

Papa Wemba: musical king of the Society of Ambianceurs and Elegant People

Here is my brother Tom's alternately lyrical and learned tribute to the great Congolese singer Papa Wemba, who died after collapsing on stage in Abidjan earlier this week. Among Wemba's many achievements, [Tom Salter](#) argues, was his embodiment of what is described as 'a very Congolese cultural trajectory – the creation of ways of being modern that were not Western'.



Photo credit above: Congo's most famous musician Papa Wemba, performing at a concert in Kinshasa in 2004. Reuters/ David Lewis

Papa Wemba: musical king of the Society of Ambianceurs and Elegant People

Tom Salter, 27 April 2016, [*The Conversation*](#)

Sadly, we have lost another great of Congolese music – [Papa Wemba](#).

Papa Wemba was born Shungu Wembiado in 1949. He came to musical prominence in the great beating heart of Congolese popular music, Kinshasa's famous district of Matonge in the 1970s during the [belle époque](#) of Congolese popular music. The people of the capital, and especially its musical heart, are now mourning one of their musical heroes. Oh Kinshasa! Oh Matonge!

I never met Papa Wemba, but I did meet many of his colleagues and contemporaries. When I did my [research](#) on the spread of Congolese music in Africa between 1945 and 2000 I found the Congolese, whether from one side of the river or the other, were people who really knew their music and its history. It never ceased to amaze me how anyone I talked to could narrate a shared musical narrative, a kind of creation story, a history in which four generations of Congolese musicians marched through the years after 1945 spreading Congolese music all over Africa in a way no other African country could rival.

Each of these four generations was identified with a particular set of dances and with a particular formative band. Papa Wemba played no small part in this unparalleled musical achievement as part of the third generation.

This was a continental achievement that stood in marked contrast to the degradation of domestic political life, the gradual collapse of the national economy and the crushing of

hopes fired by the country's first Prime Minister, [Patrice Lumumba](#), after independence.

It was not South Africa and Nigeria – the African countries with the largest economies, populations and music industries – that spread their music in Africa between 1945 and 2000. Instead it was the country with the beating heart, *le grand tam tam d'Afrique*, Zaire (now the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#)).

Star of the rebellious generation

Papa Wemba was a star primarily of the third generation, the rebellious generation that came to maturity in the late 1960s and began touring Africa and Zaire in the 1970s. This generation was inspired as much by the stagecraft and showmanship of American soul superstar [James Brown](#) as by the indigenous musical sources to which their apparently omnipotent President [Mobutu Sese Seko](#) asked they turn when he instituted his [Zairianisation](#) and authenticity policies in the 1970s.

These policies were influenced by similar ones instituted earlier by [Sekou Touré](#) in [Guinea](#). But they were not isolationist.

They were launched at the same time that Mobutu funded an international black diaspora musical jamboree. James Brown was invited to perform in Zaire in 1974 as part of the amazing musical extravaganza put on for the world title boxing fight between [Muhammad Ali](#) and [George Foreman](#) known as the [Rumble in Jungle](#).

The Congolese stars of the second generation, [Tabu Ley](#) and [Franco](#), performed in the stadium in Kinshasa alongside long-time favourites in Zaire – Latin stars [Celia Cruz](#) and [Johnny Pacheco](#). They were joined by American stars [Bill Withers](#), [BB King](#) and [Sister Sledge](#), who were less well known in Zaire. The

show is gloriously captured in the 2008 documentary “[Soul Power](#)”.

That galaxy of stars performed to the budding young musicians like Papa Wemba who were challenging the dominance of the second generation, which had grown fat on the patronage dispensed by their president in return for loyalty and praise.

In his life Papa Wemba composed one or two songs in his native [Tetela](#). Like most Congolese singers, he used a rare thing in Africa – the single unifying national Congolese language of song, [Lingala](#), for most of his compositions.

<https://youtu.be/Qf9A801qg50>

Papa Wemba had a very distinctive voice that, in 1969, carried him into the formative band of the third generation – [Zaiko Langa Langa](#).

The Italian tenor [Tino Rossi](#) is credited as having had a big influence in the dominance of a certain kind of tenor in Congolese popular music. But Papa Wemba’s voice stands out. In 1979 he formed his own band, [Viva la Musica](#).

The ‘world music’ scene

In the mid-1980s and into the 1990s Papa Wemba became a star of the newly forming “world music” scene in Europe, particularly after signing with [Peter Gabriel’s Real World](#) label in 1990. This took him out of Africa, into musical explorations that were aimed at European, Japanese and US audiences and away from the dominant dance forms of the third generation beloved by the Congolese.

This was a smoother, urbane style that suited the “world music” audiences. Papa Wemba realised that the best way to straddle the very different Western and African markets was to write different music and maintain different bands in Paris

and Kinshasa. The band he established in Paris was called Nouvelle Generation.

In this respect Papa Wemba reflected a very Congolese cultural trajectory – the creation of ways of being modern that were not Western. This was a musical cultural trajectory that freed the Congolese from the trap presented by a dichotomy between an African-defined [indigeneity](#) and a Western-defined modernity.

Papa Wemba helped forge a way of being Congolese and modern that did not mean being Western. But he was smart enough to adapt to Western tastes to access those lucrative Western markets, even if he also got imprisoned in Belgium in 2002 after years of making money [smuggling people](#) into Europe as part of his huge musical entourage.

It's interesting that it was Japanese designer clothing in particular, by the likes of [Issey Miyake](#) and [Yohji Yamamoto](#), that formed a central part of Papa Wemba's wardrobe when he was the uncrowned prince of the "[sapeurs](#)" (Society of Ambianceurs and Elegant People) in the 1980s. This was the elite Congolese society who knew how to create an ambiance.



'Sapeurs' – members of the flamboyant 'La Sape' movement – pose for a photograph in Kinshasa. Reuters/Rey Byhre

But Papa Wemba, like so many of his compatriots, also travelled all over Africa. He is one of the only Congolese musicians to have got any sort of purchase in South Africa. South Africa has struggled with the [xenophobic](#) legacies of

apartheid but a famous South African who resisted this was the pop queen [Brenda Fassie](#). She recorded a collaboration, *Ngiyakuthanda*, with Papa Wemba in 1999.

Papa Wemba came to downplay the importance of clothes as the years passed – but as images from his life on and off stage show, he was somebody who could dress as well as he sang.

He leaves behind a body of work that rivals the greats of Congolese music history, with at least 42 records on which he has songs or on which he is the main composer.

Papa Wemba died after collapsing on stage in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire on April 23 2016.

Bombay: Music and Heartbreak

Bombay: Music and Heartbreak



Final port of call at this year's [Stockholm Indian Film Festival](#): ***Nachom-ia Kumpasar***, a bittersweet, tenderly observed Konkani work that made it into this year's Oscar lists. A paen to the unsung Goan musicians who populated the Mumbai jazz scene through the 60s and 70s. And what a singer lead Palomi Gosh is too – 'Lisboa', a stirring period hymn to a Lisbon lover included.

'Arshinagar' at the Stockholm

Indian Film Festival

'Arshinagar' at the Stockholm Indian Film Festival

Think Mumbai slum meets West Side Story meets the delicate tightrope of Hindu-Muslim relations . . . that at least gives you some idea of where *Arshinagar* is coming from in its take on Shakespeare's 'Romeo & Juliet'.

Caught this lovely slice of Bengali cinema at yesterday's opening evening of the **Stockholm Indian Film Festival**,. Catch it if you can! (Festival programme: <http://www.cinemaindien.se/>)

Trump's Putin Fantasy

Here's noted US historian Timothy Snyder's excellent dissection of what a Donald Trump victory in forthcoming presidential elections would mean for US-Russian relations – and a whole lot more besides.

Trump's Putin Fantasy

[Timothy Snyder](#), [New York Review of Books](#), 19 April 2016



Donald Trump in Syracuse, New York, April 16, 2016; Vladimir Putin in Moscow, Russia, April 14, 2016. Carlo Allegri/Reuters; Maxim Shemetov/Reuters.

Few foreign leaders seem enthusiastic about the prospect of a Donald Trump presidency. But there is one who should be pleased: Vladimir Putin. Or so Trump seems to think. Most prominent Republicans criticize President Obama for reacting too feebly to Russian domestic oppression, the Russian invasion of southern and southeastern Ukraine, and Russia's growing threat to NATO in Eastern Europe. Trump, on the other hand, has praised Putin's "strong" leadership at home, called NATO "obsolete and expensive," and made a point of describing his friendship with Putin—though it seems to be entirely imaginary.

From the beginning of his candidacy last summer, Trump has repeatedly claimed that he would "get along very well with Vladimir Putin." Last fall, after he was interviewed on the same segment of *60 Minutes* as Putin, he warmly referred to the experience of being "stabilemates" as "going well." This was strikingly at odds with [reality](#), since Trump was in the US and Putin in Russia during the interviews, and the two men did not

in fact meet.

More extraordinary still, Trump has indicated, in his selection last month of Carter Page as a foreign policy adviser, that American policy to Europe will be guided by Russian interests. Page, heretofore known as an adviser to Russia's state gas company, has been among the prominent Americans spreading Russian propaganda about Ukraine's revolution in 2014 and the Russian invasion that followed. In his writings he has questioned Ukraine's status as an independent state, which is precisely the line that Moscow took to justify its invasion. He maintains—preposterously—that Ukraine is like Quebec inside a Russia that is like Canada. Quebec is a province and Ukraine is a country. He has referred to Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, a signal violation of international law, as the “so-called annexation.”

It is not hard to see why Trump might choose Putin as his fantasy friend. Putin is the real world version of the person Trump pretends to be on television. Trump's financial success (such as it is) has been as a New York real estate speculator, a world of private deal-making that can seem rough and tough—until you compare it to the Russia of the 1990s that ultimately produced the Putin regime. Trump presents himself as the maker of a financial empire who is willing to break all the rules, whereas that is what Putin in fact is. Thus far Trump can only verbally abuse his opponents at rallies, whereas Putin's opponents are assassinated. Thus far Trump can only have his campaign manager rough up journalists he doesn't like. In Russia some of the best journalists are in fact murdered.

President Putin, who is an intelligent and penetrating judge of men, especially men with masculinity issues, has quickly drawn the correct conclusion. In the past he has done well for himself by recruiting among politicians who exhibit greater vanity than decency, such as Silvio Berlusconi and Gerhard

Schröder. The premise of Russian foreign policy to the West is that the rule of law is one big joke; the practice of Russian foreign policy is to find prominent people in the West who agree. Moscow has found such people throughout Europe; until the rise of Trump the idea of an American who would volunteer to be a Kremlin client would have seemed unlikely. Trump represents an unprecedented standard of American servility, and should therefore be cultivated as a future Russian client.

Trump correctly says that Putin respects strength. But of course Putin prefers weakness, which is what Trump offers. As Putin understands perfectly well, the president of the United States has standing in Russia, and enjoys far superior power to the president of Russia, only insofar as he or she mobilizes the moral and political resources of a rule-of-law state. It is precisely Trump's pose of strength that reveals his crucial vulnerability. As anyone familiar with Russian politics understands, an American president who shuns alliances with fellow democracies, praises dictators, and prefers "deals" to the rule of law would be a very easy mark in Moscow. It is unclear how much money Trump has, but it is not enough to matter in Russia. If he keeps up his pose as the tough billionaire, he will be flattered by the Russian media, scorned by those who matter in Russia, and then easily crushed by men far richer and smarter than he.

Putin has been accordingly circumspect in his return of Trump's wooing. For him Trump is a small man who might gain great power. The trick is to manipulate the small man and thereby neutralize the great power. In his annual press conference last December, after hearing six months of praise from Trump, Putin said that he welcomed Trump's idea of placing US-Russian relations on a more solid basis, and characterized Trump as "flamboyant, talented, without a doubt." It is hard to miss the ambiguity of "flamboyant," but Trump chose to miss it.

The next day Trump seemed pleased. Perhaps having

been [misadvised](#) about what Putin actually said, Trump said that, "When people call you brilliant it's always good." After suggesting that killing journalists was normal, he concluded warmly that "I've always felt fine about Putin, I think that, you know, he's a strong leader, he's a powerful leader, he's represented his country." Not long after that, Trump defended Putin from the official British inquiry into the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko. Trump's reasoning was that Putin "said he didn't do it." In March Trump said that Putin was a stronger leader than the president of the United States. For a crumb of praise from Putin, Trump has presented criminality as normal and sold out his own head of state.

Let us imagine the first few weeks of a Trump administration. Most of his domestic agenda will quickly prove illegal, or at least very complicated to implement. He is not a man who has displayed much patience for management. It seems very likely that he would quickly turn abroad for that surge of approval that he seems to find so pleasurable. And there would be no easier way to gain such a feeling than currying favor with Putin. It is so much easier to ignore traditional allies than to cultivate them, and so much easier to ignore aggression than to maintain order. The louche style that Trump seems likely to bring to American foreign policy is all he will need to garner praise from the man he admires. Given what Trump has done thus far, under no stress and with little encouragement, it is terrifying to contemplate what he would do as a frustrated American president looking for love.

Even as Putin carefully cultivates a future client, the Russian population (alone in the developed world) [prefers Trump](#) to Clinton, and Russian elites reveal their excitement at the prospect of a tame America. It is unusual, of course, for Russian or other public figures to take sides in American elections. Prudence usually overrides preference; even the most willful authoritarians and media figures usually hedge their bets, knowing that endorsing a losing candidate can

bring eight years of bad luck while endorsing the eventual winner may bring very little. In this particular election cycle, however, Russian politicians are in an unusual situation. Hillary Clinton has been the target of such criticism from Russia and its current president that it is impossible to create the impression of evenhandedness. In December 2011, Vladimir Putin personally (and absurdly) blamed Clinton, then US secretary of state, for giving a “signal” that prompted Russians to protest faked parliamentary elections.

Once liberated from the normal rules of the game, Russian politicians have been able to give voice to what seems like heartfelt sympathy for Trump. Vasily Likhachev, a Communist in the Russian parliament, explicitly expressed his preference for Trump over Clinton. Dmitry Kiselev, the Russian talk show star best known in the West for reminding us that Russian can turn the US into “radioactive ash” and for advising that the hearts of gays be burned after their deaths, gushes that “a new star is rising—Trrump.” Konstantin Rykov, a member of Putin’s United Russia party and a leading media manager, opines that Trump is “the very embodiment of the American dream.” Aleksei Pushkov, the chairman of the Russian parliament’s international affairs committee, [tweets](#) admiringly about Trump on a regular basis. Most revealingly, he wrote that Trump “can lead the Western locomotive right off the rails.”

The explicit endorsement of Trump by Aleksandr Dugin, the leading Russian fascist ideologue and a very important media presence in Russia, is particularly alarming. The premise of Dugin’s “Eurasian” movement is that Russia and the West are artificially separated by enlightened ideas of the rule of law and individual rights. Once leaders of the West understand that these are artificial (Jewish) implantations, they can join Russia in the embrace of fascism. Dugin accordingly praises the American people, calling upon them to shed

their “oligarchic” elites and return to their true (fascist) values. I read Dugin’s use of “oligarchic” to mean “Jewish”—a suspicion confirmed by Dugin’s reaction to an actual oligarch who enjoys the backing of American neo-Nazis: “Trump is the voice of the real right wing in America,” he writes. [“Vote for Trump!”](#)

The Russian expectation is that a Trump victory would be ruinous for American power, and that such power as remains will be deployed to support Russian interests. Trump’s fantasy friendship with Putin is one more reason to expect that a Trump victory would also be disastrous for American values and institutions. Putin can be expected, if the two men actually meet as presidents, to flatter Trump’s vanity and urge him onward toward a full assault on the Constitution. Russia is in a downward spiral of its own; what Americans must consider now is a weak presidential candidate who wants to follow Putin’s charm where it leads, which most likely means straight to the bottom.

<http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/04/19/trumps-putin-fantasy/>

Nonsense About Norwegians: The Struggle Continues

Another week ...and yet again the need to counter a particularly fatuous ‘review’ of my Sri Lanka book that featured on the pages of [The Island](#) newspaper last week, claiming that in reality I ghost wrote the whole thing on Erik Solheim’s commission and to his political specifications. Forgive any grammatical infelicities detected – this was written in something of a hurry. The main points, however, stand firm I

hope!

Misery, Kamal Wickremasinghe Style

The Island, April 17, 2016



*Mark Salter addressing a gathering at ICES, Colombo at the launch of **To End a Civil War** recently. From (L-R). Jehan Perera, Dr. Dayan Jayatilleke, Dr. Pakiasothy Saravanamuttu and Salter.*

In what is starting to become something of a weekly ritual I find myself again responding to an article that takes my recent book, *To End A Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement in Sri Lanka* as its point of departure. In this case, a splenetic diatribe by Kamal Wickremasinghe, dramatically titled 'To end Solheim's misery' (*The Island*, 12 April 2016) which, among its various ambitions purports to be a 'review' of my book.

The 'review' gets off to a distinctly unpromising start: at the end of his first paragraph Wickramasinghe informs us that he is in fact talking about 'the latest offering by Erik Solheim' – and leaves matters at that. Following this extraordinary salvo we – and in particular I, as the actual author of the book – are then given a paragraph in which to compose ourselves before we are informed at the beginning of the following one that in fact Solheim commissioned the book, rather than actually wrote it, chiefly in order to "settle a

few scores' with people such as Lakshman Kadirgamar and Mihinda Rajapaksa''.

By this stage Wickremasinghe has already made no less than three major, and demonstrably false assertions: that my book in some way constitutes an Erik Solheim 'offering'; that Solheim commissioned it; and that his – and thus the book's – aim was to settle some old Sri Lankan scores. First, the book was written by me, and me alone, on the basis that it would seek to provide an objective and impartial account of the Norwegian engagement in Sri Lanka as official peace facilitators, a mission undertaken at the joint behest of the GoSL and the LTTE. In that context, I interviewed a very wide range of people involved in one way or the other in the peace process in Sri Lanka, India, the USA, EU, UN and of course Norway – as Wickremasinghe would have registered had he taken the trouble to consult the book's Appendices, where I list all of them.

While it is indeed true that Erik Solheim, along with Vidar Helgesen were key sources for the book, this was simply by virtue of their having been the two frontline figures in the Norwegian peace facilitation effort. Moreover, even a superficial reading of the book would have revealed to Wickremasinghe that in its pages, alongside more favourable mentions, Solheim comes in for plenty of criticism – both from Norwegian colleagues and a number of international figures.

Moreover, Solheim did not in any sense 'commission' the book – I submitted an initial proposal to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was eventually accepted. As to the score settling charge, I can state categorically that this assertion is complete and utter nonsense. Criticism of individuals such as Kadirgamar and Rajapaksa – which by the way is certainly not confined to Solheim – there most certainly is in the book. But this cannot and should not be confused or otherwise conflated with suggestions of the narrative being guided by predefined vendettas, supposedly

entertained by one of its prime subjects.

But things go from bad to worse hereafter. Here in all its glory is Wickremasinghe's next paragraph of purple prose

No one should be under the illusion that the former NGO wallah Mark Salter is the real author of TECW: it is ghost-written to evade the impact of Solheim's unsavoury reputation on the credibility of the exercise. I think Salter's claim that he wrote the book as an objective observer is undiluted hogwash in the absence of an explanation as to why Solheim would fund a 'fishing expedition' by him on a set of events that have been buried for nearly a decade. Solheim's prominence at the launch of the book in Oslo, London and the US, and the lead role he played in panel discussions, with Salter playing a subsidiary role, portrayed Solheim as the real instigator.

Here we have it then: the 'real' story of how this, my latest book came to be written by a 'former NGO wallah' (I haven't worked for an NGO for over 20 years). Except hold on there! Now it seems I'm not really the book's author! Or to be more precise, that I 'ghost-wrote' it as part of a plot engineered by Erik Solheim to try and shield the book's reception from the negative impact of his own 'unsavoury reputation'.

But now, thankfully, the heinous plot has been unmasked by our intrepid columnist. And in this context, moreover, Wickremasinghe can also now 'reveal' my claim to have written the book as an 'objective observer' for what it really is: 'undiluted hogwash' – unless, that is, an explanation can be provided as to why Solheim would have wanted to fund the whole exercise. (Spoiler alert: as explained earlier, he didn't fund the book). In support of his argument, Wickremasinghe points to Solheim's alleged prominence at the book launch events held in 'Oslo, London and the US' (for some reason he omits to mention those held in Canada, and most recently in Delhi, Chennai and Colombo), with me apparently playing no more than a 'subsidiary' role.

Obviously questions of prominence are to some degree a matter of perception. For anyone curious to verify the matter for themselves, however, films of the London and Colombo launches are easily viewable at www.marksalter.org. But I would challenge any fair-minded observer to watch the London launch film and tell me that I play second fiddle to Erik Solheim's lead role (others, including Vidar Helgesen, feature on the panel). When it comes to the Colombo launch, moreover, the matter becomes even more clear cut, as Solheim was not even present for that occasion – a strange way of demonstrating his 'prominent' role in 'his' book on its home territory launch!

Adding insult to injury, Wickremasinghe concludes his 'review' of the book with the following casual one-liner. "Any analysis of Solheim's selective account of his claimed 'services' to peace in Sri Lanka would be a waste of time."

So, that's the level of intellectual engagement a 500 page work, two years in the making and based on interviews with over 70 key figures in the Sri Lankan peace process, merits by way of attention! Much more useful, as Wickremasinghe appears to believe, to proceed to churn out a long, fairly random list of 'puzzling questions' regarding Norway's engagement in Sri Lanka. The list is so rambling, so filled with alternately partisan, ill-informed and fanciful 'questions (An example of the latter that actually had me laughing: 'Why did Norway facilitate the training of sea tigers in Thailand?') that it's hard to know where to start.

In fact on second thoughts, I don't propose even to start. If Wickremasinghe seriously considers attempting to produce an informed analysis of my book to be 'a waste of time', then I am inclined to feel the same about the rest of his article – the list of 'puzzling questions' along with the crude, ill-informed and occasionally down-right slanderous attack on Erik Solheim that sullies the final section included.

Would it be too much to ask, then, for someone to produce a

serious, objective and impartial review of my book in these pages? All in all, I'm beginning to think it just might be.

Mark Salter, Writer and researcher

The war on terror: an interim report

With Obama reiterating gung-ho visions of the imminent/inevitable defeat of global terrorism – focused on the growing presence of IS in Libya this time round – this is a good moment to take heed of a rather more sober assessment of the actual ground situation.

The war on terror: an interim report

[Paul Rogers](#), [openDemocracy](#), 7 April 2016

Al-Qaida and ISIS bookmark a fifteen-year era of global conflict marked by western hubris and failure.



Chambers Street, New York, 11 September 2001. David Farquhar/Flickr. Some rights reserved

In the wake of 9/11 there was widespread support across western governments for strong military action against al-Qaida and its Taliban hosts in Afghanistan, although from the start there were voices expressing another view. The first column in this series warned that the atrocities should be [seen](#) as a provocation by al-Qaida to drag the west into a long drawn-out war in central Asia. Oxford Research Group [published](#) a longer report along the same lines (see "[The United States, Europe and the majority world after 11 September](#)", ORG, September 2001).

The scholar-activist [Walden Bello](#), taking an even wider view, condemned the attacks but went on presciently to [argue](#):

"[The] only response that will really contribute to global security and peace is for Washington to address not the symptoms but the roots of terrorism. It is for the United States to re-examine and substantially change its policies in the Middle East and the Third World, supporting for a change arrangements that will not stand in the way of the achievement of equity, justice and genuine national sovereignty for currently marginalised peoples. Any other way

leads to endless war.”

Such views got nowhere at the time, the war went ahead, and in late January 2002 – after the Taliban had been dispersed – George Bush used his state-of-the-union address to Congress to declare an extension of the war to an “axis of evil” of rogue states, with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq [heading](#) the list. The long-planned termination of that regime started fourteen months later and within six weeks seemed, like Afghanistan, to have been a great success, with Bush’s “mission accomplished” speech on 1 May 2003 celebrating the end of hostilities. The war on terror appeared to have been won.

Instead, complex wars ensued in [Afghanistan](#) and [Iraq](#) with over a quarter of a million people killed, yet there have been periods when the devastating conflicts seemed to be diminishing. In 2009, for example, the incoming United States president, Barack Obama, could begin to carry out his campaign promise of getting US troops home from Iraq, and in 2011 the killing of Osama bin Laden appeared to confirm that al-Qaida was finished.

At the same time, the Arab awakening was seen initially as promising a new era for the Middle East, but it led rapidly to a bitter war and a disastrous non-peace in Libya, severe and brutal repression of dissent in Syria, and further deep divisions in Iraq with a marginalised *Sunni* minority.

Syria and Iraq then provided the [opportunity](#) for a revitalised al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) to reinvent itself and proclaim a new caliphate – Islamic State, or ISIS – which took control of a population of around six million in a proto-state that sought continual expansion. It went on to establish an offshoot in Libya with its own territorial ambitions and developed links across west Africa, the Sahel, Yemen and even Russia’s Caucasus.

Within months, that brought the west back to war in the Middle

East. Since August 2014, 20 months ago, some 10,000 [air-raids](#) have killed 28,000 ISIS supporters (see "[After Brussels: understanding and countering ISIS's strategy](#)", *IISS Strategic Comment*, March 2016). In this period there have been intermittent reports that this new manifestation of al-Qaida was in retreat, for example after losses in Kobane and Ramadi, or in light of the Paris and Brussels attacks, which are claimed to be desperate reactions to these [setbacks](#) on the ground.

Fifteen years on



Destruction in Homs, Syria. Khaled al Hariri/Flickr. Some rights reserved.

Looking back over these fifteen years it is extraordinary how often western leaders have stated that the end is in sight and that just some more military [effort](#) will bring success. Every time, the optimism is soon [blighted](#) – yet the official mantra ('there is no alternative') persists.

The current period is hearing the same blithe reassurances, though a recent column in this series argued that the European attacks demonstrate ISIS's global prowess, its ability to stir up anti-Muslim bigotry and attract more adherents from the margins, and its capacity to extend the war from the Middle East directly to countries it accuses of killing its people

(see [“After Brussels, ISIS’s strategy”](#), 25 March 2016).

There is, though, an even more important dimension. It was reported in that earlier column that ISIS had been preparing this change in strategy for over a year. It now appears that the planning goes back much further, with the building up of cadres of potential attackers over several years (see Rukmini Callimachi *et al*, [“In Europe, ISIS sowed its seeds”](#), *New York Times*, 30 March 2016).

If ISIS’s change of strategy predates the western military response to its [advances](#) – and is not at heart a response to the reversals since the air-war started 20 months ago – the implications are chastening. What this means is that the ISIS planners had worked out in advance how the west would respond to its rapid expansion, and were far less fixated on the geographical creation of a territorial caliphate than was supposed.

From the start, it would seem, ISIS recognised that there would be a strong and sustained response and that they would face very many casualties. Because of this expectation, resources were being put into the [planned](#) war in Europe and elsewhere some years ago. This may seem far beyond what one would expect unbalanced extremists to be able to do, but one of the most consistent problems with western analysis has been a serious underestimation of the intellectual [resources](#) embedded in the creation of ISIS strategy.

On reflection this should hardly be surprising – ISIS paramilitary leaders have many years of fighting elite western forces, mostly notably in the shadow [war](#) against JSOC in Iraq from 2004 to 2008. Moreover, the last decade’s experience itself builds on an earlier quarter of a century of paramilitary combat in Afghanistan: against the Soviets in the 1980s, alongside the Taliban against the Northern Alliance warlords in the 1990s, and against American forces in the early 2000s. It is this hard, determined background, coupled

with a religious [intensity](#) that transcends this earthly life, that makes the current war so robust and difficult to counter – so much so that it is probably not [amenable](#) to a military solution at all.

If that view is not acceptable in western capitals, neither is the scale of investment required to nurture the [alternative](#) to military control. Part of that alternative lies in countering the underlying poverty of ISIS's religious vision, and can only come from within Islam; but the other [part](#) is addressing the reasons for the alienation and marginalisation of so many young people across the Middle East and beyond.

The latter certainly does require sustained western involvement, though of a very different kind than the military approach of the last fifteen years. Rather, it means taking to heart the views expressed by Walden Bello amid the post-9/11 fallout. In the unlikely event of this [series](#) of articles surviving another five years until the thousandth is published, some time in 2021, my fear is that we still will not have made that transition.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/paul-rogers/war-on-terror-interim-report>

Confusion Reigns: Roberts On The Sri Lankan Conflict's Final Stages

Here's my latest effort to rebuff some of the nonsense peddled about the Sri Lankan conflict – in this instance pulling my recent book into the morass.



Confusion Reigns: Roberts On The War's Final Stages

Colombo Telegraph, 12 April 2016

From Michael Roberts' latest essay '[Attempts To Rescue Pirapāharan Et Al In 2009](#)' (*Colombo Telegraph*, 5 April 2016) I see that I have joined the list of authors whose work has been subjected to his less than forensic critical attentions. In this instance his focus is the final stages of the Sri Lankan conflict. Rarely one for modest enterprise in this context, part of Roberts' aim here is an attempt to show where – and how – others have got it wrong, and/or wilfully sought to mislead, over events in the final stages of the war.

I do not propose to tackle all Robert's factual assertions or broad-brush claims, though many of them certainly warrant such critical treatment. Rather I shall confine myself to those that reference my recent book [To End A Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement in Sri Lanka](#) (Hurst), notably Chapter 11, 'Endgame', dealing with the conflict's final stages.

Two distinct but related key issues present themselves in this context. The first concerns Norwegian efforts to persuade the LTTE leadership – in essence meaning Prabakharan – to agree to a proposal for what was described as an 'organized end to the war' via the good offices of 'KP', the Tiger's chief arms

procurer turned inter-national representative. The second concerns related efforts, led by the Norwegians but with support from the US in particular, to craft an actionable plan to evacuate Tamil civilians trapped in the war zone and secure the surrender – and safety – of all Tigre cadre bar Prabakharan himself and his security chief Pottu Amman.

First, on a relatively minor note Robert's points to differences in the details of the peace plan relayed to the LTTE leadership by KP as reported both by me and by DBS Jeyaraj, the latter's version being based on a very informative later interview h conducted with KP. Differences in recollection, especially at a distance of some years from the events, are hardly surprising – even if Roberts doesn't seem to have noticed that balancing the Norwegian account of the plan, I also provide a summary of the Jeyaraj KP interview 'version'. But the key point here – as Roberts, to be fair, points out – was KP's belief, clearly expressed to the Norwegians, that Prabakharan would not accept such a proposal owing to the fact that, as I quote Erik Solheim saying 'the LTTE leadership was living in a surreal world, believing in miracles'.

Next after briefly recounting the story – which I elaborate in the book – of a secret meeting between KP, other LTTE representatives and the Norwegians held in Kuala Lumpa in late February, Roberts returns to the subject of a 'rescue' mission to the North. In this context he refers to 'a negotiated end to the hostilities' as the goal of international peace efforts but with the rider 'if Salter's account can be relied upon'. This is a curious comment, because there is no need whatsoever to 'rely' on my account. (Although I'd of course be happy if Roberts did!) If Roberts had read the earlier sections of my chapter carefully he would have seen reference to a meeting of the Sri Lanka Co-Chairs Group, made up of Norway, the USA, the EU and Japan, held on 2 February 2009. (In this respect Roberts' reference to 'Norway and the USA' as sponsors of a

rescue plan needs adjusting.)

In particular, the meeting's final statement called on the LTTE to initiate discussions on 'the modalities for ending hostilities, including the laying down of arms, renunciation of violence, acceptance of the [GoSL's] offer of amnesty, and participating as a political party in a process to achieve a just and lasting political solution'.

This statement, which as Solheim points out in the book was 'not what either side wanted to hear', provided the basis for international efforts to limit, and if possible stop the blood-letting that enveloped the war zone over the following months. And, if he so prefers, Roberts can take the Co-Chairs rather than my word for this.

In this context, too, it would be pertinent to point out that the impetus to develop a rescue plan did not come solely from international actors. From interviews with Tore Hattrem, former Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka I learned (and reported in the book) that around the time of the February Co-Chairs meeting, Hattrem received a phone call informing him that there were 'a strong voices' within the LTTE calling for a 'face-saving mechanism that would allow civilians to leave the war zone'.

Indeed, Hattrem went on to suggest that it was following this 'message' that efforts to pull together a rescue plan really began in earnest. First the ICRC was proposed for registering the names of cadre who surrendered, and the US soon added the suggestion of evacuation ships docking in the Vanni. This in turn provided the basis for deliberations over the coming weeks – noted by Roberts – on the modalities of involving US naval forces in the rescue operation. In response the GoSL was reportedly 'hesitant' over the proposal.

On chronology, at least, so far Roberts' has followed the script. Now, however, he begins to lose it. Let me quote:

“Basil Rajapaksa was the conduit through whom this international cabal explored such options. But Solheim and Salter – perhaps deliberately – do not tell us WHEN Rajapaksa or some other Sri Lankan dignitary was approached. This is a critical gap in my present stock of information. It is my surmise that Sri Lanka was only approached with this scheme late in the day, say mid-April or late April”

Where to start? While it is true that no specific date is given for communicating the rescue plan to Basil Rajapaksa is given – but *deliberately?* – the proposal cannot have been, and indeed was not a surprise either Rajapaksa or government as whole. If Roberts had read earlier section of the chapter he would have seen reference (pp. 340-341) to an SMS sent to Tore Hatrem in early January 2009 by ‘a high-ranking official close to the president outlining an amnesty proposal to the LTTE and including an offer to continue their struggle by political means, forming a political party’. Details of the official in question’s identity apart, this surely makes it crystal clear that in the early part of 2009, the Rajapaksa administration – or at any rate parts of it – were thinking along similar lines to the Co-Chairs, if not in details, at least in substance regarding the both the contours, and the desirability, of a peaceful end to the conflict.

Second, as I also note in the account of developments in February 2009, towards the end of the month Foreign Minister Bogollagama was quoted in media reports as pronouncing himself ‘aware’ of the Co-Chairs rescue initiative, while also stressing that the GoSL was talking to ‘other friendly countries’, India in particular, about the options for evacuating Tamil civilians from the Vanni. Thus at whatever point it was that Basil Rajapaksa was officially informed of such plans, they would almost certainly not have come as a surprise to him, and definitely not to the GoSL as a whole.

Indeed there is a final, clinching reason why Rajapaksa cannot have been in the dark. As I (again) report, following the

secret February meeting with KP in Kuala Lumpur, Tore Hattrem debriefed him on its outcomes, notably KP's pessimism regarding the prospects of his persuading Prabakharan to go along with the Co-Chair proposal, in response to which Rajapaksa was reportedly 'disappointed'.

All in all, as I hope this account makes clear, the suggestion or insinuation – the latter is in fact more Robert's style – that the Norwegians attempted to hoodwink or withhold vital information from the GoSL is simply absurd. A final word on the subject – from the book – goes to Bård Ludvig Thorheim, then First Secretary at the Norwegian Embassy in Colombo. Thorheim points out that media stories alleging a Norwegian attempt to save the LTTE, which began to emerge after the (supposedly secret) Kuala Lumpur meeting, soon faded.

Thorheim attributes this to the GoSL's realization that if the Norwegians received too much criticism for having assisted the LTTE, 'they could cover themselves by revealing that the government had been fully informed about all contacts with the LTTE, and had even passed on messages to the Tigers not long beforehand (the latter a reference to the 'amnesty' proposal SMS sent to Hattrem in January 2009).

Roberts saves his crudest and most absurd jibe for last – one, moreover, in which I am reduced to a mouthpiece, dubbed 'Solheim through Salter'. Discussing the Sri Lankan Army's behaviour in the final days of the war Roberts takes me – or rather Solheim-through-me – to task for demonstrating what he calls our 'infantile military intelligence'. The evidence proffered for the charge of military infantilism is my reference to suggestions that SLA troops 'fired or threw grenades into civilian bunkers as a 'precaution' against LTTE attacks'.

In response his argument could be summed up as: any old fool knows that advancing troops can't check what they're attacking – especially not if terrorists are mixed in with civilians.

Well, if the case ever gets as far as an international court I don't suspect that's a defence that will get Syrian troops accused of barrel-bombing civilian districts of Aleppo held by 'terrorist forces' very far. Nor should it in Sri Lanka's case – if and when the long-promised domestic courts eventually materialize.

What makes the critique even more absurd, moreover, is the fact that if Roberts had only bothered to read onto the end of the paragraph he quotes from so dismissively, he would see that I offer a clear explanation of the contextual factors that probably help explain the Sri Lankan Army forces' use of this gruesome practice: during the earlier battle for PTK wounded Black Tiger cadres had allegedly hidden themselves in bunkers and then blown themselves up when an army unit passed by. (An alleged Army response at the time was for heavy army vehicles to flatten bunkers containing civilians.)

So there it is: the Robert's critique, such as it is, of my book. And if any further response from him is forthcoming, it would be heartening to discover that it was informed both by a careful reading of the text itself, and an avoidance of fatuous personal jibes.

**Mark Salter – Author, [To End A Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement in Sri Lanka](#)*

<https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/confusion-reigns-roberts-on-the-wars-final-stages/>

Sri Lanka: in defence of Oslo

Sri Lanka: in defence of Oslo

Another week – and another rebuttal letter published as a full page feature in Sri Lankan newspaper *The Island*. Wonder how long I can keep this up for . . .



Erik Solheim, Gopalkrishna Gandhi and myself at the Chennai book launch, 8 March 2016

Salter adds to war of words on CFA

The Island, April 7, 2016

Gamini Gunawardene's comments on my most recent response to your correspondent Shamindra Ferdinando (*The Island*, 5 April 2016) have been brought to my attention. I don't propose to respond on every issue he raises, just those that relate directly to my earlier reply – Gunawardene's scattershot historical assertions are probably best left to others to address.

Gunawardene begins by wondering why the Norwegians singled out the majority Sinhala community for assistance in efforts to build up a 'peace constituency' – and concludes by taking this fact as evidence that their basic assumptions were 'flawed'. The answer is that – correctly in my view – the Norwegians identified securing Sinhala support for the Ceasefire

Agreement (CFA) as absolutely essential to the future prospects for the peace process initiated with the CFA's signature in April 2002. This view was based on the straightforward proposition that any sustainable peace agreement in Sri Lanka requires the backing of the country's majority population group – the Sinhalese.

Regarding the overall lesson learned that, as Gunawardene quotes me as saying, 'external support for peace can never be substituted for locally owned and initiated efforts', he draws two demonstrably false conclusions. First, it is not the case that, as he infers, this 'lesson' never occurred to the Norwegians until much later in the day: the question of supporting the emergence of a local 'peace constituency' was in fact a subject of lively debate among not only Norwegians, but also other internationals working in Sri Lanka and—last but not least – their local partners from at least the mid-1990s, and probably earlier.

Second, it is simply false to suggest that the Norwegians failed to pay sufficient attention to previous attempts at external intervention/mediation— notably India's and the lessons to be drawn from them. As Erik Solheim and others involved at the time never tire of pointing out, close consultation with Delhi was a cornerstone of Norwegian peace facilitation efforts in Sri Lanka. The issue then, I believe, is not one of familiarity with, for example, the ultimately disastrous IPKF intervention, but rather of the right conclusions to be drawn from it.

As the main argument of Gunawardene's piece makes plain, supporters of a military 'solution' to the conflict in Sri Lanka, such as himself, never tire of pointing to a range of incidents during the conflict's course as 'evidence' of the futility of 'appeasing' the LTTE, the impossibility of reaching any agreement with them and thus the necessity of destroying the Tigers by force.

Those who framed and supported the CFA examined precisely the same evidence as Gunawardene et al. However, they draw very different conclusions from it, the central one being that after over 15 years of conflict, the futility, human and economic cost of continuing with the war pointed clearly to the imperative of redoubling efforts to achieve a peaceful end to the conflict. Nor were the Norwegians alone in thinking in this manner. In early 2002 they shared this starting point (or a close variant of it) with many others, notably the key architects of the CFA: Ranil Wickremesinghe and his newly elected government and the LTTE leadership.

All in all, then, it is simply false to contend, as Gunawardene does repeatedly, that the Norwegians had not 'studied' the Sri Lankan conflict, or had failed to understand the lessons of past interventions. No: the point was simply that they, like many others, came to the conclusion that a peaceful solution to the conflict was both desirable and – based on the good will of both parties apparent at the time – perhaps possible.

Gunawardene goes on to question my reference to Chandrika Kumaratunga's proud recollection of the achievements of the Sudu Nelum movement. 'So when the Sinhalese supported, was peace ushered'? he asks, somewhat sarcastically. No, not in 1998 is of course the answer. But three years later, a majority voted in Wickremesinghe's UNP government, which proceeded swiftly to agree a ceasefire with the LTTE and only four months later, to conclude the CFA with them. And even if the margin was pretty thin, opinion polls conducted soon after the CFA indicated majority support for the agreement.

This suggests that, all in all, efforts to secure popular support for peace in the majority Sinhala community were both sensible – and feasible. (The suggestion towards the end of Gunawardene's article that in positing a post-CFA need to 'explain and advocate the benefits of peace' to sections of the Sinhalese community I am contradicting myself here is

spurious. Sinhala attitudes are not a fixed asset, and much had shifted between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, public opinion with respect to peace efforts included).

Following this comes Gunawardene's dissection of what he calls my 'foolish assertion' that when Norway peace facilitators entered the scene in Sri Lanka they shared the widely held view that 'neither side was capable of defeating the other militarily'. He goes on to deride the 'superficiality' of this perception. But hold on there! First, I am offering a statement of fact here, not a judgement. Fact because, it is unquestionably the case that this represented majority perception –at this point; including significant sections of the Sri Lankan political and military establishment.

Second, this is a perception that appears to have been maintained by significant actors in Sri Lanka until a good deal later in the conflict. As noted in my last reply, for example, Erik Solheim relates an incident in autumn 2008 when a senior Indian official informed him that he believed that Sri Lankan forces were now capable of defeating the LTTE militarily as the first time he had heard a high-level Delhi representative express that opinion. Hardly evidence that, as Gunawardene argues, this viewpoint was 'a 'popular misconception created by 'the West' (sic)'. All in all, in describing the Norwegian view as 'superficial' and as an explanation for the fact that their 'peace effort' (his ironic inverted commas) 'miserably failed', Gunawardene is condemning as ignorant a much wider audience than he perhaps intended.

In similar vein, he goes on to pose the rhetorical question: what if they [i.e. the Norwegians] did not [support and facilitate the peace process]? Would that have been the end of the world for us?' The answer to that, I sense, is 'almost certainly not'. With, however, one important rider; namely, that the one and only reason the Norwegians agreed to act as peace facilitators in Sri Lanka was because they were asked to do so by the parties.

It's important to reiterate this basic point, if only to counteract the continuing tendency – traces of which are evident in this intervention – to ignore or otherwise downplay the fact that Norwegian involvement in the conflict was the result, not of external interference and/or a post-imperial breach of Sri Lankan sovereignty, but of a request to do so by the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE.

Coming to Gunawardene's rousing if cheapshot conclusion. If it is indeed the case that, as he suggests, a fundamental lesson from Sri Lanka is 'not to mess around with other people's troubles', then the people who may most need to take that lesson to heart are those who invited the Norwegians in, in the first place. If you talk to those people, however – as I have done– you will discover that they extended the invitation to Norway following considerably more thought and reflection than Gunawardene appears to credit them with.

And they did so, moreover, in the apparent belief that the invitees were a good deal more level-headed – and well-informed about Sri Lankan affairs – than he appears to believe was the case. All of which leaves his parting swipe at the Norwegians – 'especially when you are incompetent' – looking even more questionable, if not absurd, than it already was.

Mark Salter, Author, [To End A Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement im Sri Lanka](#)

http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=143383

Amnesty International charges Turkey with 'illegally returning Syrian refugees'



Thousands of Syrian refugees are living in Turkish refugee camps

“In their desperation to seal their borders EU leaders have wilfully ignored the simplest of facts: Turkey is not a safe country for Syrian refugees and is getting less safe by the day, The large-scale returns of Syrian refugees we have documented highlight the fatal flaws in the EU-Turkey deal. . . .It is a deal that can only be implemented with the hardest of hearts and a blithe disregard for international law. . . . Far from pressuring Turkey to improve the protection it offers Syrian refugees, the EU is in fact incentivising the opposite.”

[An Amnesty International](#) spokesperson commenting on AI's new report on Turkey's treatment of Syrian refugees

Turkey 'illegally returning Syrian refugees' – Amnesty

BBC News, 1 April 2016

Turkey has illegally forced thousands of refugees to return to Syria, a report by Amnesty International says. The group says about 100 Syrians have been sent back to their war-torn country every day since mid-January in breach of international law.

Amnesty says [its report exposes the flaws](#) in a recent deal between the EU and Turkey aimed at stemming the flow of refugees arriving in Greece. [Turkey](#) has denied sending back any refugees against their will.



Illegal migrants are still arriving on the Greek islands, but the numbers have fallen. Image copyright: Getty Images

The group says its research in southern Turkey suggested that authorities had been rounding up and expelling groups of about 100 Syrian men, women and children almost daily since the middle of January. Under the “non-refoulement” principle of international humanitarian law, a state is prohibited from deporting individuals to a war zone. Amnesty said one case

involved three young children forced back into Syria without their parents, while another saw the forced return of an eight-months' pregnant woman.

It said many of those returned appeared to be unregistered refugees but it had also documented cases of registered Syrian refugees being sent back while not carrying their papers. "The inhumanity and scale of the returns is truly shocking; Turkey should stop them immediately," said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty's director for Europe and Central Asia.



Many refugees are stranded in northern Greece as EU countries tighten their border. Image copyright: Getty Images

Under the EU-Turkey deal, migrants arriving illegally in Greece are expected to be sent back to Turkey from 4 April if they do not apply for asylum or if their claim is rejected. In return, Turkey will receive aid and political concessions.

But critics of the deal say it hinges on Turkey being a safe country of asylum, which Amnesty says is clearly not the case. "In their desperation to seal their borders, EU leaders have wilfully ignored the simplest of facts: Turkey is not a safe country for Syrian refugees and is getting less safe by the day," said Mr Dalhuisen.

“The large-scale returns of Syrian refugees we have documented highlight the fatal flaws in the EU-Turkey deal. It is a deal that can only be implemented with the hardest of hearts and a blithe disregard for international law.” He added: “Far from pressuring Turkey to improve the protection it offers Syrian refugees, the EU is in fact incentivising the opposite.”

Key points from EU-Turkey agreement

- **Returns:** All “irregular migrants” crossing from Turkey into Greece from 20 March will be sent back. Each arrival will be individually assessed by the Greek authorities.
- **One-for-one:** For each Syrian returned to Turkey, a Syrian migrant will be resettled in the EU. Priority will be given to those who have not tried to illegally enter the EU and the number is capped at 72,000.
- **Visa restrictions:** Turkish nationals should have access to the Schengen passport-free zone by June. This will not apply to non-Schengen countries like Britain.
- **Financial aid:** The EU is to speed up the allocation of €3bn (\$3.3 bn; £2.3 bn) in aid to Turkey to help migrants.
- **Turkey EU membership:** Both sides agreed to “re-energise” Turkey’s bid to join the European bloc, with talks due by July.

[The Turkey-EU statement in full](#)

[A BBC report in January](#) uncovered allegations of refugees being detained in Turkey before being forced to return to Syria. One refugee told the BBC that guards had driven them to the Syrian border and forced them to sign a piece of paper on

which was written “I want to go back to Syria”.

Turkey has taken in 2.7 million Syrian refugees since the civil war began five years ago. Many live in camps near the border between the two countries. The Turkish foreign ministry said it had maintained an “open door” policy for Syrian migrants and strictly abided by the principle of not returning people to a country where they are liable to face persecution.

“None of the Syrians that have demanded protection from our country are being sent back to their country by force, in line with international and national law,” a foreign ministry spokesman told Reuters news agency.

Borders tightened

Last year, more than one million migrants and refugees arrived in the EU by boat from Turkey to Greece, triggering a political crisis within the bloc. More than 143,000 have arrived this year alone, and about 360 have died, [according to the International Organization for Migration](#).

Most migrants and refugees intend to go to Germany and other northern European countries, but tens of thousands are now stuck in Greece as their route north has been blocked. Human rights groups have said the EU-Turkey deal could force migrants to start using other and potentially more dangerous routes, such as the journey between North Africa and Italy.

A note on terminology: The BBC uses the term migrant to refer to all people on the move who have yet to complete the legal process of claiming asylum. This group includes people fleeing war-torn countries such as Syria, who are likely to be granted refugee status, as well as people who are seeking jobs and better lives, who governments are likely to rule are economic migrants.