

NATO in Sri Lanka?

[The Island](#) gives a front page slot my latest response to their absurdly slanted (and continuing) coverage of Norway's peace facilitation role in the Sri Lankan conflict. (Probably not the last of either . . .)



April 2002: The then Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgessen (centre) and Special envoy to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, Erik Solheim, with President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga at the President's House, Colombo. They discussed, at length, matters related to Oslo's peace initiative, including the ban on the LTTE.

**A NATO role in failed
Norwegian peace bid and
costly propaganda projects' –
a response**

March 29, 2016

Once again I find myself in the position of replying to your columnist Shamindra Ferdinando, this time with respect to his 23 March 2016 column '*A NATO role in failed Norwegian peace bid and costly propaganda projects*'.

In a column peppered with grandiose, and in several instances unsubstantiated claims, I will confine myself to commenting on those that relate specifically to the role of the Norwegians in Sri Lanka – the subject of my recent book [To End A Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement in Sri Lanka](#), on which Ferdinando has been good enough to comment on several occasions in recent weeks.

First, Ferdinando asserts that the 'Norwegians believed decision making process (sic), as well as the public opinion in any conflict-affected country, could be influenced through well-funded propaganda projects.' This strikes me as a tendentious interpretation of Norwegian strategy in Sri Lanka. As I understand it their view was that, in Sri Lanka as in other post-conflict countries, there was a real need to assist the building up of a critical constituency that both understood and supported the peace process, in particular within the majority Sinhala community.

To that end, it was felt that one of the most useful things Norway could do was to support a wide range of civil society initiatives whose objectives were clearly aligned with promoting peace and general, and support for the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) in particular. To call these 'propaganda projects' is simply misleading – unless of course, you are of the view that expressing support for the peace process constitutes propaganda-mongering.

Moreover, to construe the fact that the ultimate impact of such Norwegian-funded peace constituency building was limited as evidence that it constituted what Ferdinando calls 'squandered Norwegian taxpayers' money' is similarly misguided. In my view the real lesson learned here is that

external support for peace can never be a substitute for locally owned and initiated efforts. What Sri Lanka really needed in the aftermath of the 2002 CFA, in other words, was a concerted government-led effort to explain and advocate the benefits of peace among the population, in particular those sections of it, such as rural Sinhalese communities in the South, most likely to be suspicious of a peace deal with the LTTE.

By any account, however, that is precisely what didn't happen. And in this context, former President Chandrika Kumaratunga's justifiably proud recollection, in the course of a book interview with me, of the dramatic impact on public opinion of the *Sudu Nelum* (White Lotus) movement initiated in the mid 1990s to persuade the Sinhala population of the overarching imperative of achieving peace with the Tamils is surely an instructive precedent. (Recall that in the space of two years, popular support for peace moves up from only 20 to 70 per cent).

Next, referencing the 2012 'Pawns of Peace' evaluation of Norway's engagement in Sri Lanka, Ferdinando suggests that the 'ambitious Norwegian peace initiative' suffered an 'irreparable setback' due to its 'inaccurate assessment of the ground situation'. Specifically, he suggests 'Norway operated on the premise that the Sri Lankan government lacked the wherewithal to defeat the LTTE militarily'.

This claim has the distinction of being both inaccurate and trivial. Inaccurate, because at no point was the fundamental rationale for Norwegian support to the Sri Lankan peace process premised on calculations of military balance and advantage (although it certainly took account of such matters). Oslo supported peace because it – like many others – believed that it was a better alternative to continued conflict between government forces and the LTTE.

Trivial, because at the point at which Norway entered the

scene as peace facilitator, the belief that neither side was capable of defeating the other militarily was pretty much universal, not least among the international community. Only much later, in 2008, did that assessment of the prevailing military balance shift. (Erik Solheim, for example, recalls the occasion in autumn 2008 on which a senior Indian official told him for the first time that he believed that government forces were now capable of defeating the LTTE.)

Next the 2002 CFA was not, as Ferdinando states, a 'Norwegian peace initiative'. In fact the real initiative for the CFA came squarely from the parties, notably from Ranil Wickremesinghe following his electoral victory in December 2001 and from the LTTE, who in the aftermath of their devastating July 2001 attack on Katunayake airport and from what was by then a position of undoubted strength adopted a notably positive approach to peace efforts. As befits a facilitator, Norway's role was to assist in the final agreement's formulation, shuttling between the two sides in an effort to achieve consensus on formulations and so on.

It is thus essential to underscore that both the CFA and the broader peace process were in the first instance a bilateral initiative of the Sri Lankan government and LTTE, supported and facilitated by the Norwegians. Accordingly, responsibility for the process' direction, setbacks along the way and ultimately breakdown rests squarely with the parties, and nowhere else. Thus Ferdinando's suggestion that there was a 'Norwegian project in Sri Lanka' is ultimately false. Rather, for a time, there was a peace project in Sri Lanka – initiated with the Ceasefire Agreement – to which Norway lent its whole-hearted support.

Next, in the context of a discussion of what Ferdinando describes as the UNP government's CFA-era 'suppression' of the media in a 'bid to prevent ... reportage of the actual ground situation', he alleges that the Norwegians 'failed to take tangible measures to discourage the LTTE from causing trouble'

– presumably meaning with the media. Sadly, the comment suggests a failure to understand what being a third party peace facilitator does, and does not, involve.

In Sri Lanka neither the Norwegians as facilitators nor the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) as monitors had the mandate – or indeed the practical instruments – to take the kind of ‘tangible measures’ Ferdinando presumably has in mind. Such an interventionist mandate and capability was held exclusively by the parties themselves.

Further on, Ferdinando states that the ‘much touted assertion’ that ‘NATO member Norway is a lightweight facilitator’ simply ‘does not hold water’. First, it is worth recalling that the term ‘lightweight facilitator’ was first used by none other than Lakshman Kadirgamar – ‘lightweight’ being precisely Norway’s preferred quality in the eyes of the former Sri Lankan Foreign Minister.

With respect to the (correct) reference to Norway as a NATO member, Ferdinando takes an ‘expert on Norwegian initiative’ – a thinly-veiled reference to myself, as the context makes clear – to task for questioning his claim that, in as yet unspecified ways, Norway “involv[ed] NATO in their project here.” By way of supporting evidence, Ferdinando’s latest column points to the Pawns of Peace Evaluation – well, actually, a single page in it – which he also suggests I ‘obviously hadn’t perused’. [In fact I have, as a simple glance at the bibliography of my book plus a number of references and quotes from the Evaluation would have made clear to him).

Here it is then, the one reference to NATO (p.100) – a search of the whole Evaluation turned up three more, all of them hidden away in minor references. Summarizing this single substantive reference to a NATO connection or involvement in Sri Lanka, Ferdinando concludes from it that ‘as the five-nation Nordic Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) had received

intelligence from NATO, it didn't require intelligence provided by India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) (page 100)'.

Is this what the Evaluation in fact says? The answer is provided in actual quotation of which Ferdinando himself provides a part.

'The SLMM was not equipped for high-tech intelligence. In line with the preferences and concerns of both the parties and India, the mission had no radar surveillance and relied almost exclusively on its own observations and information forwarded to them. Indian intelligence only reached them through informal channels, 'so we could never fully trust it,' a HOM explained. 'They were not giving it to us to be nice. We would always ask ourselves: why do they want us to know this?' Intelligence provided by NATO only confirmed what they already knew.'

Does this offer proof that since the SLMM received intelligence from NATO, they didn't require input from India's RAW? No, I think, not even on the most fanciful interpretation. And as if this weren't bad enough, Ferdinando goes on to conclude with the rhetorical flourish that 'NATO intelligence would have had a significant impact on the (sic) decision making process' – although it's not clear which such process, when or even how this claim has in mind.

Last but not least, the pièce de resistance: an article title that reads 'A NATO role in failed Norwegian peace bid and costly propaganda projects'. In other words a lone, dubiously-interpreted reference as the basis for a headline!

Whatever else, I believe the Norwegian engagement in Sri Lanka deserves more careful consideration and analysis than is on offer in Ferdinando's latest article.

http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=142888

Poland approves large-scale logging in Europe's last primeval forest



Anyone who's ever visited this amazing primeval forest – the last such left in Europe – home to both its native bison and an amazing array of flora and fauna, knows this is a truly catastrophic decision. Along with Polish democracy, high time to save the *puszcza Białowieża*!

Poland approves large-scale logging in Europe's last primeval forest

Greenpeace accuses government of ignoring scientists over fate of Białowieża woodland, home to 20,000 animal species and

Europe's tallest trees.

AFP, Mar 26, 2016

[Poland](#) has approved large-scale logging in Europe's last primeval woodland in a bid to combat a beetle infestation despite protests from scientists, ecologists and the European Union. The action in the Białowieża forest is intended to fight the spread of the spruce bark beetle.

"We're acting to curb the degradation of important habitats, to curb the disappearance and migration of important species from this site," the environment minister, Jan Szyszko, said. Szyszko vowed that the logging plans would not apply to strictly protected areas of the primeval forest that was designated a [Unesco](#) World Heritage site in 1979.

But under the new plan, loggers will harvest more than 180,000 cubic metres (6.4m cubic feet) of wood from other areas of the forest over a decade, dwarfing previous plans to harvest 40,000 cubic metres over the same period.

Vowing to protect the forest, Greenpeace accused Szyszko of "ignoring the voices of citizens and scientists, the European Commission, Unesco and conservation organisations." Along with other environmental groups protesting the move, Greenpeace also said the logging could trigger the EU to launch punitive procedures against Poland for violating its Natura 2000 program.



Fog clings to the ground behind a grove of tall birch trees silhouetted by evening light in Białowieża forest. Photograph: Raymond Gehman/CORBIS

Sprawling across 150,000 hectares, the Białowieża forest reaches across the Polish border with Belarus, where it is entirely protected as a nature park. It is home to 20,000 animal species, including 250 types of bird and 62 species of mammals – among them Europe’s largest, the bison. Europe’s tallest trees, firs towering 50m high (164ft), and oaks and ashes of 40m, also flourish here, in an ecosystem unspoiled for more than 10 millennia.

IS in Europe: The Race to the Death



Former ISIS commander Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who ordered fighters to 'shoot into crowds' of civilians

Here's a revealing BBC Panorama backgrounder on the continuing international intelligence scramble to try and head off the current wave of IS attacks in Europe.

IS in Europe: The race to the death

By Peter Taylor, John O'Kane and Ceri Isfryn. BBC News, 23 March 2016



Tuesday's devastating attacks in Brussels, in which more than 30 people died and scores were injured, are the latest phase of the war on Europe declared by the so-called Islamic State. The attacks cast a dark shadow over last week's triumph, the arrest of Salah Abdeslam.

The hope will be that Abdeslam, one of the leading members of the cell behind the Paris attacks, will provide crucial intelligence on the current state of IS's network and its future plans. The authorities will also hope that he can identify the people behind Tuesday's attacks.

Getting captured IS fighters to talk is one of the crucial ways in which Western intelligence services have built up the picture of its European network and in particular the role of its former commander, Abdelhamid Abaaoud.

The BBC's *Panorama* programme has seen the transcripts of some important interrogations carried out by France's equivalent of MI5, the DGSI. They reveal valuable details about the tactics used by Abaaoud to train and equip IS fighters in Europe.

Suspects

including Salah Abdeslam were arrested in the Brussels suburb of Molenbee. Image: Reuters Nicolas Moreau was one them. He was arrested in 2015 having left Nantes to fight jihad in Syria in 2014. He, like many IS recruits, was a former petty criminal who had converted to Islam in prison and become disillusioned with life in France. He told his interrogators he couldn't stand the "injustice" and "couldn't see any future in this country".

He went on to provide valuable information about IS's external operations department known as Amni, meaning "security", that sends hand-picked trained fighters back to Europe to inflict death and destruction on their homelands. "Each gets 50,000 euros (£40,000) to mount an attack," Moreau said.

Captured fighter Nicolas Moreau gave details about IS's external operations department. Amni, with 1,500 members, also had an internal security role "to detect spies in Iraq and Syria", he said. Crucially he then revealed the *kunya*, the nom de guerre of the person in charge of Amni – Abu Omar from Brussels.

In fact, Abu Omar's real name was Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the commander of the network that was to plan and execute a number of attacks in Europe in 2015, culminating in the meticulously

planned massacres in Paris.

Back there [in Syria], it was a real industry – they were really looking to hit France or Europe

Another IS fighter, Reda Hame, captured in France in August 2015, gave more precise details about Abaaoud that helped intelligence agencies fill in the picture about how his network operated. Hame's value to Abaaoud was that his French passport was due to expire and Abaaoud wanted to get him back to Europe to carry out an attack while his passport was still valid. He said Abaaoud was "a very tough person, very determined and very dangerous".

Time was of the essence to take advantage of the expiry date. Abaaoud personally gave Hame a crash course in weapons training and then issued instructions. Getting weapons in France, he said, was not a problem. "I just had to ask for what I needed, in France or in Europe." Abaaoud also warned him to test the weapon thoroughly "as it wasn't an option that the operation would be lost due to phoney stuff".

But the most chilling instructions that Abaaoud issued were about the targets Hame was to hit. "He just told me to choose an easy target like a place where there are people. Imagine a rock concert in a European country. If we arm you, would you be ready to shoot into a crowd?"

"Imagine a rock concert in a European country. If we arm you, would you be ready to shoot into a crowd?"

Abaaoud added that it was best to wait after the attack for the forces to intervene and then to die while fighting. "He said that if many civilians were hit, the foreign policy of France would change."

Interrogators then asked Hame if he was aware of a possible attack in France or Europe. He said he couldn't be specific.

“All I can tell you is that it will happen soon. Back there [in Syria], it was a real industry. They were really looking to hit France or Europe.”

He said that given the motivation of the IS fighters he had met, he would not be surprised if there were actions soon. He then reminded his interrogators of IS’s justification for their attacks on Europe. “They just want the [coalition] airstrikes to stop.”

The interrogation of Reda Hame and his mention of a rock concert as a suggested target took place just three months before the Paris attacks and the assault on the Bataclan concert hall in which 89 fans of the heavy metal American band, Eagles of Death Metal, died.

However dire his Cassandra-like prophecy, it would have been unrealistic to expect the authorities to spend the following months monitoring every concert and public gathering in Paris. But the clear warning was there.

With the help of Israel’s Mossad, the CIA planned to intercept him but the plan failed – Abaaoud slipped the net

From intelligence we have seen, we now understand how 2015 became a desperate race between Abaaoud and Western intelligence agencies as they tried to find him and stop him. From the beginning of the year they had no doubt about his key role in planning attacks in Europe. Telephone intercepts indicated that he was behind an IS cell set up in the Belgian town of Verviers with the alleged aim of killing police officers.

The cell was neutralised when Belgian police, aided by France’s SAS equivalent, the GIGN, stormed the building, killing two members of Abaaoud’s cell who had been with him in Syria. One of them, Khalid Ben Larbi, had flown from Syria and used the UK as a back door to Belgium via St Pancras. We’ve

been told he was travelling on a passport belonging to a Dutch jihadi.

Ant

i-terror police patrol streets in Verviers Image: AFP

The telephone intercepts made to the cell in Verviers, were traced to Athens and were identified as having come from Abaaoud. It was a golden opportunity to swoop and arrest him. Intelligence we've seen indicates that with the help of Israel's Mossad, the CIA planned to intercept him but the plan failed. Abaaoud slipped the net, returned to Syria and boasted in IS's glossy propaganda magazine, Dabiq, how he had escaped under the noses of Western intelligence.

The IS network is still at large and no-one knows where and when it may strike next

Through the summer, the warnings about the threat from Abaaoud and his network increased. One source reported that Abaaoud was now IS's Minister for War. The CIA warned that Abaaoud's network was trying to get hold of European ID cards and that

he was in contact with Turkish smugglers about trying to get recruits back to Europe. Alarm bells were now ringing ever more loudly.

There was concern, too, when it was discovered that Mohamed Abrini, a member of the Paris cell and one of Abaaoud's closest lieutenants, spent time in the UK last summer. We understand he went to Birmingham and when he returned to Brussels, he was interviewed by the police. Mohammed Abrini, unlike his fellow jihadi, Salah Abdeslam, is still at large.

Mohammed

Abrini was photographed with Salah Abdeslam shortly before the Paris attack. Image AFP

We have learned that as summer 2015 turned to autumn, the race to find Abaaoud intensified. A series of meetings were held between Western intelligence agencies, now seriously concerned about their inability to locate Abaaoud and increasingly worried about his network's intent. In October, MI6 and MI5 met with a European partner agency to discuss Abaaoud and their concern about a report that he was intending to send 60 trained fighters to attack Belgium, France, Germany and the

UK.

Other agencies, too, were trying to find a way of countering Abaaoud and discussed setting up a specialist team to target an individual who was now Europe's most wanted man.

The meeting to finalise the details was to be held in Paris. The original date in the calendar was ominous: 13 November, the very day of the Paris attacks. The meeting was postponed before that date but it would have been too late anyway. The race was over and Abaaoud had won.

The grim statistics were the result: 130 people dead and almost 700 injured. Five days after the attacks he had commanded, Abaaoud was killed in a safe house in St Denis, a suburb of Paris – a suicide bomber hiding with him detonated a suicide vest.

French security forces fired thousands of rounds at the flat in St Denis where Abaaoud took refuge. Image: Alamy Tuesday's attacks in Brussels clearly indicate that the IS network is still at large and no-one knows where and when it may strike next. That's the nightmare that keeps the intelligence services awake at night. However intense their efforts to keep

us all safe, they can never guarantee 100% security against such a ruthless and sophisticated enemy.

As Alain Winants, the former head of Belgium's MI5, warns. "I fear that in the West we will have to live for the coming years with the threats of that kind of terrorism."



Image: AFP

Film of The Colombo Book Launch

Film of The Colombo Book Launch



The video quality isn't exactly pristine, but the audio is actually pretty good – certainly more than enough to catch the main contours of the discussion.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yf5XfudbUB8>

CR Joint Analysis Workshop Report

CR Joint Analysis Workshop Report

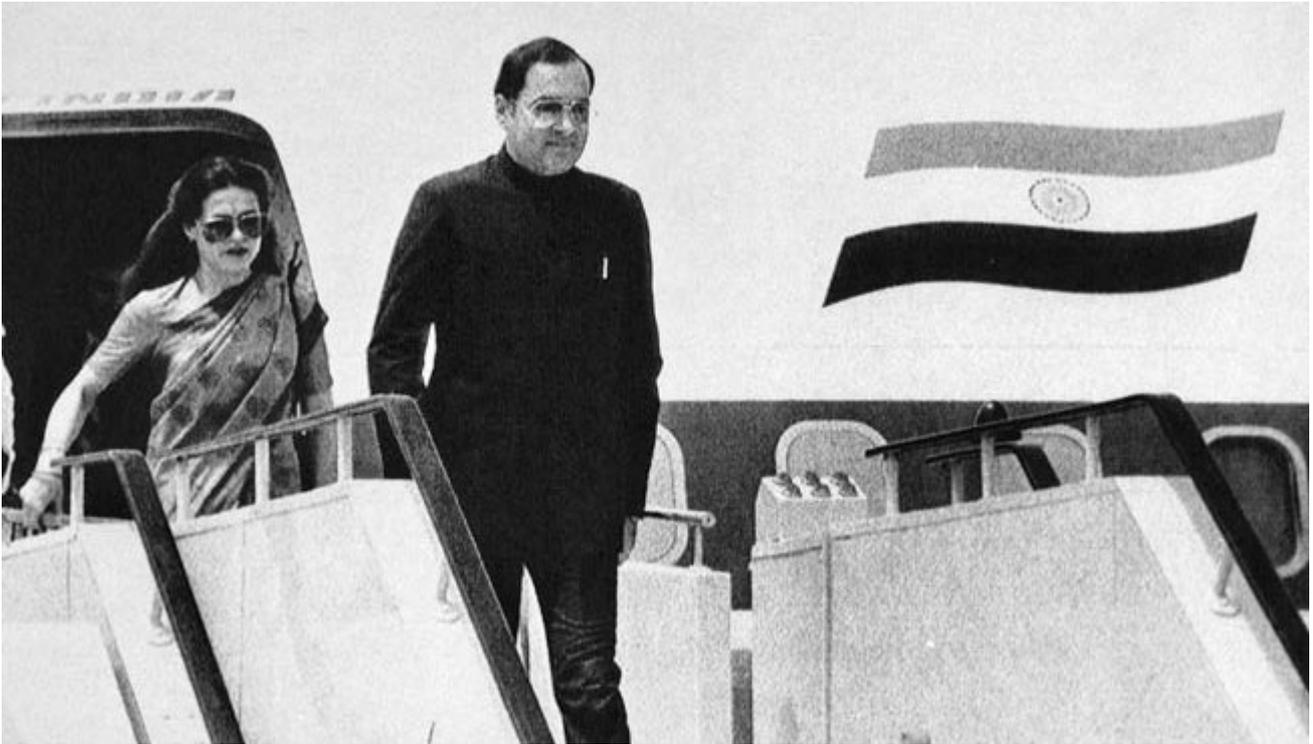


Here's my report from a recent [Conciliation Resources](#) 'Joint Analysis Workshop' held in the context of the 'Peacebuilding and Reconciliation' [Accord Insight](#) publication on the same theme for which they have invited me to act as Specialist Editor. Web page includes some great video interviews with some of the key participants too!

<http://www.c-r.org/resources/joint-analysis-workshop-peacebuilding-and-reconciliation>

'Killing Rajiv Gandhi Was the LTTE's Biggest Mistake'

Here's an **India**-focused report from the recent launch of my Sri Lanka-book in New Delhi.



Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated on May 21, 1991 in Tamil Nadu's Sriperumbudur. (AP File Photo)

‘Killing Rajiv Gandhi Was LTTE’s Biggest Mistake’, Leader Reportedly Said

[All India](#) | [Indo-Asian News Service](#): March 10, 2016

New Delhi: Assassinating former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was the Tamil Tigers’ biggest mistake, a new book quotes the late LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham as saying.

Balasingham told Norway’s former Special Envoy to Sri Lanka Erik Solheim that LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and his feared intelligence chief Pottu Amman initially denied their involvement in the killing.

But they admitted the truth to Balasingham “a few weeks” after the May 21, 1991 assassination, says Mark Salter’s book “To

End A Civil War” (Hurst & Company, London).

The just released 549-page book is the most exhaustive account of the Norwegian-led peace process that sought to end three decades of conflict in Sri Lanka.

The conflict finally ended when the Sri Lankan military crushed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009, wiping out its entire leadership including Prabhakaran and Pottu Amman.

“Perhaps most controversially, in terms of official LTTE policies, Balasingham conceded that the killing of Rajiv Gandhi was the biggest mistake the LTTE had ever made,” says the book.

The LTTE has never officially admitted to killing Mr Gandhi, who was blown up by a Sri Lankan Tamil woman suicide bomber at an election rally near Chennai.

Privately, Balasingham told the Norwegians that Mr Gandhi’s killing “was a complete disaster”.

According to Mr Solheim, Balasingham put the decision to kill Mr Gandhi to Prabhakaran’s desire for revenge for Tamils killed by Indian troops when they were deployed in Sri Lanka in 1987-90, and a belief that Gandhi may again send the troops to Sri Lanka if he returned to power.

Mr Solheim also says that although Balasingham, who in his final year was based in London and died of cancer in December 2006, wanted to reach out to the US and Europe, his real affinity was with India.

“Thus at the end of his life in 2006, Balasingham went so far as to try and ‘apologize’ to India for this misdeed (assassination).”

After Mr Gandhi’s assassination, India outlawed the LTTE – which was earlier based in Tamil Nadu and enjoyed New Delhi’s

blessings – and declared Prabhakaran and Pottu Amman proclaimed offenders.

In contrast, Balasingham had no hesitation in admitting that the LTTE assassinated moderate Tamil leader and academic Neelan Tiruchelvam – who was critical of the Tamil Tigers – in July 1999 on a Colombo street.

When the Norwegians, Mr Solheim included, confronted Balasingham on the killing, the book quotes the latter as saying point-blank: “Yes, we killed him and if you listen to me I will tell you why.”

The book quotes Solheim as saying that Balasingham once referred to Prabhakaran as a “warlord” and said the LTTE needed to transform into a political entity.

Balasingham also told Mr Solheim, who is now based in Paris: “You must never underestimate the capacity for violence of these guys (LTTE).”

According to Mr Solheim, Balasingham “was very frank with us, including admitting to the LTTE’s mistakes.

“Over time I came to regard Bala highly and to consider him as a great human being as well as a good friend.”

<http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/killing-rajiv-gandhi-was-lttes-biggest-mistake-leader-reportedly-said-1285777> ... via [@ndtv](#)

Rejecting ‘point scoring’ on

the Sri Lankan conflict

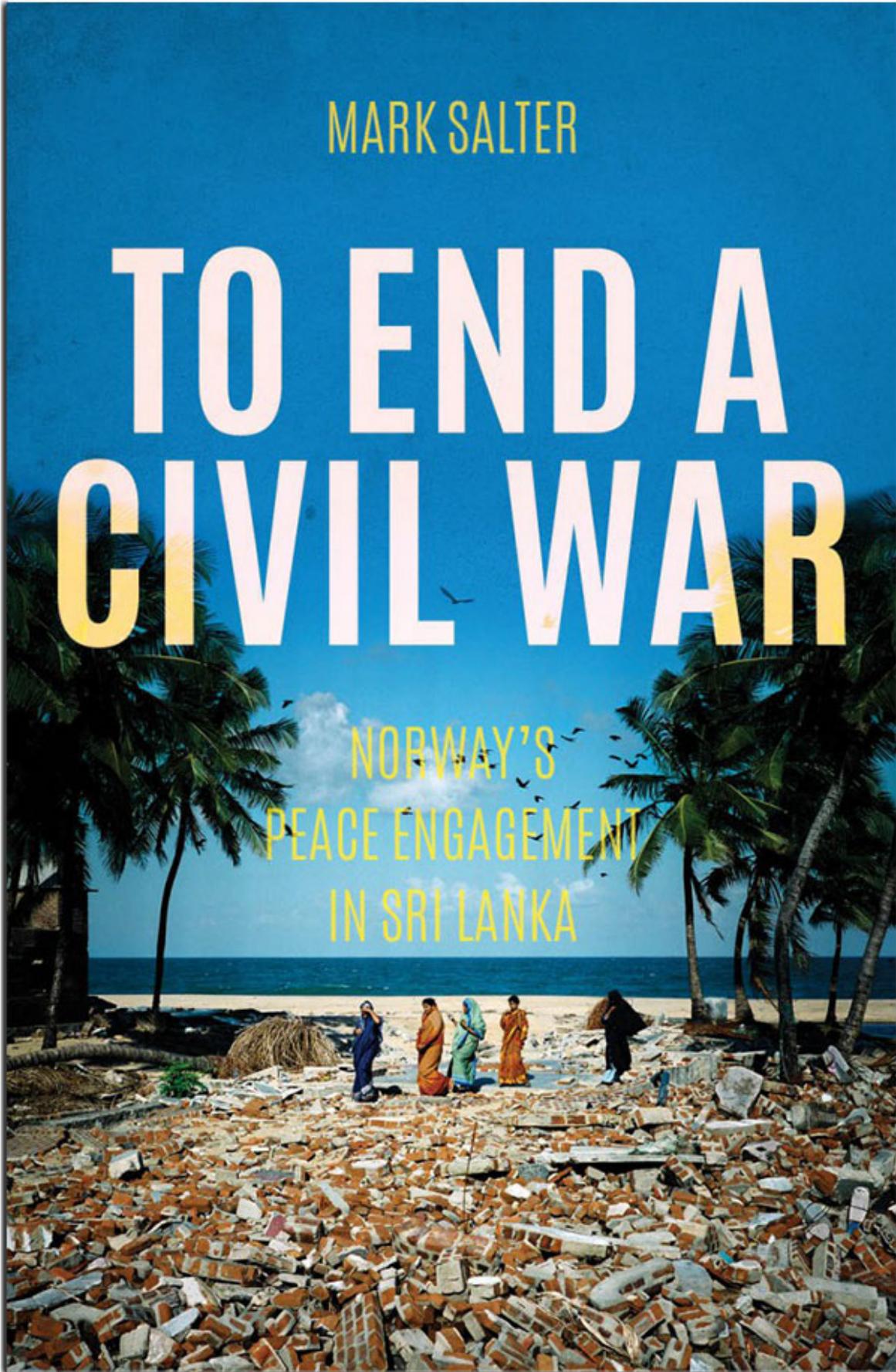
Rejecting 'point scoring' on the Sri Lankan conflict

In response newspaper [The Island](#)'s report of my recent Colombo book launch event, earlier this week I sent in this critical letter of response to the editor. Today it ends up being published in the paper – as a front page feature, no less!

MARK SALTER

TO END A CIVIL WAR

NORWAY'S
PEACE ENGAGEMENT
IN SRI LANKA



My new book *To End A Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement in Sri Lanka*, was published by Hurst in late October 2015.

Mark Salter rejects 'point scoring' on SL conflict

[*The Island*](#), March 18, 2016

I write in response to Shamindra Ferdinando's 9 March column for [*The Island*](#) – 'Failed Norwegian peace bid in SL: Different perspectives, glaring omissions'.

I welcome the coverage the column gives to the recent (3 March) Colombo launch of my new book ['To End A Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement in Sri Lanka'](#) at an event held at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) that Ferdinando himself attended. At the same time, the column significantly misrepresents both some of my comments at the launch, as well as, important aspects of the book itself.

At the book launch event, for example, I emphatically did not describe the April 2003 Washington Sri Lanka donor's conference as the 'primary reason for the failure of the [peace] process', as Ferdinando suggests. Rather, I characterised the decision to hold the conference in Washington – thereby effectively excluding the LTTE, as an organization proscribed as 'terrorist' in the USA, from participating in it – as one among a number of critical milestones in the peace process' break down, since it was the event that led to the LTTE officially suspending its participation in peace talks. In saying this, moreover, I am primarily reflecting the view of the Norwegian facilitators – who did not attend the Washington conference – that the failure to consult the LTTE over the conference's location, and the lack of consideration this in turn suggested for the Tiger's wish to be treated with equal consideration with

respect to the negotiation process, was a critical mistake.

Other critical milestones in the peace process' breakdown highlighted both in the book and my comments at the Colombo launch – which Ferdinando mentions in his column – include the fallout from the LTTE's Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) proposal tabled in late 2003, and the ultimate failure of the P-TOMS mechanism, unrolled in the aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami. To characterize any or all of these events as milestones is not, however, to suggest that any one of them is either singularly or principally responsible for the peace process' ultimate failure.

Similarly, I do not consider it remotely "obvious", as Ferdinando claims, that I apparently do not find 'fault with the LTTE for the collapse of the Norwegian effort'. The insinuation of bias or implied by the word 'obviously' apart, this claim also happens to be manifestly untrue. Any impartial reading of the book would clearly reveal: first, that in overall terms I am not in the business of 'favouring' one side or the other in my analysis – the book, to repeat, is focused on the Norwegian peace facilitation role in the Sri Lankan conflict; second, that when it comes to finding fault for the peace process' ultimate failure, it assigns at least as much: and on critical occasions, such as the assassination of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar in autumn 2005, considerably more blame to the LTTE than the Sri Lankan government.

Finally with respect to Dayan Jayatilleke's remarks at the launch event it would have been helpful – and certainly more balanced – if Ferdinando had leavened his somewhat uncritical account of Jayatilleke's analysis with a more substantial presentation of the counter-arguments offered in response. First, throughout the peace process (and indeed before it) the Norwegians did consult with India closely and – contra Jayatilleke's assertions – emphatically did take on board the lessons of the traumatic IPKF (mis)adventure in Sri Lanka. As

outlined clearly throughout the book, consultation with Delhi was an absolute bedrock of the Norwegian approach to Sri Lanka: any visit to Colombo by Erik Solheim and others from Oslo was always immediately followed – and sometimes preceded – by consultations in New Delhi.

Taking on board lessons learned, however, is not the same thing as drawing the same conclusions. And Jayatilleke's interpretation of the lessons of the IPKF experience, in particular for how to deal with the LTTE, is manifestly not the same as that adopted by the Norwegians in pursuit of the peace process. (Incidentally, anyone who doubts the extent of Norwegian-Indian consultation during the Sri Lankan peace process could do worse than take a look at Indian media reports of comments by such senior former Indian Foreign Service figures as Gopalkrishna Gandhi and Lalit Mansingh at the book launch events held in Chennai and Delhi last week.)

Second, Ferdinando's claim that the book 'conveniently ignores' what he describes as 'India's despicable role in sponsoring terrorism' in Sri Lanka, is simply untrue. While the early stages of the conflict are described briefly – this is, after all, mainly a book about its later stages, when Norway became directly involved – there are clear references (e.g. p. 14) to India's role in funding the LTTE and other Tamil militant groups during the 1980s.

Third, Ferdinando calls my 'failure' to interview TNA leaders in connection with the Rajapaksa-LTTE financial deal that allegedly preceded the 2005 presidential election boycott by Tamils in the North East 'astonishing'. More astonishing, perhaps, was Ferdinando's seemingly total ignorance of this story until I agreed to provide him with the relevant section of my book. That aside, I didn't interview TNA leaders on the subject for the same reason that I was ultimately unable to talk to a number of key figures in the Rajapaksa-era administration.

At the time I was chiefly working on the book – 2012-2014 – securing access to the country as a whole, not to mention government ministers, was extremely difficult for outsiders like myself; and not least when the subject was the peace process and conflict as a whole. So by and large, if I didn't talk to someone important it was because I was simply unable to. Thankfully, however, with the advent of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration, all that has significantly changed.

In conclusion, I believe that the tired old zero-sum habit of point scoring when it comes to the Sri Lanka conflict is now well and truly past its sell-by date. Time, surely, to move beyond that and into the critical business of achieving a lasting political solution to the roots of the conflict.

Mark Salter, Writer & Researcher

Joint Analysis Workshop Report

CR Joint Analysis Workshop

My report from the recent [Conciliation Resources](#) Workshop on 'Peacebuilding and Reconciliation'. Great video interviews with some key participants too!



<http://www.c-r.org/resources/joint-analysis-workshop-peacebuilding-and-reconciliation>

Sudar Oli Interview

Sudar Oli Interview

Well, I'm simply going to have to trust the veracity of this interview – although given the obvious quality of *Sudar Oli* Editor Arun Arokianathan who conducted it, I don't think I need have too many qualms on that score

Delhi Book Launch

Delhi Book Launch (9 March)



The final Indian launch for my new book on Sri Lanka, held at the [India International Centre](#) in Delhi. High-level panel and group of participants, thoughtful discussion of the lessons learned from Norway – and earlier India's – experience in Sri Lanka. Many thanks to [Lalit Mansingh](#) and colleagues at the [Forum for Strategic Initiatives \(FSI\)](#) for hosting and organizing the event.