when he arrived in-post, USAID was actually planning to close out its programme on the island³⁴. For almost 50 years USAID had managed a very successful (though of course highly contingent) relationship with Sri Lanka. For it even to have been a consideration to close its operation, demonstrates the seriousness of the situation in the country. Once again, the historical parameters corraling the US-Lanka relationship, are clearly demonstrated. Ambassador Wills did go on to say that it was only by a dogged determination on his part that the “bureaucratic battle” to keep USAID operating in Sri Lanka was won. Nevertheless, the escalating conflict deepened Sri Lanka’s social and economic problems as much needed resources were prioritised away from sectors of the country in desperate need of financial

³³ Discussed in earlier chapters

³⁴ Interview with former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills, November, 2009

development and protection. An Asian Development Bank report for the year 2001 did not understate the scale of the problems to be found on the island when it said that in that year Sri Lanka had seen,

“...the worst economic performance ever recorded—in which the currency peg was abandoned, inflation picked up, and foreign finance became scarce.”³⁵

Interestingly, and instructive for the next part of this chapter, the report did include a note of optimism for Sri Lanka’s economy, but it had nothing to do with President Kumaratunga’s PA government and everything to do with the new UNP-led government (a coalition known as the United National Front) and Ranil Wickremesinghe.

“Sri Lanka is poised for a modest private sector-led recovery in 2002.”³⁶

c) Twin Hopes: The Return of the UNP and the War on Terror

“Tonight, we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom.”

“All of this was brought upon us in a single day, and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.”

“Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.”

“We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place until there is no refuge or no rest.”

“This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.”

“Terror unanswered can not only bring down buildings, it can threaten the stability of legitimate governments.”³⁷

³⁵ Asian Development Bank, *Asian Development Outlook 2002: II Economic Trends and Prospects in Developing Asia: South Asia: Sri Lanka*

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Transcript of President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night, September 20, 2001, <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>

As 2001 drew to a close, it became increasingly obvious that President Kumaratunga and the broad-based PA coalition she had managed to craft so profitably back in 1994 was crumbling. In a desperate bid to maintain control of parliament, she was forced into a 'marriage of convenience' with the ultra-nationalist JVP – a move which caused a number of high profile defections to the opposition, effectively dealing the death-blow to her ability to maintain a practicable government. The inevitable result was the dissolution of parliament and the calling of a general election. The outcome of the election, however, was far from inevitable – Shastri was perfectly correct in the assertion that when the country went to the polls, the people were just as much reducing support for a PA that had perhaps over-promised and under-delivered, as they were shifting support to a UNP lacking an "...imaginative alternative project"³⁸. Nevertheless, the UNP, with the support of the SLMC, managed to scrape a parliamentary majority. Calling itself the United National Front, the coalition emerged from an election marred by the unfortunate violence that has become a tragic, yet customary phenomenon, of the island's modern voting practices, as the new force in Sri Lankan government. Rather uniquely because of Sri Lanka's Gaullist political system, however, Chandrika Bandarnaike Kumaratunga remained the President, whilst Ranil Wickremesinghe, as leader of the majority in parliament, was elevated to the position of Prime Minister. A period of cohabitation followed that would raise and dash hopes with painful regularity, testing the patience of the electorate and often bewildering the international community, particularly the Americans. However, for a brief period of time Washington, and many within the country, truly believed that the country was on the verge of something historic. In the context of the War on Terror, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's accession to power presented to the Americans an historically and ideologically familiar face with whom they could 'do business'.

³⁸ Shastri, 'Sri Lanka in 2001: A Year of Reversals', p. 181

Ambassador Wills was very forthcoming in his appraisal of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe in relation to President Kumaratunga. He expressed a personal liking for both leaders but he held a clearly divergent attitude (reflected by Washington's own attitude) to the approaches both took to the conflict and the economy:

“I had a good relationship with CBK; we would debate matters in a collegial way and personally we had a good equation, with humor and kidding possible both ways. I got along well with Ranil as well.”

However,

“We liked his (Wickremesinghe) government's approach better than CBK's; his program focused on the two major matters: a lasting peace and economic growth based on the private sector. Kadirgamar and I also got on well, although he had harder edges than either CBK or Ranil.”³⁹

However, President Kumaratunga must be given due credit. Despite being admittedly slow to get going, her government's anti-LTTE public relations machinery – particularly that aimed at the international community – did energise itself in the period bridging the two centuries. Consequently, there were a number of countries, the US included, which began examining ways to pressure the LTTE into laying down their arms – hence the increase in the number of countries who, following in the footsteps laid by Washington in 1997, began proscribing the LTTE. However, it was not really until the attacks of September 11th that America and the world began to take a more active interest in the eradication of *all* forms of terrorism. Although the comparison may be oblique, there are parallels to be drawn, should one wish to do so, between the effects of the Oklahoma bombing on the American recognition of the horrors of domestic terrorism, and the effects of the attacks of September on the American view of international terrorist networks. What is absolutely clear is that, after the attacks, “Hostility to terrorism sharpened worldwide”⁴⁰.

³⁹ Interview with former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills, November, 2009

⁴⁰ Shastri, ‘Sri Lanka in 2001: A Year of Reversals’, p. 182

And so it was that, no more than a few weeks after the December general election that brought Ranil Wickremesinghe and his UNF coalition to power, the LTTE declared a unilateral ceasefire. The international pressures brought to bear by the new scrutiny of its activities fired in the kiln of the War on Terror rendered a climate of unprecedented opportunities for Sri Lanka: her people, her government and the LTTE. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's election pledge of ending the war through peaceful negotiation resulted in an immediate 'jump-start' from the powerful and consensus-driven new engine turning the wheels of American foreign policy. The newly reconstituted Sri Lankan government immediately responded (in a way that, as Ambassador Wills pointed out, President Kumaratunga increasingly seemed no longer willing/able to do) by declaring its own cease-fire. Through Norwegian mediation a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was finalised and signed by both parties in February 2002. The MOU formalised the cease-fires, laid the pre-requisite ground-rules for arbitration and, perhaps most importantly of all, established a "...positive atmosphere in which further steps towards negotiations on a lasting solution can (sic) be taken"⁴¹. The Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) would be monitored by the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) – an autonomous international organization, civilian in nature and financed and staffed by the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland.

This MOU represented the first and most serious attempt at a peaceful settlement of the Sri Lankan conflict since 1995. The twin narratives of a re-aligned international environment coalesced around a singular anti-terrorist objective, and a Sri Lankan government a) more willing to find a solution to the conflict and b) more ideologically in tune with the American Embassy, constructed a unique convergence in the island's history. This convergence promised to remodel modern Sri Lanka in an unprecedented and, most importantly, peaceful image. It was no understatement when noted scholar on South Asia and Sri Lanka, Amita Shastri, entitled one of her articles, 'Sri Lanka in 2002:

⁴¹ Text of the Memorandum of Understanding found at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/document/papers/memorandum2002.htm>

Turning the Corner?'⁴². What this study will examine next is what exactly was around this 'corner'.

d) The War on Terror Years: Progress, Regress, and the Rise of Mahinda

This chapter uses, among a number of other invaluable resources, a set of statistics to substantiate its central posits. These statistics prove the core arguments that have evolved throughout the thesis but, just as importantly, they demonstrate clearly the links to be found between the events taking place in Sri Lanka and America's response, placed in the context of the War on Terror, to these events. Before the chapter examines the statistics, however, it is vital and inevitable that a detailed examination of the themes, issues, and events that dominated the bi-lateral US-Lanka connection in the period contextualised by the War on Terror, be undertaken so that the chapter has very clear and chronologically identifiable 'pegs' upon which to hang the statistics that follow. It is also important at this juncture to note that the purpose of this chapter is not a critical exploration of conflict resolution, nor a judgment on the Sri Lankan government's handling of the conflict in its final stages, but an investigation of America's response to certain key elements of Sri Lankan governance during the peace-process and later the renewed state of war.

History is often viewed through the rose-tinted glasses afforded by the passage of time and, to a certain degree, this practice has, on occasion, been indulged in when remembering the initial period of time covering the CFA and the peace process. Of course, the objective of this chapter is to separate fact from romantic fiction, however, the emotional or psychological dimension attached to those brief months in 2002 and 2003, should not be neglected as mere phantasms characteristic of over-indulgent retrospectives. There are major counter arguments existing as to whether anything was actually achieved during those years when Ranil Wickremesinghe was Prime Minister.

⁴² A. Shastri, 'Sri Lanka in 2002: Turning the Corner?', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43, No. 1, A Survey of Asia in 2002 (Jan.-Feb., 2003), pp. 215-221

Many of the voters saw the middle class business owners as the principal beneficiaries of his policies, whilst the cost of living for average citizens rose to often unbearable levels, and clearly there were political opponents at the time – including President Kumaratunga – who believed that Wickremesinghe had been too naïve in trusting Prabhakaran and had, as a consequence, conceded too much to the LTTE. Nevertheless, having personally been a witness to the contemporary impact of the CFA as an expatriate member of the civilian population, it is no exaggeration to describe the contemporary situation as dramatically optimistic and physically transformative. Within the space of just a few weeks, many of the security check-points that had dominated the Colombo cityscape evaporated, and within mere months it was possible to identify the beginnings of economic confidence – new bars and restaurants materialised, new construction projects began laying their foundations, and early signs of foreign investment were clearly evident. While this panorama must be tempered with the due circumspection that is necessary when investigating the complexities of a predicament decades-in-the-making and particularly one which had proved historically insoluble, it is also necessary to remember that it was precisely these developments and advances being made by the Wickremesinghe government that were key to the reconstitution of American attitudes to the island and the conflict. At the very least, this period of time, distinguished by the three convergent themes of the War on Terror, the policies of the economically liberal UNF government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the sincere attempts being made by this new government at peace-building, would come to represent the unequivocal ‘high point’ of the US-Sri Lanka bi-lateral relationship, not only of the previous decade, but the decade that was just beginning. As will become clear, the relationship would once again begin suffer from a process of atrophy. It would not take long before this process began. Very early on in the peace-process, the SLMM felt the situation had deteriorated to such a degree as to consider withdrawing from the country:

“By July 1, 2002, a total of 270 violations were reported against the LTTE and 110 against government forces accompanying the monitors. Most violations consisted of complaints about harassment, kid- napping, abductions, extortion,

use of violence, and killings. At one point, the Scandinavian monitors began to reconsider their mission after the Tigers held two team members against their will on board a guerrilla trawler.”⁴³

The numerous transgressions perpetrated by both sides during the period of the CFA, were just one of a number of key issues that would impact the US-Lanka relationship in the time covered by this chapter. President Kumaratunga’s November 2003 seizure of the key cabinet portfolios of Defence, Media, and Interior while Prime Minister Wickremesinghe was on a state visit to Washington, and her subsequent dissolving of parliament and calling for new elections, would politically destabilise the country, antagonise the Americans, and re-contextualise a stalling peace-process. The rise of an SLFP stalwart to the position of President – a man who would eventually lead the armed forces to victory over the LTTE – would, in the process of doing so, dramatically isolate Sri Lanka from the international community and cause a massive rift with the US Embassy and British High Commission over its human rights abuses (against political, military and civilian opponents) and its single-minded prosecution of the war. The two historically consistent themes in the US-Sri Lanka relationship – that of the ideological colouration of the Sri Lankan government being an attractant or repellent of Washington, and the perceived contravention of basic human and civil liberties by government forces would, once again, help to shape the relationship in the first decade of Sri Lanka’s new millennium.

To those key contemporary and historical determinants of the US-Sri Lanka relationship that will be investigated in this chapter, another must be added: the tragic tsunami that devastated the country in December 2004. While the chapter will not discuss in isolation the impact of the Tsunami on bi-lateral ties, it will attempt to separate its impact, where practical and possible, from the statistics used as primary evidence to support the arguments herein. Inevitably the statistics of aid and assistance will be ‘skewed’ from normalcy because of the catastrophe, but it is essential that these ‘disfigurements’ are

⁴³ A. Shastri, ‘Sri Lanka in 2002: Turning the Corner?’, p. 217

examined for what they were – anomalies in, what should be recognised as, a largely predictable pattern of relations.

With the full weight of the newly re-aligned international community behind the peace-process, two meetings in Thailand and one in Oslo (September, November, and December respectively) “...made surprisingly swift progress”⁴⁴. The talks in Oslo were particularly high profile, both Shasti in her article, ‘Turning the Corner’ and Ambassador Wills in his interview with this author, specifically made mention of the attendance of the formidable Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage. Wills stated that the presence of Armitage was an attempt by the State Department to “...use our moral authority and international prestige to try and push for a peace deal”⁴⁵. Ambassador Jeffrey Lunstead, Wills’ immediate successor, went even further, in his report, ‘The United States’ Role in Sri Lanka’s Peace Process’, stating that,

“Heightened US interest in Sri Lanka from 2001 onwards was largely driven by then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. The enhanced interest was largely based on a belief that Sri Lanka was engaged in a process which, if successful, would resolve a conflict marked by terrorism through peaceful means – assisted by the international community. This would be a model for the region and, indeed, for the world. It would show that a seemingly intractable problem could be solved peacefully when the internal actors were willing, and that the international community could play a major role in assisting them.”⁴⁶

The international will, apparently rallied by Richard Armitage, was abundantly clear at the Oslo meeting, at which forty countries were in attendance and over \$70 million was promised to help rebuild the war-torn country if suitable progress was made⁴⁷. As mentioned earlier, the effects of the peace-process were highly visible in the capital as foreign investors, aid from country donors, and money from various NGO’s/charitable organisations poured into the country. Various international agreements, such as the Air

⁴⁴ A. Shastri, ‘Sri Lanka in 2002: Turning the Corner?’, p. 218

⁴⁵ Interview with former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills, November, 2009

⁴⁶ Lunstead, *The United States’ Role in Sri Lanka’s Peace Process, 2002-2006*, p. 5

⁴⁷ A. Shastri, ‘Sri Lanka in 2002: Turning the Corner?’, p. 218

Transport Agreement signed in Washington, became a more common part of the new political landscape of accommodation and ‘peace’⁴⁸. Ambassador Lunstead was adamant that, never before had America been so involved in Sri Lanka, and that this “enhanced engagement...occurred despite the absence of significant US strategic interest in Sri Lanka”. In fact, Lunstead went on to declare that ‘The degree of engagement and commitment of US attention could, in fact, be viewed as out of proportion to US interests in Sri Lanka’⁴⁹. American involvement at this juncture of history can be roundly attributed to the three convergent themes of the War on Terror, the ‘new variant’ peace-process, and to a US “...enthusiasm...bolstered by the policies of the Ranil Wickremesinghe”⁵⁰.

Further rounds of talks continued between the government and the LTTE throughout 2003 at various venues throughout the world: more in Thailand, then Japan and Germany. Meanwhile, the political cohabitation between Prime Minister Wickremasinghe and President Kumaratunga was deteriorating to such levels that Ambassador Wills confirmed personally what many academics have since discussed as being perhaps the greatest contributing factor in the demise of the peace-process. As the bickering between the two state executives escalated, the LTTE, seeing the bountiful and unbidden opportunities presented to them, rubbed its hands and naturally exploited the situation to its own advantage. President Kumaratunga, with a weight of personal experience on her side, viewed the peace-process and its possible outcome as a sequence of largely unreciprocated concessions given by Wickremasinghe’s government to the LTTE, as well as a major attack on the sovereignty of the island. Critics of Kumaratunga suggested that she was, to a degree, envious of the apparent progress her prime minister was making in finding a resolution to the conflict. Wickremasinghe himself felt that since Kumaratunga had previously tried and failed to find peace, that a newer path must be trodden. In any event, the PA of Kumaratunga, allied to the nationalist JVP, began denouncing the UNP

⁴⁸ Air Transport Agreement, with annexes. Signed at Washington June 11, 2002. Entered into force November 18, 2002. See, *2002 Treaty Actions*, State Department Website

⁴⁹ Lunstead, *The United States’ Role in Sri Lanka’s Peace Process, 2002-2006*, p. 11

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 5

government as appeasers and traitors to the national sovereignty of Sri Lanka. The SLMM were labelled as sympathisers to the LTTE because, in some cases, the proposals it had negotiated with the LTTE and submitted to the government were quite remarkable in their brazenness, and were destined to raise much more than mere eyebrows in the capital and amongst the population. With an armed terrorist organisation threatening to establish its own air force, having its own shipping network officially recognised by the government and dedicated shipping lanes formed for its use was, quite understandably, viewed as a concession too far, particularly since the LTTE had still not agreed to disarm nor abandon its central claim of separatism. Meanwhile, despite the CFA still in place, conflagrations between the LTTE and the government continued to escalate in seriousness and number.

The LTTE declared it was withdrawing from the peace-process in April 2003 on the grounds that the government was not serious about implementing the MOU. Over the course of the next few months, the political cohabitation descended into an almost unbearable embarrassment of name-calling, accusation and counter-accusation. Ambassador Wills lays responsibility for the political debacle at the feet of the two main protagonists who, he sternly complained, should have made a much greater effort to “...get along so that they could have presented a united southern front to the LTTE”⁵¹. The chaos reached surprising levels when the President took advantage of her Prime Minister’s trip to meet President Bush in Washington, to suspend parliament and to take control of the ministerial portfolios essential to the successful running of the UNP government. These actions inevitably also undermined a government still dedicated to the peace-process. In his excellent article, ‘Sri Lanka in 2004: Enduring Political Decay and a Failing Peace Process’, Neil De Votta decried ‘political opportunism’ and the “...inability to put the island's national interests before their cravings for power” as the primary reason “for the country's sorry state”⁵². After forcing the country into a third set

⁵¹ Interview conducted with former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills

⁵² Neil De Votta, ‘Sri Lanka in 2004: Enduring Political Decay and a Failing Peace Process’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb., 2005), pp. 98-104, p. 98

of elections in four years, the President and her newly formed coalition-of-convenience, the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), dethroned the UNP-led coalition, the UNF but, lacking a majority, the result was a hung parliament until September/October, at which time a number of members from the Ceylon Worker's Congress (CWC) and SLMC joined the UPFA, and once again it took control of parliament⁵³. Former Labour Minister, Mahinda Rajapakse, was placed in the position of Prime Minister. The resulting government coalition was a bizarre mix of ultra-nationalists, anti-peace-process socialists, erstwhile UNP supporters, and even those whom Kumaratunga had once (and continues to do so to this day) publically denounced as the murderers of her own husband! Never more so than at this juncture was President Kumaratunga correct, when she said that the Americans were "...looking at us askance"⁵⁴.

In November 2005, the island would have to face another election. This time it would be a presidential election – one that would spell the end to the Bandaranaike dynasty's involvement in politics and one that would herald the rise to the seat of power of Mahinda Rajapakse – a man who would prove even more controversial than all who had come before him. Rajapakse narrowly defeated the UNP candidate and friend to the Americans, Ranil Wickremesinghe, in a presidential election that pivoted not simply on the votes Rajapakse garnered but also on the votes Wickremesinghe did not. The LTTE, knowing that a victory for the 'hawkish' Mahinda Rajapakse, would further its own agenda and provide a continued *raison d'être* for its authoritarian leader, brutally enforced an embargo on voting in the Tamil areas under its control in the North. The absence of these ballots is generally considered one of the major reasons why the UNP's Wickremesinghe lost out to the SLFP's Rajapakse. Of course the newly inaugurated President Rajapakse should also be seen as a reaction by the electorate to the overly concessionary nature of Ranil's peace process (a process that seemed to be collapsing in on itself) and a hardening of the attitude of many within the country against the idea that the conflict should be ended by negotiation. The continued violence being perpetrated by

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

the LTTE, including the recent assassination of its respected Tamil Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, had pushed certain people within the polity into the arms of a man who had, in his election campaign, pledged to tear up the 2002 peace deal brokered by Wickremesinghe. The US-supported 'Joint Mechanism'⁵⁵ for apportioning post-tsunami reconstruction funds, which would place monies in the hands of the LTTE for projects in regions under their control, would also be abrogated. The New York Times was not alone in its recognition of the fact that a president had been installed "...whose ascendance makes the resumption of conflict far more likely – at least if his election promises are to be believed"⁵⁶.

Former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Jeffrey J. Lunstead believed that "...building peace in Sri Lanka is like putting together a mosaic picture, a picture of many tiles...One day all of the tiles will be in the picture and the picture will be called 'peace'"⁵⁷. Ambassador Lunstead hoped that this inspired picture would be achieved through peaceful means. With the election of Mahinda Rajapakse to the Presidency, Lunstead's delicate mosaic looked very much in danger of being remade into a more militant-themed montage, crafted by Rajapakse's Nixon-esque 'honourable peace', rather than Wickremesinghe's 'peace at any cost'.

To the Americans, Mahinda Rajapakse's twin pillars of economic nationalisation (Rajapakse's socialist SLFP credentials are a matter of clear and unapologetic public record), and the abandonment of the peace-process in its current guise (amongst his allies in 2005 were the country's staunchest Marxists and Sinhalese nationalists), appeared to represent a deflating reminder of Sri Lanka's tragic cycle of political opportunism, economically unsound socialist policies, and unrepentant Sinhalese chauvinism.

⁵⁵ Later known as P-TOMS – Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure. Note: the US supported P-TOMS but because of the LTTE FTO designation it could take no active part in it.

⁵⁶ Somini Sengupta, 'A Hawk Narrowly Wins Sri Lanka Presidential Election', *New York Times*, November 19, 2005

⁵⁷ Press Release: 'USAID FUNDS MUSLIM LAND REGISTRY, SUPPORTS COMMUNITY-BASED DISPUTE RESOLUTION', *Peace in Sri Lanka, Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process*, <http://www.peaceinsrilanka.org/press-releases-details/press-releases-details/1666>

Ambassador Lunstead was unambiguous in his depiction of Washington's view of the Wickremesinghe government in comparison to that which replaced it:

“The US enthusiastically embraced the dramatic economic reform program of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's government in the belief that it would strengthen, not weaken, Wickremesinghe's ability to move the peace process forward...”⁵⁸

Washington's disappointment with the electoral events of 2005 was encapsulated in Lunstead's remark that America's new found enthusiasm for Sri Lanka and the peace-process was based upon the unfortunately incorrect assumption that the Wickremesinghe “...government would have a full five-year term to show results”. The Sri Lankan stock market seemed to reflect the new found pessimism running through the veins of America's attitude to Sri Lanka and her new, ideologically and politically contrary, government:

“No sooner had he claimed victory than Bloomberg News reported the steepest drop in Sri Lankan stock prices in 18 months, with the benchmark Colombo All-Share Index declining by 7.2 percent.”⁵⁹

Whilst part of the goal of the chapter is to examine the reaction of the US to the ascendancy of Mahinda Rajapakse, it must also be noted, for reasons of objectivity, that Sri Lanka is a democracy, and the election returns reflected the dissatisfaction of the electorate with the policies of the Wickremesinghe government. Many of the poorer Sri Lankans had seen the budget for anti-poverty programs cut and viewed with suspicion a government that overtly courted the business and middle-classes, seemingly at the expense of the majority population. As with many of the donors to the peace-process, Washington didn't quite understand the politically insensitive and economically exclusory policies that Wickremesinghe was practicing. The electorate felt the impact of those policies and they voted accordingly. In a less developed country, particularly one

⁵⁸ Lunstead, *The United States' Role in Sri Lanka's Peace Process, 2002-2006*, p. 6

⁵⁹ Sengupta, 'A Hawk Narrowly Wins Sri Lanka Presidential Election', *New York Times*

with an educated population, a government ignores the poorer classes at its peril. Nevertheless, it really is at this point in the decade that a divergence is seen in terms of the commitment America was prepared to make to the Sri Lankan government.

The new government of President Rajapakse was viewed as, at the very least, a disappointing eventuality, and at the most a potential game-changer in terms of Washington's willingness to support the country's 'peace' initiatives. In combination with the absence of Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage's 'moral authority'⁶⁰, the period heralded the demolition of Ambassador Lunstead's hopeful 'mosaic-through-peaceful-and-internationally-supported-negotiation'. It was to be replaced by a government that would eventually prosecute an escalating war against the terrorists, with an 'international-community-be-damned' unilateralism that would succeed in defeating the LTTE in 2009, but would in the process alienate itself from its erstwhile supporters.

As President Rajapakse's government (with his brothers Gothabaya and Basil installed as Defence Secretary and Senior Presidential Advisor respectively) returned to war in 2006, the international community began to take great and vocal note of the deterioration in the human rights situation on the island. In successive Human Rights Watch World Reports, Sri Lanka's SLFP-dominated government and the LTTE are held responsible for a serious and exponentially worsening state of human rights provisions. In the 2007 report (which details the issues and events of the previous year, 2006) – the first full year in Rajapakse government's tenure – a staggering litany of abuse, callousness, and violence against its own population is recorded. With almost nil accountability, the Rajapakse government was deemed to be in serious violation of international humanitarian law. Of course, in times of war, civil liberties are always susceptible to erosion, but for an international community that had invested time, money, and interest in a peace-process with negotiation and arbitration at its core, the information being transmitted from Sri Lanka, made for grim reading. The report details, extra-judicial killings, politically

⁶⁰ Armitage resigned as Deputy Secretary and left his post in February 2005.

motivated kidnappings and murder, mass killings of Tamils, complicity in the use of child soldiers, indiscriminate bombing of civilians, and presidential "...immobilisation of the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission"⁶¹.

The Tokyo Donor Conference, as well as other multi-lateral aid agencies, had promised millions to Sri Lanka to help rebuild the war-torn island. These pledges were based on a certain conditionality: progress in the peace-process, a resolve not to return to war, and an improvement in the respect for human life and dignity. As the war situation rapidly escalated, the respect for basic human and civil liberties precipitously declined. Consequently the preparedness of the US to provide assistance would, in the years 2005 onwards, be framed by the obvious lack of intent on the behalf of the government to end the war peacefully, its almost unapologetic disregard for human rights, and its contrary economic and social platform: all historically very familiar parameters. The modern 'twist' to the historical determinants that have been identified throughout the thesis is that the War on Terror had no substantive historical precedent. Consequently, Washington found itself in the grip of a dilemma: If the War on Terror necessitates assistance against terrorism, how should that assistance be applied to a country recognized by Ambassador Lunstead for its strategic insignificance to US policy, and one whose government appeared on most levels – ideologically, politically, and socially, increasingly contrary to the goals of US foreign policy?⁶²

It is important to note at this point that it is not the goal of the chapter to discuss whether the Rajapakse government was ultimately proved correct in its method of solving the conflict; the goal remains the same: an assessment of the impact of the actions of this government on American policy towards the island. As the government of President Rajapakse went to an all-out war footing, promising, much to the dissatisfaction of many international observers – particularly those who had invested in the peace process – to rid

⁶¹ *Human Rights Watch World Report, 2007*

⁶² One can, of course, argue that Rajapakse's 'unilateralism' in his prosecution of the war against the LTTE was little different to that demonstrated by President Bush and his neo-conservatives when invading Iraq. But that argument is not necessary here.

the island of the LTTE within three years⁶³, so the reports of abuses multiplied. Successive Human Rights Watch World Reports detailed the apparent catastrophic decline in concern for the Sri Lankan citizens supposedly under the protection of the state. In the 2008 World Report the government was accused of:

“...extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, forcibly returning internally displaced persons (IDPs) to unsafe areas, restricting media freedoms, apparent complicity with the abusive Karuna group, and widespread impunity for serious human rights violations.”⁶⁴

The report highlighted the new Emergency Regulations initiated by the government as a tool which helped to provide an air of legality to the widespread abuse of ethnic Tamils in Colombo, as well as the arrest and detention of “...political opponents, journalists, and civil society activists.”⁶⁵ One of the most controversial claims of the report was one which would become a common accusation over the course of the remainder of the war – that the government was complicit in the recruitment of child soldiers to fight against the LTTE⁶⁶. Although the Rajapakse government would repeatedly deny these charges, the evidence put on show by the UN, the world media, and the various NGO’s swayed the opinion, and troubled the sensibilities of countries like the US.

The New York Times would carry a number of articles particularising the alleged transgressions of the Sri Lankan government, standing them side-by-side with those of the terrorist LTTE. As early as November 2006 Alan Rock, a special advisor to the United Nations on children and armed conflict, claimed that he had “...encountered both direct and indirect evidence of security forces’ complicity and participation (in the

⁶³ Billboards began springing up around Colombo in 2007 outlining visually what the government had planned for the coming years. A map of the island replicated three times showing in red the areas under direct influence of the LTTE. Each successive year was represented by another map showing the red areas diminishing in size until, on the third map, there was no red at all.

⁶⁴ *Human Rights Watch world Report, Sri Lanka, 2008*

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ In 2004 a faction of the LTTE led by Colonel Karuna, broke away from the terrorist group and became aligned with the government. It was through this group that the government was accused of complicity in the recruitment of children as soldiers

recruitment of child soldiers)”⁶⁷. These reports, in concert with all of the other information being channelled out of the island, would reinforce the American reluctance to publically align itself with a democratically elected government suffering the scourge of terrorism.

Another New York Times report asked, “But in human terms, the question is how much more civilians can bear”⁶⁸. The question of how much can be borne might just as well have been asked of the Americans. War on Terror or not, Washington would struggle to support the Rajapakse regime. Writing in 2006, Ambassador Lunstead presciently foresaw how,

“...if the GSL does not take action to improve an increasingly difficult human rights situation, and show that it is ready to make the dramatic political changes necessary to meet legitimate Tamil grievances, US support may diminish.”⁶⁹

In terms of the qualitative nature and overall quantity of assistance the US would give from 2005 until the end of the conflict, diminish it did.

The twin issues of the human rights condition of the island coupled to what America’s response to it should be, was encapsulated perfectly by Resolution 1338⁷⁰, which was introduced into the US House of Representatives in July 2008. The resolution outlined the alleged behaviour of the Sri Lankan government, chastising it for its military prosecution of the war, its support of the Karuna faction, its...

“...extra-judicial killings, shelling and bombing of civilian areas, unnecessary prevention of the delivery of humanitarian aid, undue restrictions on the freedom

⁶⁷ Shimali Senanayake, ‘Sri Lanka Accused on Child Soldiers’, *New York Times*, November 14, 2006 (Information in the brackets has been added by the author)

⁶⁸ Somini Sengupta, ‘Resumption of Sri Lanka War Tests Civilians’ Endurance’, *New York Times*, September 18, 2006

⁶⁹ Lunstead, *The United States’ Role in Sri Lanka’s Peace Process, 2002-2006*, p. 10

⁷⁰ This resolution was first detailed in Chapter 4

of movement of internally displaced persons, and widespread impunity for serious human rights violations...⁷¹.

The resolution urged the US Government and the President himself to recognise the 25th Anniversary of the events of 1983 and, by doing so, use the symbolism of this recognition to put pressure on the Sri Lankan government to find a peaceful solution to the conflict and put an end to its seriously errant practices. The timing of the resolution, to coincide with the 25th anniversary of ‘Black July’, was designed for maximum impact for the resolution’s key request, that the “...President... publically urge Sri Lanka to accept an international human rights monitoring presence on the island, which would deter, monitor, investigate, and report attacks...”⁷²To understand the unusualness and seriousness of such a call – for international observers to enter Sri Lanka – one need only note the firestorm of a response such a call created on the island. For it to even be suggested that a sovereign and functioning democracy should make way for an outside force that would observe, examine, and monitor the behaviour of its government, was derisory in the extreme for many within the polity. The US was not alone in such a call – certain members within the EU, including Great Britain, called for the same. When David Miliband, the British Foreign Secretary, arrived in Sri Lanka in early 2009, in an ill-judged attempt at halting the conflict, he was greeted by burning effigies, protests, an embassy under siege, and a supremely defiant President and Defence Secretary.

The resolution is revealing for three reasons: Firstly, it outlines that there was a definite understanding to be found in Washington of the deteriorating situation on the island; Secondly, it reminds us of the difficult predicament facing policy-makers in Washington: Sri Lanka needs assistance against the terrorists but the government is failing to live up to certain standards of behaviour, consequently what role should the US play?; Thirdly, the resolution itself almost proves Ambassador Lunstead’s point that Sri Lanka does not rate highly as a priority for the US government, despite the War on Terror. The very fact that

⁷¹ H.Res. 1338, 110th Congress, 2d Session

⁷² Ibid, point 6.

there was a need to submit a resolution to the House of Representatives 'reminding' the US government of its responsibility in Sri Lanka, reveals a certain level of active ambivalence to be found in Washington policy-circles towards the tiny Indian Ocean island.

CHAPTER 8

Aid, Assistance, and the New Millennium

“America will help nations that need our assistance in combating terror.”¹

“In the wake of the events of 9/11, the importance of effective response to the humanitarian problems created by failed states and long-lasting armed conflicts has been magnified. Simply put, assistance to limit the suffering of the displaced and victims of conflict and natural disaster is good foreign policy.”²

One of this study’s most useful sources, because it can be traced with relative ease over the many years covered, is the amount of aid and assistance (bi-lateral, non-military) given by the United States to Ceylon/Sri Lanka. We have already seen that aid has historically been given more readily to those Sri Lankan governments more willing to adopt a model of governance more ideologically, politically, socially and economically ‘in tune’ with the standards acceptable to Washington. To this is added the standards of governance as related to issues of human dignity and civil liberty. The period of time covered by this and the previous chapter is unique because of the sheer amount and variety of aid on offer to countries around the world that were willing to a) adopt US-stated norms of governmental practice and, b) unite behind the US-led War on Terror. Christina B. Rocca, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Affairs, very clearly enunciated the linking of aid and American partnership in South Asia to the twin engines of America’s newly modernized foreign policy machine:

“U.S. foreign policy in South Asia is firmly founded on the President’s belief in expanding freedom -- for individuals as well as nations -- on promoting economic prosperity and an ongoing search for peace. Nowhere is this more the case than in South Asia, where democracy has both taken root and proven elusive.

¹ ‘Introductory Message from the White House’,

The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2002

² US Department of State, *Performance and Accountability Report, FY 2002*, Strategic Goal 13

It is also the front line of our Global War on Terror, which remains our principal foreign policy priority.

In the South Asia region, we are building a network of partnerships – based on national interests and shared values – to promote human dignity and the spread of development, freedom, and democracy. Meeting these goals in South Asia is not incidental to U.S. foreign policy – it is essential for the free and prosperous world we all hope to see.”³

Whilst the quantity and quality of aid on offer was indeed unprecedented, what is more revealing is that, despite such bounty on offer, Sri Lanka was, at certain times unable to access very much of it at all. At times Sri Lanka was unable to access *any* of it. As this chapter will show despite the unprecedented nature of some of the events in the first decade of the twenty-first century, many of the restrictions placed on the aid proffered by America to Sri Lanka, had very clear and predictable historical precedents.

An individual with particular and direct experience of the issues pertinent to the first few years of the decade was, of course, Ambassador Wills. When asked whether the US Embassy’s position towards Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and his newly initiated peace process had given a new impetus to the US-Lanka relationship, Ambassador Wills was unequivocal:

“We admired Ranil's willingness to take risks to try to end the war and give Tamils reason to feel they had a stake in Sri Lanka's unity as well.”

In the same interview Ambassador Wills was equally unequivocal when asked directly whether he believed there was, “any significant change, in terms of policy or assistance to Sri Lanka (*vis à vis* the conflict), after the War on Terror was declared?”. His answer was that, in concert with the new political developments on the island, the declaration had created a, “...greater willingness to work with the GSL (government of Sri Lanka)”. In terms of non-military aid and assistance, this greater willingness is demonstrated in an

³ Christina B. Rocca, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Affairs, ‘Remarks to the American Chamber of Commerce Luncheon, Dhaka, Bangladesh, May 18, 2004’, US Department of State Website

obvious sense by Ambassador Wills initial effort to salvage the operational existence of USAID in Sri Lanka, but it is also clearly supported by the statistics below.

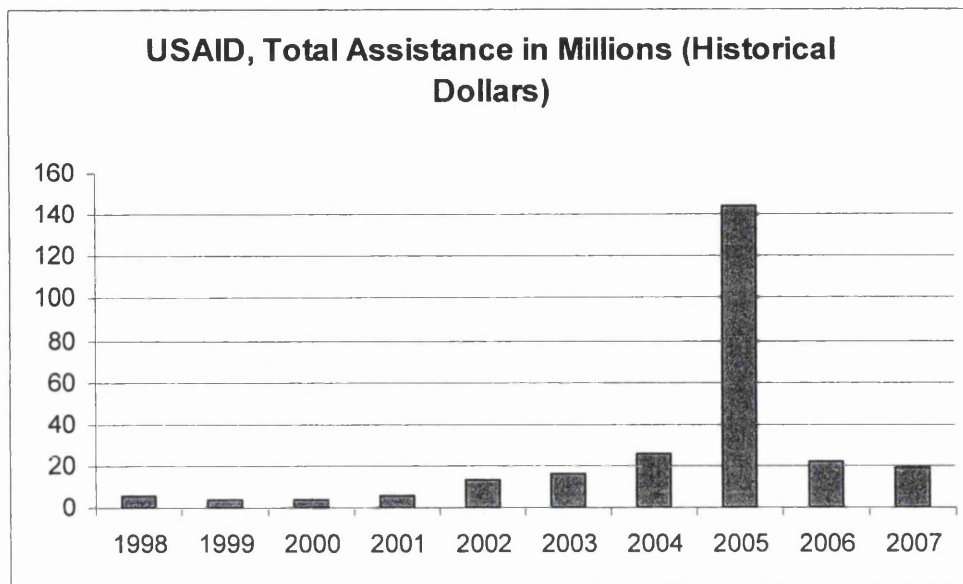


Fig. 1, Total USAID Assistance to Sri Lanka in the years 1998 – 2007⁴

Clearly reflected in *Figure 1* are four distinct issues. First, it is abundantly clear how little the American foreign policy network thought of President Kumaratunga's *fin de siècle* governance. Her controversial prosecution of the war and the well-documented (but fiercely denied by Her Excellency) deterioration of the quality of her government's authority resulted in a desperate level of assistance, rising no higher than \$5.7 million in the four years from 1998 to 2001, culminating in the aforementioned plan to abandon the USAID mission altogether. Second, there is an unambiguous improvement in assistance covering the years which saw the convergence of the War on Terror, the ascendancy of the 'America-friendly' Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the inception of the peace-process. Third, the statistics are skewed massively once the scale of the humanitarian disaster caused by the tsunami becomes clear – hence the figure of \$143.9 million in 2005;

⁴ Author's original graph using data collated from USAID, *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)*

Finally, after the return of the SLFP to parliamentary power and with it control of the offices of the President and Prime Minister, aid drops off dramatically.

What the statistics in *Fig. 1* begin to show us is that in the years following President Rajapakse's inauguration, American aid and assistance, contingent upon, and critically tied to, certain standards of governmental performance, begins a process of restriction. As the Rajapakse government's standard of governance deteriorates, and its single-minded prosecution of the war causes conniptions in the international arena, naturally assistance levels fall. As the 'end-game' of the conflict played out and reports of abuses escalated, American assistance from some quarters, dried up entirely. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the collapse of Millennium Challenge Account Assistance to Sri Lanka.

In 2002 the Bush administration announced a new strategy in its deliverance of aid to countries: a Millennium Challenge Corporation would be established to coordinate aid and assistance to those countries who were eligible to apply for it. Eligibility for access to this assistance would be determined by a set of criteria/indicators, broadly summarised under the three categories: Ruling Justly, Encouraging Economic Freedom, and Investing in People⁵. What was unique about this new system of aid administration was that countries first had to demonstrate a commitment to, and success in, the criteria outlined by the Corporation. Secondly, those countries that were able to meet the conditions would then have to *apply* for the assistance. Not since the era of the Marshall Plan had American aid and assistance been so strategically aligned with Washington's global foreign policy program.

⁵ Later in 2008 certain environmental indicators would also be introduced

“...these billions of new dollars will form a new Millennium Challenge Account for projects in countries whose governments rule justly, invest in their people, and encourage economic freedom. Governments must fight corruption, respect basic human rights, embrace the rule of law, invest in health care and education, follow responsible economic policies, and enable entrepreneurship. The Millennium Challenge Account will reward countries that have demonstrated real policy change and challenge those that have not to implement reforms.”⁶

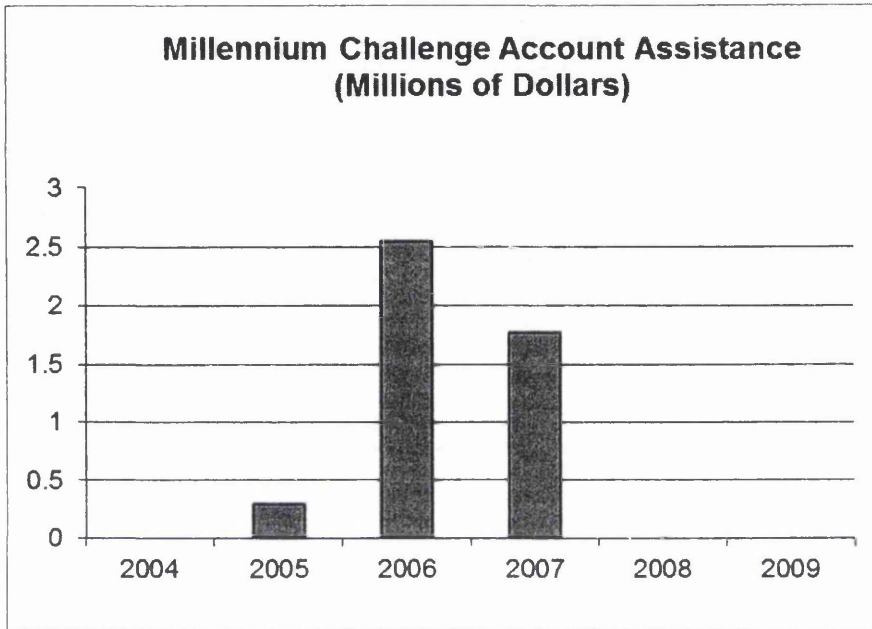


Fig. 2, Total Millennium Challenge Account Assistance to Sri Lanka, 2004 – 2009⁷

The ultimate goal of the Millennium Challenge Account was two-fold. It was a recognition of the fact that, “...aid is most effective when it reinforces sound political, economic, and social policies that promote economic growth”⁸. It was also clearly designed to encourage countries to emulate, as far as possible, the economic, political and social model of the United States, so that American hegemony throughout the world

⁶ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2002*, p. 21-22

⁷ Author’s original graph using data collated from *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants, Country Report (Greenbook)*

⁸ Press Release, *The Millennium Challenge Corporation Names MCA Eligible Countries*, Millennium Challenge Corporation, May 6, 2004

would be further entrenched, acting as a tactical bulwark against the threat of terrorism. The socialist ideology and economic nationalisation programmes of the SLFP, as well as their peace-through-war strategy, seemed about as far away from ‘emulation’ as one could possibly get.

Recognising the precedent-setting importance of the MCA assistance, President Kumaratunga, under whose presidency Sri Lanka first achieved eligibility, was quick to highlight that Sri Lanka was one of the first sixteen countries found to be eligible to apply for the fund. Not only this, but Sri Lanka was the *only* South Asian country found to be eligible. Of course, this had much to do with the peace initiatives admired by the Americans, as well as the familiarity to be found in the Wickremesinghe government’s economic policies. Consequently, Sri Lanka applied and was given MCA Assistance, reaching a relative high of \$2.55 million dollars in 2006, before plummeting to zero in 2008, as the island’s government failed to fulfil its eligibility requirement. President Kumaratunga was under no illusion as to the reason behind this calamitous decline: “...but all of that has stopped now because of the human rights violations. They have stopped disbursing that because of this present government”⁹.

Whilst Kumaratunga was correct in asserting that eligibility for the MCA assistance was not met and thus assistance was terminated, it was not solely as a result of the human rights practices of the Rajapakse government – this is not quite the whole story. There is a little more to Sri Lanka’s fall from grace in the eyes of the MCC. An examination of the MCC ‘Scorecards’ for Sri Lanka in the years 2006, 2007, and 2008 reveals that it scores poorly in a number of key areas, particularly in Economic Freedom – where it ‘failed’ in its Fiscal Policy score in each of the three years. The country also failed in most of the areas under the category ‘Investing in People’, for these three years. Whilst Sri Lanka did not ‘fail’ on its scorecards in the ‘Ruling Justly’ categories, it does show a clear decline between the years 2006 to 2008 in almost all of the areas – particularly in Political

⁹ Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

Rights, Civil Liberties, and Control of Corruption. In the Millennium Challenge Corporation Report on the Selection of Eligible Countries for Fiscal Year 2008, it is made clear that the Rajapakse government's dogged escalation of the conflict and its pursuit of Prabhakaran's head, was the central obstacle to MCA assistance¹⁰. Simply put, many of the problems highlighted by the poor MCC scorecards were seen as systemic problems in a structure almost breaking under the strain of an intensifying conflict – a conflict, it is worth remembering, that is historically considered by Americans to be largely the result of political and governmental discrimination.

A very similar story can be found in the dramatic decrease in the amount of P.L. 480 assistance traditionally given to Sri Lanka. Even the briefest examination of *Fig. 3* leaves a telling impression. Almost as soon as the SLFP government emerges victorious in 2005, all P.L. 480 assistance (non-emergency) evaporates. At this point it is worth reiterating that, historically, Sri Lanka has been a regular recipient of such assistance. It is also worth noting that this assistance (or its withholding) has historically also been used on occasion as a tool to remind the island's government *du jour* that ALL aid is fundamentally conditional.

¹⁰ Millennium Challenge Corporation, *Millennium Challenge Corporation Report on the Selection of Eligible Countries for Fiscal Year 2008*

P.L. 480 Title II Non-Emergency Assistance (actual) Dollars in 1000's

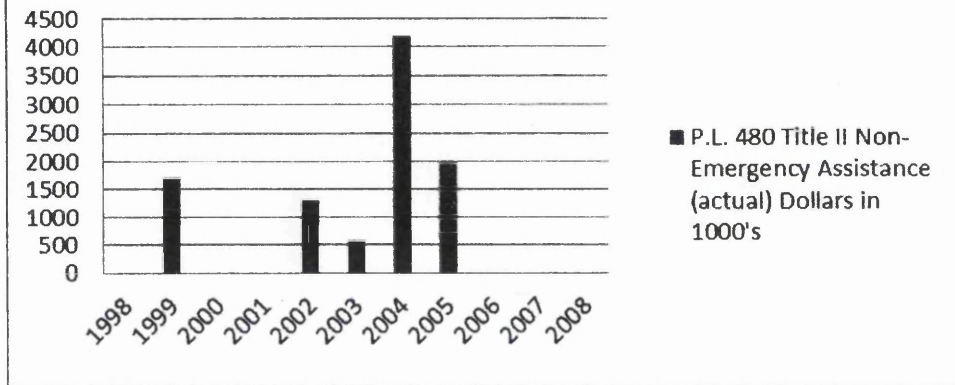


Fig. 3, P.L. 480 Title II Non – Emergency Assistance, to Sri Lanka 1998 – 2008¹¹

In terms of American assistance under the Economic Support Fund (ESF), we see a remarkably similar story. In the Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2009, the level of ESF assistance is seen to collapse from \$3 million in 2007 to zero in 2008 and 2009. The report reveals that there was not even an estimate or request placed by the State Department for ESF assistance in these two years. Of course, American aid and assistance undergoes re-prioritisation annually, and at least one former US Ambassador (Donnelly) explained that diminished assistance to Sri Lanka was due to this re-prioritisation. Whilst this justification should not be discounted, it appears a more realistic assessment of the trends towards awarding or withholding aid during this decade, to say that it was highly contingent (as it has been seen to be over the course of this historical investigation) upon the nature and policies of the government in power. The evidence, statistical or otherwise, clearly reflects this assessment.

¹¹ Author’s original graph using data collated from *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)* as well as *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations Fiscal Years, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009*, US Department of State

The overall trends in American aid apportionment to Sri Lanka highlight very clearly the US response to the perceived ideological orientation, activities, and generally uncooperative attitude of the Rajapakse regime. However, within the statistics already outlined in *Fig. 1 (USAID, Total Assistance)* there is a category which at once seems to support and deny the trend. Looking at *Fig. 4* it is easy to identify the correlation between the clear fall in the amount of Development Assistance given to Sri Lanka and the beginning of the Rajapakse government/collapse of the CFA – from highs of \$6.25 million (2003) and \$6.77 million (2005) to figures similar to those found pre-Wickremesinghe/CFA for the years 2006 and 2007. Then, however, Development Assistance rises to \$5.24 in 2008, which would seem to suggest at the very least, an anomaly in the trend. The first point to be made here is that Development Assistance is already counted in the USAID Total outlined in *Fig. 1* and the trend for this was downwards. The second point is that, as mentioned by Ambassador Lunstead, Development Assistance was not delivered through the Sri Lankan government, but by NGO's¹². Consequently, it was not bound by the same restrictive parameters placed by the US upon the assistance that would ordinarily have gone through the island's government. As the country's conflict escalated and the problems caused by this escalation grew in number and seriousness, so did the need for Development Assistance.

¹² Jeffrey J. Lunstead, *The United States' Role in Sri Lanka's Peace Process, 2002-2006*, (Colombo: The Asia Foundation, 2007)

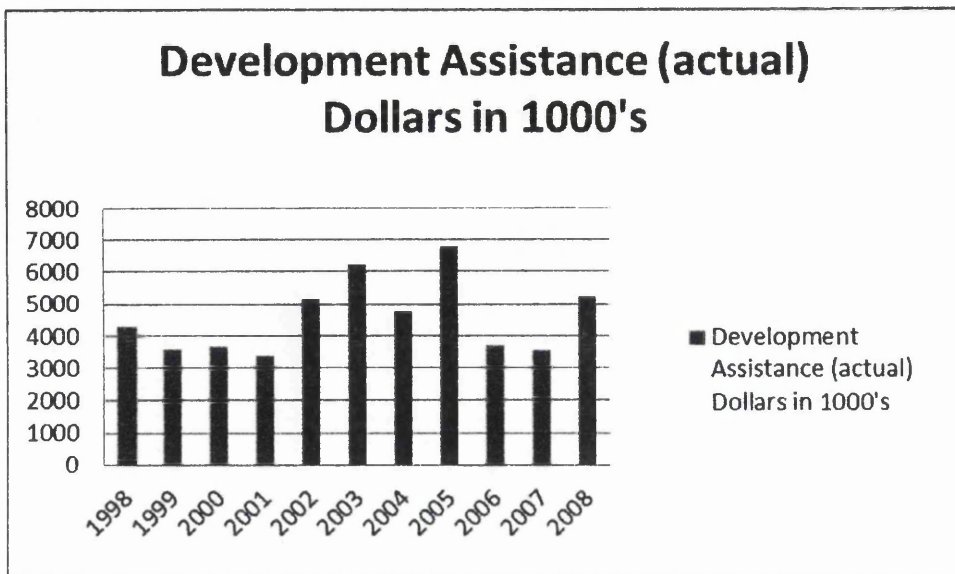


Fig. 4, US Development Assistance to Sri Lanka, 1998 – 2008¹³

It is still, however, important to put the 2008 figure for Development Assistance to Sri Lanka (\$5.2 million) in perspective: the total global estimate of DA for the same year was \$1.6 billion, making Sri Lanka's share just over 0.3%. For a country facing a decades-long state-terrorist conflict, in the middle of a global War on Terror, the amount is negligible in the extreme. Morocco received \$5.4 million in 2007¹⁴.

Military Assistance: Mixed Messages?

One of the major dilemmas that has historically faced America and its attitude towards Sri Lanka has been just how involved Washington is either prepared or able to become involved in a country, strategically of little importance (particularly in comparison to the modern regional strategic partnerships America maintains with India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan), often with governments contrary in nature, but a country nevertheless

¹³ Author's original graph using data collated from *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)* as well as *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations Fiscal Years, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009*, US Department of State

¹⁴ US Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2009*

besieged by terrorism. Whilst America has tended to approach Sri Lanka and its conflict in a strictly non-interventionist manner, either for fear of upsetting regional giant India, or out of concern for the government's use of whatever assistance might be given, or because the island simply does not warrant any such assistance, it has also recognised that there is a need for a degree of military support. The type, the amount, and the timing of military assistance have all been subject to variation over the course of this study and, in particular, during the decade covered by this chapter. *Fig. 5* amply demonstrates this fluctuation.

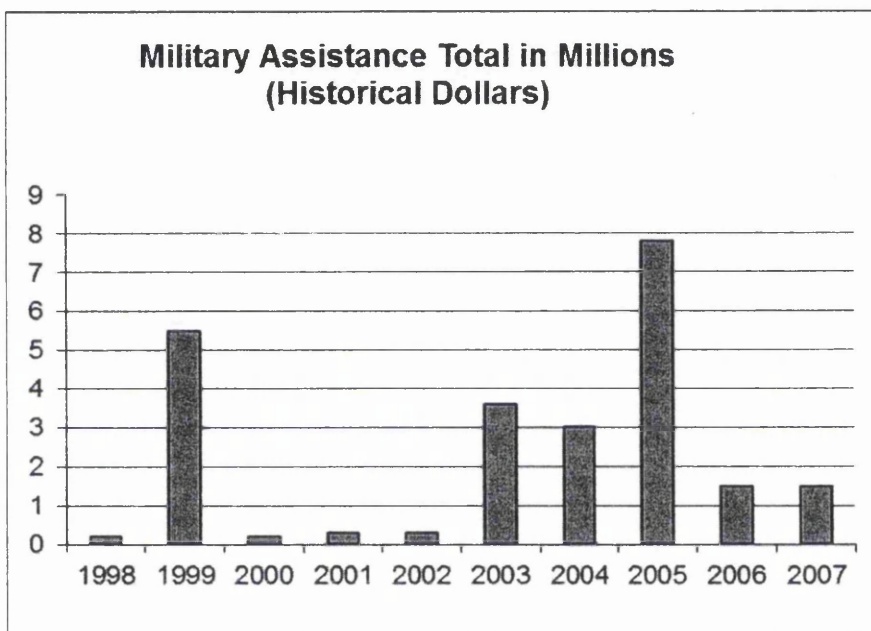


Fig. 5, Total US Military Assistance to Sri Lanka, 1998 – 2007¹⁵

The graph above reinforces the key trends already highlighted by the statistics relating to non-military aid and assistance, in that the years immediately prior to the CFA and the accession to power of the Wickremesinghe government, were lean years indeed for Sri Lanka. Clearly President Kumaratunga's military escalation, and the country's concomitant slide into economic and social difficulty, persuaded the State Department

¹⁵ Author's original graph using data collated from *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations Fiscal Years, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009*, US Department of State

and the Department of Defense that, unless the island's government could commit to a peaceful settlement of the war, increased military assistance would be counter-productive to the goals of American foreign policy. As the restructuring and reprioritising of US foreign policy, initiated by the War on Terror, begins to take effect, along with the election of the UNP dominated government and their more 'acceptable' plans for peace, so military assistance begins to rise – dramatically so, even after the skewing effect caused by the tsunami is taken into account (2005). By way of exemplifying the cordial military to military relationship seen during this period, Ambassador Wills pointed out to the author that in mid-2004 the United States Coast Guard donated one of its Cutters to the Sri Lankan Navy¹⁶. Although it is important to place such an offer of military hardware in perspective – the ship *was* over forty years old, and was not strictly a military ship – it is just as important to see this as emblematic of the relationship between the two countries. America very rarely supplies hardware to Sri Lanka for the historical reasons already explored, so on the clear understanding that this ship was going to be used for military purposes, it should be viewed as important, if only for its symbolism.

Just as dramatic, but for opposite reasons, is the reduction in military assistance to be seen after 2005, the year in which the SLFP and Mahinda Rajapakse are elected to run the country. As the conflict escalated and the palatability of the Sri Lankan government to the Americans deteriorated, military assistance declined. Again, the statistics are not quite as simple as they may at first appear. In some areas, military assistance actually increased, but the nature of that assistance had as its emphasis training, de-mining and such (see *Fig. 6 below*) – direct country to country sales of military equipment were largely absent¹⁷. Nevertheless, the overall trend in military assistance was one of restriction. One of the reasons, other than those already discussed (government complicity in human rights violations, ideological issues, wariness of India, lack of strategic interest etc.), as to why the US, despite the War on Terror, was ambivalent about

¹⁶ Renamed the Samudara

¹⁷ America maintains a steadfast reluctance to supplying Sri Lanka with military hardware. Sri Lanka has traditionally sourced its hardware from countries such as Israel, Russia.

supplying more military assistance to the Sri Lankan Government, was iterated by Ambassador Lunstead. He pointed out at a dilemma in US policy, something which, if extrapolated, could cause something of a *Catch 22* in the relationship America maintained with the government of President Rajapakse, vis à vis the war. Providing military assistance to the Sri Lankan state would protect it from the evils of terrorism, but it might also encourage the government to seek a military solution rather than one borne from negotiation. This, in turn, might convince the LTTE that its only option would be to continue its terroristic activities, discouraging it from negotiation¹⁸. Consequently, America could choose *not* to assist the Sri Lankan government militarily, to encourage it down the path of negotiation. However, in the process of doing this, the Americans might actually contribute to the weakening of the Sri Lankan state in its struggle against the terrorists, thus encouraging the LTTE into a more aggressive course of action against it.

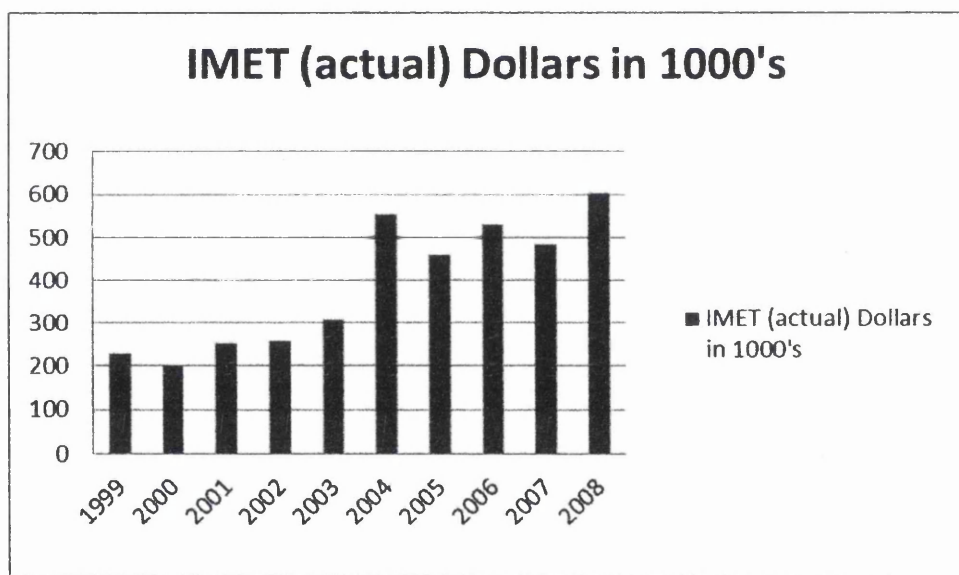


Fig. 6, International Military Education and Training, US to Sri Lanka, 1999 – 2008¹⁹

¹⁸ See Ambassador Lunstead’s remarks, *The United States’ Role in Sri Lanka’s Peace Process, 2002-2006*

¹⁹ Author’s original graph using data collated from *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations Fiscal Years, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009*, US Department of State

Although an increase can be seen in certain types of military assistance to Sri Lanka, it is clear that the general trend was a definite narrowing of *all* assistance. By way of a simplistic, yet symbolically useful, comparison it is possible to demonstrate three things simultaneously: 1) The relative strategic insignificance of Sri Lanka to global US foreign policy, 2) The attitude of the Bush administration, regardless of the War on Terror, towards the island's government, and 3) A clear indication that Sri Lanka's War on Terrorism, was no longer (if indeed it ever legitimately could have been claimed to be) included in the wider War on Terror. With a population of just over one million (roughly half of which are expatriates/non-indigenous), a geographical size of just under 260 square miles, and absent any terrorist insurgency, Bahrain received a total of \$216.1 million in military assistance between the War on Terror years of 2001 – 2007 (*Fig. 7*). In the same period, the terrorist-ravaged Sri Lanka, with its population of 20 million, received \$18 million. Even at the height of the optimism generated by the arrival in government of Wickremesinghe and the UNP coalition, in convergence with the War on Terror, Prabhakaran's change of clothes, and Richard Armitage's 'moral pressure', Sri Lanka received \$3.6 million (2003). In the same year, Bahrain received \$94.5 million. Of course. Bahrain has something that Sri Lanka does not necessarily have: strategic value. In both the War on Terror and Middle East security, Bahrain, despite its size, population, and stability, has an oversized value to the United States: military assistance to Bahrain "...in particular...is consistent with other requirements to fight the War on Terror and secure Middle East peace"²⁰. To reinforce the point even further, Sri Lanka does not even appear to maintain a strategic significance in its own backyard. While Bahrain is a key policy ally of the US in its own region – it is a major partner in the Gulf Security Dialogue²¹, and as such receives major "...arms sales intended to enhance the

²⁰ US Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2009*, p. 112

²¹ The Gulf Security Dialogue is the '...principal security coordination mechanism between the United States and the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council', see next footnote

defense capabilities...and improve the interoperability of their militaries in line with the objectives of the Gulf Security Dialogue”²², Sri Lanka barely ranks as a consideration in US policy in terms of regional South Asian security. The majority of all military funding for the region is swallowed up by Pakistan, due to its support for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

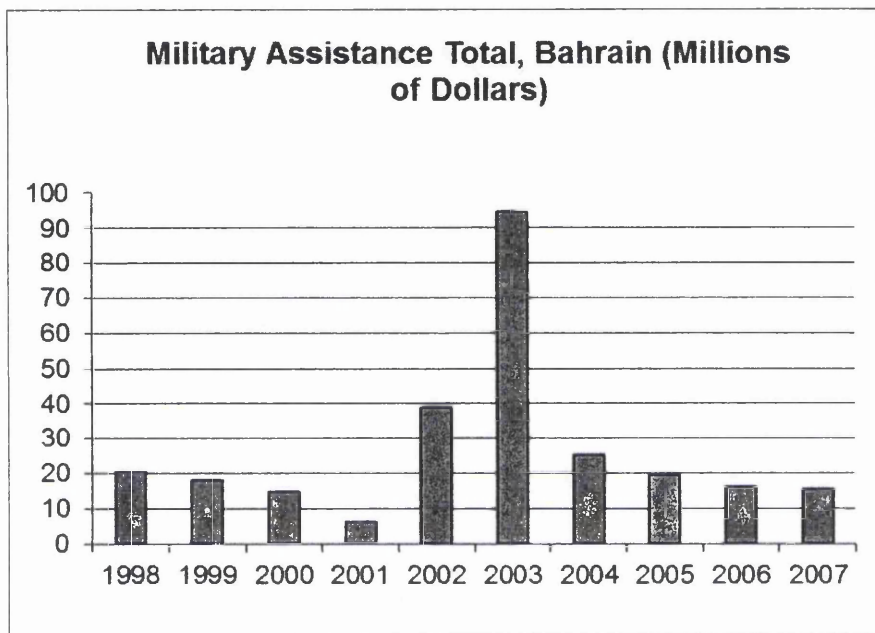


Fig. 7, Total US Military Assistance to Bahrain, 1998 – 2007²³

Conclusion: An Island of No Importance

²² CRS Report for Congress, ‘The Gulf Security Dialogue and Related Arms Sale Proposals’, October 8, 2008

²³ Author’s original graph using data collated from *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations Fiscal Years, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009*, US Department of State

“I do not believe the Sri Lanka-LTTE conflict should have been put higher on Bush’s ‘War on Terror’. This is an internal conflict and must be solved internally.”²⁴

“But I don’t see how the SL (*sic*) case, an internal struggle in a small country far away, competed with al Qaeda and its allies attacking and killing Americans.”²⁵

Former President Kumaratunga: “Well, Iraq was an internal affair!”

Interviewer: “Is there a double standard with regard to Sri Lanka?”

Former President Kumaratunga: “Oh yes. Definitely.”

Interviewer: “Is it simply because they (the US) have no interest in Sri Lanka – no strategic interest?”

Former President Kumaratunga: “Yes.”²⁶

In 1948 Ceylon attained its independence. After hundreds of years of foreign domination and colonial subjugation, the island’s population was presented with an historic opportunity to recreate the country in a fashion more in keeping with the rich 2,500 year history that had, prior to pressures brought to bear by external interlopers, helped create a uniquely rich cultural, social, religious, and political identity. Ceylon had emerged from colonisation in an enviable position of peace, stability and relative economic constancy. It was with no small degree of optimism that many looked at this foundation, largely a result of the maturity of the Sri Lankan political system allowing for the comparatively peaceful transition from colony to sovereign country, and saw how inevitable it must be that a regional example of successful nation-building would be constructed upon it. Ceylon would become an example to be lauded for an accomplished mix of modernity and atavism that would drive the country triumphantly into the future. Of course, this vision never became reality. The reality that very quickly consumed the post-independent history of the island was one dominated by the cynical and divisive politics of self-

²⁴ Former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, John H. Reed. Interview conducted April, 2009

²⁵ Former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Shaun E. Donnelly. Interview conducted May 21, 2009

²⁶ Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

interest, religious and cultural divergence, political and linguistic exclusion, ideological vacillation from one general election to the next, controversial foreign policies, endemic corruption, human tragedy, economic mismanagement and, of course, an escalating conflict between the state and an increasingly sophisticated terrorist organisation.

Characterised by the volatile vicissitudes of a country wrought by division and later held to ransom by an escalating conflict, Sri Lanka has been left, for the best part of the last sixty years, desperately wanting for a prolonged period of stability and consistency. In one area, however, Sri Lanka has managed to find a degree of uniformity and, for those with an eye to view it, predictability. In its relationship with the United States, Ceylon (and later Sri Lanka) may have found neither a staunch, firm friend nor an eternally harsh critic, but what this thesis has demonstrated is that when America has been firmly friendly with, or harshly critical of, the island's government, there are clear and predictable historical grounds upon which its actions are predicated. The historical conditionality of the relationship Washington maintains with the island is ultimately born out of two unavoidable facts: 1) Sri Lanka is simply not sufficiently important, strategically, economically, militarily, or politically to America; 2) historically, the island's governance has been noted in foreign policy circles for its capriciousness, consequently any foreign policy the US creates to deal with Sri Lanka's, often rapidly, changing political, social, and economic landscape, has to mirror this unreliability with its own necessary caution²⁷. What these two issues translate to in geo-political terms is that the US feels no urgent strategic need for and, because of Sri Lanka's notorious instability, has no real capacity to create, an overarching foreign policy model specific to the island. Nor is America comfortable in finding a permanent place for Sri Lanka in one of its foreign policy meta-narratives, such as that of the Cold War or the War on Terror, precisely because of these two issues. Despite this tentativeness of approach the relationship America does maintain with Sri Lanka is nothing if not consistent – in fact the very tentativeness is historically consistent: the reasons for repulsion or attraction

²⁷ Caution does not denote indecisiveness

remain striking in their steadiness – America’s reactions to the activities of the island’s governments are almost mechanical in their predictability, their persistent constancy.

There is a clear contradiction in US policy towards Sri Lanka, which helps prove the concluding assertions in this chapter – that a crucial mix of Sri Lanka’s limited importance to the United States and the necessary tentativeness that comes as a corollary to this, particularly when dealing with a country riven by the vacillations of poor governance and unshrinking terrorism, is a key determinant of the nature of the bilateral relationship. The highly illustrative contradiction is this: the US diplomatic corps (former Ambassadors Reed, Donnelly, and Wills) explain that Sri Lanka and its long battle with terrorism did not rank highly enough on Washington’s agenda (2001 onwards) to warrant greater assistance, regardless of the fact that the language of the Bush administration’s War on Terror denoted that it was a war on *all* forms of terrorism, and terrorism *everywhere*. According to them, this was because the conflict was an internal matter that needed to be solved internally and/or the LTTE was not a threat to Americans or the national security of the United States. However, despite these unanimous and unequivocal assertions from those deep within the machinery of American foreign policy, they are fundamentally contradicted by the very legal criteria as set down for the designation of Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) by the Secretary of State. Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act states that in order for a terrorist group to be placed upon the FTO list,

“The organization’s terrorist activity or terrorism must threaten the security of U.S. nationals *or* the national security (national defense, foreign relations, *or* the economic interests) of the United States”²⁸

Since 1997, until its defeat in 2009, the LTTE had carved out a permanent presence on the Secretary of State-ordained FTO list. This fact alone renders the argument that Washington’s unwillingness to supply direct assistance, or even more ‘indirect’

²⁸ US Department of State, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>

assistance, to the Sri Lankan state in its battle against the LTTE because the terrorists or the conflict itself, were not a sufficient enough threat to America, as meaningless. That is not to say the assertion that America's attitude may have been changed had the LTTE begun specifically to target Americans or American property, is not accurate – of course it is – but this is not really the issue. The real issue is that the ambivalence inherent in Washington's approach to the conflict and the LTTE is in itself contradictory. It is contradictory because, as former President Kumaratunga adamantly pointed out, there is clearly a double standard in operation with regards to the terrorism affecting strategic American partners, and that which affects countries of less strategic value. In this sense, the nature and extent of the terrorism is relegated to a secondary concern, whilst the strategic importance of the state besieged by that terrorism, is raised to the primary concern. The logic of this is incontrovertible. The synthesis of the argument is this: if Sri Lanka offered the United States a greater strategic advantage in its pursuit of its foreign policy agenda then it is not a leap into the absurd to imagine that a greater and more direct level of assistance would have been forthcoming against the terrorists. To the strategic imperatives of American foreign policy, Sri Lanka has steadfastly retained its historical position as an island of no importance. This assertion is clearly demonstrated by the War on Terror.

The ultimate goal of this thesis was to put the US-Sri Lanka bilateral relationship into an historical framework so that key themes, motifs and causal imperatives, once identified, could be used to explain how Washington's attitude to Sri Lanka and its terrorist insurgency had evolved. This, in turn, would provide the modern investigations with an invaluable historical context within which could be placed the Sri Lankan conflict and its position relative to the War on Terror. Consequently, two objectives would be achieved simultaneously: 1) A thorough understanding of the issues which drive American attitudes, and hence policies, towards the conflict; 2) A conclusion would be drawn as to whether the War on Terror – the greatest paradigm shift in global foreign policy since the end of the Cold War – forced any clear alteration in the established relationship. In terms

of the War on Terror being a ‘turning point’ in the US-Sri Lanka relationship, perhaps a better characterisation would be that it was more of a *confirmation* of much that had gone before. President Truman’s conditional friendship offered to Ceylon in 1949, is clearly reflected in the central tenets of President Bush’s foreign policy. Other than for a brief period after 2002, when Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, the Wickremesinghe government, and the War on Terror, all seemed to offer hope in their historic convergence, the conditional relationship that can be traced through Sri Lanka’s post independence history, endured almost completely intact, in spite of these modern developments. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, America’s attitude to Sri Lanka was still largely dominated by factors rooted in history: the ideological orientation of the island’s government, the strategic and economic value of Sri Lanka to global US foreign policy concerns, the economic environment created by the government *du jour*, the standards of governance demonstrated by the political elite, the wariness of India’s reaction to greater US involvement, and the challenging complexities of dealing in peace with a notoriously deceitful terrorist organisation.

In the Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2009, there is a sentence that accurately carries within its words, the Catch 22 nature of American interest in Sri Lanka (during the period of conflict), and the historic ambivalence towards a country desperately ensnared in a cycle of violence, political self-interest, separatism, and a controversial religio-nationalism: “Peace would reduce the threat of regional terrorism and stabilize Sri Lanka as a partner for the United States in South Asia”. For the US, a peaceful Sri Lanka would give them cause to consider the island a ‘partner’, however, without the US as a partner, Sri Lanka would struggle to find peace. The War on Terror brought with it a promise – a promise that was taken with deadly seriousness by most people on the island, yet a promise that was left unfulfilled, for the most part, because of a traditional and historic relationship between the US and Sri Lanka, that had already helped to determine what the outcome would be long before the decade had even begun. Consolidated by the actions of the island’s twentieth century governments, and

Washington's response to these actions, America's historical relationship with Sri Lanka was resolutely re-confirmed by the War on Terror.

The central argument of the thesis – that America's contemporary relationship with Sri Lanka is determined primarily by a set of clearly identifiable parameters which are embedded in the historical evolution of that relationship – is abundantly supported by the material evidenced throughout the work. The complexities of foreign policy, particularly that which must confront terrorism and its often challenging impenetrability, make for testing study. Finding causation amidst such complexity can often result in the raising up of one cause at the necessary expense of another. Consequently, there will always be counter-argument to challenge the prioritisations assigned and the conclusions drawn. By starting its investigation in 1948, what this work has been able to do is investigate with thoroughness the very 'genetic code' of the US-Sri Lanka relationship. This unprecedented manner of examination has allowed for the creation of an historically generated 'personality' that the thesis has then been able to assign to the bilateral connection, thus avoiding, as far as possible, the prioritisation of one cause over another. Instead the study has been able to create a more holistic set of determinants that, when seen as operating in concert, help identify with a greater clarity the operational parameters by which the foreign policy America pursues with Sri Lanka is marshalled. Thus whilst modern eventualities will arise that impact the relationship, they are accommodated within the historical boundaries of the relationship.

From the early years of Ceylonese independence and the onset of the Cold War, there have developed trends and motifs in the US-Sri Lanka relationship which endure steadfastly to this day. Ever since SWRD Bandaranaike's split from the United National Party (UNP), in order to form the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1951, the political course of Sri Lanka has been determined largely by the ideological antagonisms between these two dominating parties. When the UNP were soundly beaten by Bandaranaike's SLFP-driven coalition in the election of 1956, the ideological shifts that have shaped and

re-shaped (occasionally to catastrophic effect) the social and economic policies of Sri Lanka with clockwork regularity from election to election, were born. Consequently the, often quite radical, ideological difference to be found between governments became a major element in the view America would form of the island's governance. Fired in the kiln of the Cold War the American view of Sri Lanka has been (and still is today) determined largely by its Manichean worldview that fixes economic and social liberalism (that propounded by the UNP) as the best model of governance, whilst the socialist-driven policies charted by the SLFP are pegged as regressive and dangerous. Hence, in this respect, America's foreign policy towards Sri Lanka is reactive, in the sense that it is often shaped by events on the island rather than shaped from within the US. Since the swing between the UNP and the SLFP has occurred almost, but not quite, with each succeeding election, America's attitude to the island's governance has correspondingly been subject to regular swings, from fondness to distaste. Just as these ideological shifts have become an ever-present feature of Sri Lanka's political landscape, so America's fluctuating policy toward Sri Lanka has become a notable theme in the bilateral relationship.

As parties began to realise the political capital to be gained from advocating the increasingly exclusory policies of Sinhala chauvinism, so the responsibility for causing much of the tension that would eventually engulf the island, can be placed, according to many within the US diplomatic corps, at their doorstep. As a corollary, the US would also assert, in many respects quite rightly, that the solution to the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious problems could ultimately only be found within the country. Former Ambassador Donnelly was adamant that external actors could have only a limited impact if the domestic political will to provide a genuine solution was absent²⁹. Two issues arise from this. First, Washington's unwillingness to involve itself more directly with governments that have been historically cavalier in their respect for civil and human rights, has evolved into one of the core parameters of the functioning bilateral

²⁹ Former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Shaun E. Donnelly. Interview conducted May 21, 2009

relationship. Second, the US has evolved a certain degree of sympathy towards the Tamil community – an issue that would further inhibit greater American assistance to the island’s governments. Former Ambassador Wills noted as much when he asserted that what the LTTE were actually doing was counter-productive to the “...very legitimate grievances...” of the Tamils³⁰. President Kumaratunga lamented the expertise of the Tamil diaspora in their use of propaganda to amplify this empathetic feeling abroad³¹. Consequently, the degree to which America has assisted the Sri Lankan state, from as early as the 1950’s but particularly since the formalising of the conflict in the 1980’s, has been deeply affected by the manner in which the government has treated its own citizens – not simply the Tamil community but indeed all of its citizens. Hence, the issue of human and civil rights has become a key aspect of the US-Sri Lanka relationship. The dilemma facing the Americans was summed up perfectly by former US Ambassador Wills when he said, “We never could embrace SL (*sic*) as much as we would have liked because of concerns over its human rights record”³². However, the issue of human rights is not quite as black and white as Ambassador Wills identified – this is where President Kumaratunga’s claim that there is a ‘double standard’ in operation with Sri Lanka, can be justified. As already discussed in previous chapters, there are a number of countries with which the US has extremely close relations – providing millions, if not billions of dollars-worth of aid and assistance (often military) – which yet rank highly on any objective list of countries which seriously violate human rights, e.g. Saudi Arabia. The ready conclusion to be drawn is that, in American foreign policy, strategic and economic importance clearly trumps concerns for human rights.

Traditional American reticence in relation to Sri Lanka has been compounded by South Asian regional imperatives, particularly the primacy of Indian authority. Former US Ambassador Lunstead talks of ‘deferring’ to India, not wishing to ‘irritate’ India, and the elevation of American strategic interests in India above any limited desire it might have

³⁰ Former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills. Interview conducted November 16, 2009

³¹ Interview with Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, October 1, 2009

³² Former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, E. Ashley Wills. Interview conducted November 16, 2009

to become more involved in Sri Lanka³³. Indian hegemony in the Indian Ocean region is not something the US wishes to challenge at the expense of its strategic partnership with the South Asian nuclear, strategic, and economic giant. Former Ambassador Reed reiterated the point that greater military support to the Sri Lankan government was never a viable possibility because the “US...did not want to irritate other powers, like India, in the region”³⁴.

The historical parameters of the US-Sri Lanka relationship, such as the ideological colouration of the island’s government, its standards of governance, the quality of protection it provides for the rights of its citizens, as well as the absence of a strategic position for Sri Lanka in American foreign policy narratives, and the regional sensitivities of India, have all evolved to craft a clearly identifiable pattern of US behaviour that may well adapt itself to contemporary events, but it does so in a manner that allows it to retain its well-defined character. In this sense, the core values inherent in the bilateral relationship, once set, have not fundamentally altered over the course of this study. Even after the conflict has ended, with the victorious Rajapakse government having achieved something the US has yet been unable to in Iraq and Afghanistan – the elimination of terrorism, the Americans continue to interpret Sri Lanka through familiar eyes. As recently as December 2009, the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US Senate, issued a report entitled, ‘Sri Lanka: Recharting U.S. Strategy After the War’, which, despite containing recommendations for greater engagement with the island in its post-war transition to peace and, giving dues to the government for some of its peace-time initiatives, nevertheless reinforces the staple American concerns of,

“...the Sri Lankan Government’s ability to address pressing...needs for Tamils and Muslims. The Government’s prolonged application of emergency laws, lack of transparency...questionable conduct during the war, and clampdown on press freedom have undermined trust and the prospects for greater partnership with international donors

³³ Lunstead, *The United States’ Role in Sri Lanka’s Peace Process, 2002-2006*

³⁴ Former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, John H. Reed. Interview conducted April, 2009

Though the war is over, a culture of fear and paranoia permeates society, especially for journalists, which further erodes Sri Lanka's standing in the international community and hampers its prospects for genuine peace."³⁵

Perhaps the US is correct to continue to take due caution in its approach to Sri Lanka, however, what the historical American approach lacks is a certain degree of nuance and subtlety. The extremely complex issues that have shaped post-independence Sri Lanka arguably require a less Manichean interpretation than the one that has historically been on offer: in the Sri Lankan arena of religion, language, terrorism, and ethnicity, the arguments over who is right and who is wrong don't always fit neatly into boxes. More often than not, the narrative of this conflict in particular has eschewed morality in favour of victory – an experience with which most nations states have at least a passing familiarity. And so it would appear that if the US is to 're-chart' its strategy in Sri Lanka, then it must first break away from the historically restrictive 'black and white' methodology that has, at times, worsened the situation it was hoping to improve. By restricting its commitment, the US has often encouraged greater resistance (from the government du jour, the majority Sinhalese, *and* the LTTE) as opposed to stimulating positive change. Although this notion – that a more graded assessment of Sri Lanka should be pursued – is mentioned in the recent report, it remains to be seen whether this will be forthcoming, or whether this attitude is simply another rotation in the historical cycle that has traditionally pushed the two countries apart or pulled them together.

The relationship America has built with Sri Lanka is determined by a number of historically recurring and highly visible issues. Though it is not always acknowledged by the US State Department, these issues are unmistakably constructed upon the fundamental premise that the country has simply never been important enough – in any real strategic, economic, or political sense – for America to engage with any level of

³⁵Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 'Sri Lanka: Recharting U.S. Strategy After the War', December 7, 2009, p. 2

meaningful consequence. This point is driven home in the above report when it says that, “U.S. policymakers have tended to underestimate Sri Lanka’s geostrategic importance for American interests”³⁶. However, there is some evidence that the relationship may yet find a greater degree of flexibility. During the last years of the conflict, most Western countries effectively quarantined the Rajapakse government. The effect of this was to drive the island’s government into the arms of countries such as China, Burma, and Iran (an eventuality not without historical precedent). Significantly, the new report suggests, “that this strategic drift will have consequences for U.S. interests in the region”³⁷. The consequences may be of such implication that the report goes on to use language not seen in reference to Sri Lanka since the early days of the Cold war: “The United States cannot afford to “lose” Sri Lanka”³⁸. An interesting corollary to the possible rise in strategic importance of Sri Lanka to the US might be that Washington may begin reassessing the strategic value of the eastern port of Trincomalee – one of the world’s deepest natural harbours. Long ignored by the US because of the conflict, the harbour may indeed (depending on the sensitivities of India) become attractive for its future possibilities as a centre of trade and regional influence for the Americans. Of course, this would involve a thoughtful and complex effort in regional negotiation – not to mention a serious paradigm shift in US-Lanka relations – something that should not be expected in the immediate future. Nonetheless if Washington is able to balance its historical concerns for the island’s political, economic, and ethnic trajectory, with the shifting strategic possibilities in the region, then perhaps a more appropriate model – one engineered a little less by antiquity and a little more by the possibilities of the future – can be constructed.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 3

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

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Elliott L. Watson

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