

War is peace: on bombing Syria aid convoys

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The scene the morning after a convoy delivering aid was hit by a deadly airstrike in Syria. Photograph: Omar Haj Kadour/AFP/Getty Images

Sovietspeak is still alive and well, it seems. The Russian Foreign Ministry is claiming that the nearly 20 Aleppo aid convoy trucks reportedly hit by airstrikes outside Aleppo yesterday (see below) weren't in fact: they claim, they simply 'caught fire'. Brezhnev – and indeed Stalin – would have been proud of that line.

At the same time, I've just digested this take on the latest

developments in Syria from a well-informed 'insider' regional analysis:

"Both Russia and the Syrian regime will continue to use subsequent ceasefires to solidify gains against the Syrian opposition in Aleppo City, and to employ siege-and-starve tactics to force the defeat of the opposition in critical terrain. Russia will continue to exert pressure on the US and the international community by escalating levels of violence in order to extract concessions in negotiations over the Syrian Civil War."

Which suggests that the prospects for an end to the fighting are a lot slimmer – and the consequences of this considerably grimmer – than intimated by mainstream media portrayals of the Syria conflict. In the midst of all this, particularly with respect to the UN's hapless role in the conflict, combined with official – in this instance meaning Russian/Syrian government forces' – aerial bombing of civilian targets, I continue to be haunted by the eerie parallels with the final stages of the Sri Lankan conflict.

Russian planes dropped bombs that destroyed UN aid convoy, US officials say

If confirmed, the claim of direct Russian involvement in the bombing that killed at least 20 people in Syria would have far-reaching consequences.

The Guardian, [Julian Borger](#) and [Spencer Ackerman](#), 21 Sept. 2016

US defence officials now believe that Russian planes dropped the bombs that destroyed a UN aid convoy and killed at least 20 people, the Guardian has learned.

The claim of direct Russian involvement in the bombing, if confirmed, would have far-reaching consequences. Earlier on Tuesday, Ban Ki-moon used his farewell address to the UN general assembly to denounce it as a "[sickening, savage and apparently deliberate attack](#)", describing the bombers as "cowards", and UN officials have said it is a potential war crime.

The outgoing secretary general told world leaders in New York that the UN had been forced to suspend aid convoys in Syria because of Monday's attack on Syrian Red Crescent trucks that were [carrying UN food supplies to a rural area west of Aleppo city](#).

Victims of the attack included the local director of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, Omar Barakat. Ban hailed the dead aid workers as heroes and said "those who bombed them were cowards" before calling for accountability for crimes committed in the war. "Just when you think it cannot get any worse, the bar of depravity sinks lower," he said.

[Aid officials said the convoy was hit from the air while food and medicine were being unloaded](#) at a warehouse in opposition-controlled Urem al-Kubra.

Reuters news agency [quoted two US officials](#) as saying two Russian Sukhoi SU-24 warplanes were in the sky above the aid convoy at the precise time it was struck.

The White House and state department said they could not confirm the allegations, while the Russian foreign ministry [rejected them](#) with "resentment and indignation".

Previously, US officials had said that they would hold Moscow responsible for the attack, even if it was carried out by Syrian aircraft, as [Russia had taken responsibility for the regime's compliance with the ceasefire](#) as part of the 9 September agreement.

But Moscow has not conceded that the convoy was hit by an airstrike, claiming instead that the 18 lorries had “caught fire”. In a separate statement on Tuesday, the country’s defence ministry said that the aid convoy had been accompanied by a militants’ pickup truck armed with a heavy mortar, Russian news agencies reported.

The US officials said there was no doubt the convoy was destroyed in an airstrike and that western coalition forces had no role in it.

“There are only three parties that fly in Syria: the coalition, the Russians and the Syrian regime. It was not the coalition. We don’t fly over Aleppo. We have no reason to. We strike only Isis, and Isis is not there. We would leave it to the Russians and the Syrian regime to explain their actions,” said Capt Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman.

In a meeting with John Kerry, Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, admitted that the Russian military had been monitoring the convoy – apparent drone surveillance footage of its progress had been live-streamed on a defence ministry website . But he claimed the Russians had “lost track of it when it entered rebel territory”, according to diplomatic sources. Moscow had launched an investigation, Lavrov told the other foreign ministers.

Later on Tuesday, however, the Russian foreign ministry put out an angry denunciation of allegations against Moscow and Damascus.

[Aftermath of airstrike on Syrian aid convoy – video](#)

“We are considering, with resentment and indignation, attempts by some foreign curators of rebel units and terrorists in Syria to put the blame for the incident on the Russian and Syrian air forces who allegedly bombarded a relief convoy,” the statement said, [according to the Tass news agency](#).

Despite the outrage caused by the attack, and the continued bombing of rebel-held areas of Aleppo, the US and [Russia](#) have refused to declare the Syrian ceasefire dead.

Lavrov's meeting with the US secretary of state was the first since the Syrian military declared itself no longer bound by the ceasefire the two politicians negotiated, and resumed its air campaign against eastern Aleppo and other rebel-held areas on Monday.

Lavrov and Kerry talked in a central New York hotel for about half an hour on Tuesday morning before walking, still in deep discussion, into a broader session with other foreign ministers from the security council, Europe and the Middle East who make up the International [Syria](#) Support Group (ISSG). Kerry emerged from the group's meeting insisting: "The cease fire is not dead."

"We are going to continue to work. We are going to meet again Friday on some specific steps," the secretary of state said.

Boris Johnson, the UK foreign secretary, said: "Quite frankly, the Kerry-Lavrov process is the only show in town and we have to get that show back on the road."

The UN later retreated from the claim that the convoy had been targeted in an airstrike. "We are not in a position to determine whether these were in fact airstrikes. We are in a position to say that the convoy was attacked," its humanitarian spokesman, Jens Laerke, said.

The ISSG foreign ministers are due to convene again on Friday, though diplomats said the session could be brought forward to Thursday evening, as fighting intensified in Syria.

The bombardment of eastern Aleppo continued until 2am on Monday, according to reports from the city. At least 39 civilians were killed overnight in Aleppo and the surrounding province, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring

group said, compared with 27 killed over the whole week when the truce was precariously in force.

In another incident late on Tuesday, four medical workers were killed and a nurse critically injured [in an airstrike that hit a clinic in a village near Aleppo](#). The clinic in Khan Touman was completely levelled in the strike and more dead were feared to be buried under the rubble, the aid group that supports the clinic said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said Syrian or Russian warplanes carried out the raid.

The UN special envoy, Staffan de Mistura, said that none of the foreign ministers in the ISSG meeting had wanted to call an end to the ceasefire despite the renewed bombing, and the attack on the food convoy.

De Mistura described the targeting of the convoy as “outrageous” and hoped it would turn out to be “a gamechanger that will help Friday be a serious meeting about how to reinstall the cessation of hostilities [and] humanitarian aid”.

“The ceasefire is not dead. That I can tell you,” the Swedish envoy added. “It was confirmed by everyone around the table. The ceasefire is in danger. The ceasefire has been seriously affected but the only ones who can announce that the ceasefire is dead are the two co-chairs and they have today not done so. They want to give it another chance.”

The UN emergency relief coordinator, Stephen O’Brien, said that if it was found the convoy had been deliberately targeted, it would constitute a war crime.

Peter Maurer, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) president, said: “Yesterday’s attack was a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and it is unacceptable. Failing to protect humanitarian workers and structures might have serious repercussions on humanitarian

work in the country.”

Robert Mardini, the ICRC director for the Middle East and north Africa, confirmed that Barakat, the Aleppo director for the Syrian Red Crescent, was among the dead.

“The team is in shock,” Mardini told Reuters. “Omar was badly injured and the rescue team could not reach him for two hours. When he was evacuated he could not survive his wounds.”

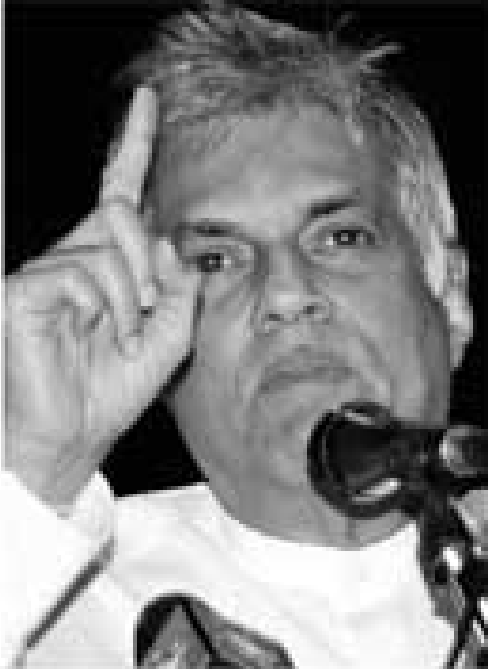
Plans for aid convoys to rebel-besieged Foua and Kefraya in Idlib, and government-blockaded Madaya and Zabadani near the Lebanese border, had been put on hold, he said.

The US state department spokesman John Kirby said that the US, Russia and other ISSG ministers had agreed to keep up attacks on Islamic State and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly the al-Qaida affiliated al-Nusra Front, “while recognising the difficulties of separating al-Nusra from the moderate opposition in some areas of the country”.

“They emphasised, in this context, the imperative of ending indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilians, which is exploited by terrorist groups. And they stressed the absolute criticality of creating the conditions necessary to resume UN-led political talks in coming weeks,” Kirby said.

Norway and Sri Lanka’s Peace Process: towards an honest assessment

Norway and Sri Lanka's Peace Process: Towards an honest assessment



Ranil



CBK

The debate on Norway's role in Sri Lanka's ultimately failed peace process continues. My latest contribution is in today's issue of *The Island* newspaper.

The Island, September 18, 2016

After the brickbats of recent exchanges on the subject, it is refreshing to see Izeth Hussain's considered assessment (*The Island*, 6 Sept.) of Norway's role in the Sri Lankan peace process.

In sum, Hussain contends that the Norwegians carried out their mandate as official peace facilitators in a serious, honourable and responsible manner. It is particularly salient to hear such sentiments being expressed by a senior former government official. It reminds us that for all the mudslinging and stinging criticism of Oslo's role that assumed centre stage during the Rajapaksa era, much of Colombo

officialdom has always held much more nuanced views on the subject.

In one sense, of course, this is hardly surprising, as it was – as Hussain notes – Chadrika Kumaratunga's government that invited Oslo to serve as peace facilitators in the late 1990s: and Ranil Wickremesinghe's administration that tasked Norway with orchestrating six rounds of talks with the LTTE, following the CFA's signature in February 2002.

That said, I want to raise two queries – one minor, the other substantive – regarding Hussain's analysis. First, he suggests that Oslo's initial involvement occurred against a background of 'public indignation' over 'alleged pro-LTTE sentiment in Norway'.

This is not a perception I have previously heard expressed – at least not with respect to this particular stage of the Norwegian engagement. Criticism of alleged pro-Tiger bias was certainly voiced from an early stage against envoy Erik Solheim in particular – chiefly as a consequence of the stream of images of him talking to Prabakharan that flooded the Sri Lankan media, from the time of his first high-profile encounter with the LTTE leader in November 2000 onwards.

And later on, of course, following Mahinda Rajapaksa's ascent to power, attacking the 'salmon eating busy-bodies' from Oslo – to coin Mangala Samaraweera's memorable phrase – became a staple diet of Sri Lankan politics: essentially a strategy of 'when in doubt, blame in on the Norwegians', as one Colombo official once described it to me.

All in all I think a 'background of public indignation' against the Norwegians is highly unlikely to have existed in the mid-late 1980s, if only for the simple reason that – absent its long-standing support for development projects around the country – Norway was essentially off the radar screens of media, less still public discourse, at this point

in the conflict.

The more substantive claim I want to query is Hussain's suggestion that the Norwegians 'shared the mistaken assessment that the LTTE was invincible' – an error that, he suggests, lay at the source of what eventually went wrong with the peace process.

Nothing I discovered during the course of researching my book on the peace process leads me to share this assessment. What the Norwegians definitely did think in the early-mid 2000s – in common, as Hussain notes, with all the other key actors in the peace process, the GoSL included – was that, even if it had wanted to, at this stage the Sri Lankan Armed Forces simply did not have the capability to achieve a military victory over the LTTE. And this fundamental assessment shifted only much later, towards the end of 2008. Solheim, for example, states that his own 'take' changed chiefly as a result of the views expressed by senior Indian officials in the course of autumn 2008.

Furthermore, I believe the initial Norwegian view was influenced by the fact that in 2000-2001, the LTTE's initial peace overtures were made from what, in the aftermath of its retaking of Elephant Pass (April 2000) and devastating attack on Katunayake Airport (July 2001), represented the height of the Tiger's military power. Seeking to enter peace talks from a position of military strength is, to say the least, an unusual phenomenon. It did, however, help to convince both Oslo and Colombo of the seriousness of the LTTE's peace overtures.

Retrospective arguments that the LTTE's eventual military defeat shows that the government, both could and should have focused on achieving victory on the battlefield all along, also ignore two further aspects of the equation. First, that by the late 1990s the SLAF had been trying – and failing – to defeat the Tigers for over 15 years, and at a tremendous cost

in lives, resources and physical destruction. The peace option was pursued in part because by this stage, a growing section – probably a majority – of the population were simply exhausted with the war and were longing for its ending.

Second, Ranil Wickremesinghe's government, and with it the Norwegian facilitators, elected to pursue a negotiated settlement with the Tigers on the assumption that such a deal might – just might – be possible, and that as long as that remained the case a peace agreement was worth pursuing. In the prevailing circumstances, this was a reasonable, even courageous path to take: and in my view, nothing that happened subsequently detracts from this fact.

While I have spent much time in these columns explaining, and in some cases defending the Norwegian's conduct in Sri Lanka, I am by no means an uncritical apologist for Oslo over its role in the conflict. My recent book [To End A Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement In Sri Lanka (Hurst, London, 2015)] devotes considerable attention to a critical assessment of the Norwegian facilitation effort. Here are some key lessons – positive and negative – highlighted there.

Bipartisan political support. Solheim and colleagues acknowledge that failure to secure bipartisan political support for the CFA and the subsequent peace talks ultimately proved to be the process' Achilles heel. It meant, for example, that when the LTTE tabled their Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) proposal in late 2003, while government ministers showed immediate understanding that this constituted a negotiating document (albeit a maximalist one), President Kumaratunga proceeded to declare a state of emergency and seize control of key government ministries, rendering forward movement with the peace process effectively impossible.

International support. Despite the implicit Indian support and establishment of the 'Co-Chairs' structure in 2003, the

Norwegians recognize that they didn't work hard enough to generate a bedrock of international support for their peace efforts in Sri Lanka. As ex-Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen expressed it, a "major failure in Norway's approach to peace processes in general [is] insufficient attention to the design of an international support structure. When a peace process fails, there is a tendency to focus on Norway as having failed, not understanding the broader parameters. Post 9/11, while we were basically aware that negotiating with terrorists was a difficult thing, we didn't do enough to 'massage' the international community's attitudes on the subject ."

"At the same time", he continues, "the degree of – admittedly 'soft'– support that Oslo was able to generate for its post 9/11 efforts to take forward a Sri Lankan process involving an internationally proscribed terrorist group– including, most strikingly, from the US Administration – remains nothing short of remarkable." **Prabhakaran**. A quotation from Erik Solheim well summarizes a key Norwegian conclusion regarding their interactions with the LTTE leader. "Contact with the LTTE should not have been restricted", Solheim argues. "More high-level visits, more encounters with Prabhakaran would have helped. [The restrictions] were mainly due to the government: they were afraid of being attacked by the opposition, the media. But it was a big mistake. There should have been more visits: they would have had a very positive effect. We took LTTE delegations outside Sri Lanka, but with the exception of Balasingham or Tamilselvan they were not decision-takers. At the end of the day it was about Prabhakaran."

In other words, more sustained international exposure to the LTTE leader might – just might – have served to help shift his views in the direction of support for a negotiated political settlement.

Communication. A criticism frequently leveled against the Norwegians – and the UNP government of the time – concerns

their failure to communicate with the public over the peace process, and thereby to help foster a vital ingredient of any sustainable settlement: a broad-based popular constituency that both understands and supports it. Here again, there is broad Norwegian recognition that the communication aspect of their facilitation effort could – and should – have been handled better. Vidar Helgesen notes:

“Our softly, softly approach would have been OK if the government had had an inclusive approach towards civil society. But they didn’t. We should have had an overall media strategy. We tended to think that it was better not to respond. And while we couldn’t—and shouldn’t—have got into a position where we were having arguments with individual politicians or journalists, we should have reinforced our message and corrected mistakes and misrepresentations.”

Solheim’s thoughts on this issue are also worth noting: “In terms of reaching out, our biggest failing was probably with the Buddhist clergy. Reaching out to Buddhists would have meant reaching out to those who didn’t agree with us—regular visits to Kandy to talk to senior monks to pay our respects, listen politely. Which might also have given them a platform from which to attack the peace process—which in turn may be part of the reason Ranil and Chandrika did not want us to reach out to them.”

Pro-LTTE bias? On this most controversial issue – and one touched on by Hussain – Solheim explains his own position as follows: “I’m attacked by extremist Sinhalese –and Tamils as well. The latter claim I’m responsible for the death of Prabhakaran. We were the main contact point with the LTTE, so this perception of bias had to come sooner or later. I met Balasingham all the time, although actually we met the government far more. I had to explain the LTTE position and so was targeted in an environment where Sinhala supremacy was ingrained. Since no one else was presenting the LTTE view to international actors I had to do it. It is a perception one

has to live with.”

Why Norway? Regarding Norway’s selection as external facilitator by both the GoSL and the LTTE, Solheim’s comments are again very much to the point: “The reason Norway was selected in the first place was that no one wanted the US, or anyone with a big stick, to be involved. Secondly, no one with a big stick wanted to be involved. The Indians had tried once. It was a war between the two parties in Sri Lanka, and [the parties] wanted someone lightweight: they wanted a way to communicate between themselves, not someone who could punish or carry a big stick. We had to think throughout about the way in which we could mobilise other forces. Even for big powers there were clear limitations on what kind of stick they could really use. It’s the same in many conflicts.”

Parity of status? On the vexed question of how the Norwegians facilitated the peace negotiations, ex-Indian High Commissioner to Colombo, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, offers the following thoughtful analysis: “I once had a discussion with Vidar and I asked him, how is it that you are able to reconcile giving parity to a state and a non-state entity? He said: We are not treating state and non-state parties as equals, but around the discussion table there is no difference between the discussants. That was a very interesting response. It also said something of the Norwegians’ methodology. On one side a state with a policy that by its own admission needed modifications in order to move forward; and on the other, a non-state entity with a cause overlaid by a method that was anathema to all civilised nations.”

There are, of course, many other important lessons to be drawn from the Norwegian engagement. But my hope is that those highlighted here will help to foster further reflection even today, for example concerning the need for bipartisan political support for peace efforts – an issue that remains highly relevant to the current political situation.

More broadly, in putting the spotlight on a principled approach to addressing and resolving the issues and grievances at the root of the Sri Lankan conflict, my hope is that consideration of these lessons can contribute to the elaboration of the way forward as Sri Lanka continues along the path of developing and implementing its own vital, and unique, transitional justice process.

Mark Salter

On Being Mark Salter

Here's my latest piece. This time with a rather different focus from my usual fare.

On Being Mark Salter



*A senior advisor to US Republican Senator John McCain.
NGAN/AFP/Getty Images*

Presidential Elections in America: And a rather interesting case of mistaken identity.

[The Indian Economist](#), September 7, 2016

By Mark Salter

So here's the thing. I've never considered my name anything special. Just another regular moniker, nothing special to attract attention. As for the rest – fine, I've written a couple of books, done the odd public thing over the years. But famous? I hardly think so.

But it turns out that I was wrong.

It all started during this spring. Out of nowhere, a number of emails arrived from various US media outlets – fairly obscure ones though in the main – asking me if I'd be happy to be

interviewed on my views on Donald Trump's bid to become the Republican presidential candidate? Not knowing quite how to react to what might prove to be an – admittedly unusual – case of spamming, before responding I did the obvious thing; I googled myself.



*Donald Trump: The Republican Party 2016 presidential nominee.
Photo Courtesy: Gage Skidmore via Flickr*

The man responsible for the controversial remarks was a guy called Mark Salter.

And I was in for a surprise! Up near the top of the search results were reports of a recent interview with US Senator John McCain's speechwriter, urging Republicans to vote for Hilary Clinton in the upcoming presidential elections. Clearly, some hot stuff going down in the Washington bear pit. But to stop here would be to omit the story's most salient aspect. The man responsible for the controversial remarks was a guy called Mark Salter. And a serious sort of character he

appeared to be too. Clearly, when Mark (is that what I should call him?) expressed the view that on balance, the Republic party faithful would be better off voting for the opposition candidate, Americans sat up and listened.

From there on, the faux publicity ball continued on something of a roll.

Interview requests from minor media outlets were followed by polite but urgent emails from the likes of Salon, Wall Street Journal, Fox News and CNN wanting me – or rather, him – to come and opine on the latest Trump controversy, explain why Republicans should vote Democrat this time around and so on.

By this stage, I had developed a standard approach – polite but short – while responding to the requests. But the CNN one, I must admit, got a bit different reply. “I’m not the man you’re looking for, but hey”, I quipped jocularly, “if you’d like someone to jet over to your New York Time Warner Studios to come and rap about the US elections, well, I’d be delighted to do so”.

Naturally, CNN didn’t take me up on this rather excellent proposal. But heck, it was worth a try. (I should add that in protest at their right-wing rabble rousing, Fox News got a token nothing from me in reply. And if they did manage to get hold of him, I sincerely hope that the ‘other me’ gave them a similar treatment.)



Why should Republicans vote Democrat this time? Photo Courtesy: U.S. Dept of State via Flickr

Then there were – and still are – the others, quite a lot of them in fact. Earnest college teachers wanting ‘me’ to come and talk to their students about the state of US politics; Jo Publics from Milwaukee and Wisconsin plying me with long, detailed accounts of the state of the country and why Donald Trump is not the right person to fix things in the White House; worried voters asking me things like this: ‘With the situation so dire, can you suggest how a moderate Republican (who voted for John McCain) without much money can make a difference?’ All in all, fairly reasonable stuff.

So far, it was all polite. But something shifted in the late spring. Into May and early June, I noted a marked increase in the number of politically barbed broadsides hitting my tray. Of course, those from Republicans who agreed with ‘my’ stand on who to vote for, come November were a mixture of the thankful and the congratulatory. “I just wanted to say ‘THANK

YOU!' for the public position you've taken on Donald Trump: from a Reagan/McCain Republican from Massachusetts" gushed one, for example.

Though, things were different on the other side of the political fence. First off, a self-professed, lifelong Republican chided me in the following terms: "You are acting like a spoiled child. You are acting like a traitor and any elite Republican who doesn't vote or threatens to vote for Clinton is also a spoiled child. Grow up and start listening to the voters or people like you will be the downfall of the Republican party." Phew! Am I really such a low-life, I wondered?

This, however, seemed like polite, dinner party conversation compared to the certified hate mail I received from some quarters. A lot of it is unprintable (you get the gist).

My response to one such message ran as follows: "Dear Mr B., you are the latest in an increasingly long line of disgruntled Republicans venting their spleen out on my US namesake. I stress 'namesake' since he is not I, nor am I he. Good luck with locating him!". In the strange call-and-response game into which I had allowed myself to be pulled into, I was, in other words, beginning to enjoy myself a little.

Perhaps my favourite exchange to date was with a young guy in New York who wrote to inform me that we were fairly distantly related cousins, that he much admired my stand on Trump and what would I say to meeting up with him? Since his budget was a little stretched he couldn't offer to take me out for dinner, but how would I feel about coffee, if he came down to see me for the purpose?

Charmed by this approach, I responded letting my would-be relative know that his distant cousin was to be found elsewhere.

Charmed by this approach, I responded letting my would-be relative know that his distant cousin was to be found elsewhere. Wishing him every luck in locating my alter ego, I informed him that I for one would be more than happy to meet him for coffee at some point if he ever found himself in my home city of Stockholm.

Came back a nearly instantaneous reply expressing profuse apologies for having got his Mark Salters mixed up. After pointing out that the absence of a subway line between his district of NY and Stockholm might render the coffee date a little hard to happen in practice, my new-found online friend finished by letting me know that having perused my website, he now planned on buying a copy of my latest book, on Sri Lanka, a subject about which he knew nothing but which, he felt sure would prove interesting nonetheless.

All very interesting but surely a bit of a one off, I can hear you say. Well, think again *amigos*. About British Prime Minister Teresa May for example. In advance of her selection as the Conservative party leader following David Cameron's resignation in the wake of the Brexit referendum, it emerged that a lot of people were confusing her with someone else of the same name. And not just any old someone either. In response to the growing interest in her Twitter feed – '10 short of 10,000 followers now' she informed us at one point – Theresa May No. 2 tweeted that she was a 'UK glamour model, not the Prime Minister'. Which, it turns out was an oblique way of letting it be known that she had starred in some popular 1980s porn films. Amusing? You couldn't have made that one up even if you tried.

What's more, Terese May (UK Prime Minister that is) has clearly been here before. A BBC report from when she first became a government minister in the early 1990s notes that May had been receiving 'numerous invitations' that were obviously intended for her racier namesake.



In the early 1990s Terese May received 'numerous invitations' that were intended for her racier namesake. | Photo Courtesy: barnyz via Flickr

"I have a suspicion that if people saw us together there might be other distinguishing characteristics", suggested May's deadpan reply regarding the activities of her shadow self. May went on to note demurely that she did indeed occasionally receive calls from 'people wanting to book me to do programmes and so forth, which are perhaps not about politics'. All in all, I'd say she seems to have managed things pretty smoothly ever since.

Now, there are yet a couple of months to go until the US presidential elections, so who knows what will happen to 'me' in the meantime? Actually, there's only one thing I'd truly like to see happen. One of these days I'd really like to meet the other me. Not to discuss Trump, Clinton and co. – although that would be interesting, of course. But no, I'd just like to talk about what it's like being Mark Salter. Compare

experiences, the goods and the bads, that sort of a thing.

Will it ever happen? I doubt it. But you never know. Meantime I'll keep an eye on my email inbox. Because if he wants to, Mark Salter will know where to find me now.

Mark Salter is a writer and researcher focusing on issues of democracy, conflict, reconciliation and diversity management.

**Reconciliation and Peace
Processes**

**Reconciliation and Peace
Processes**



A Belfast Mural from after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

A new issue of [Conciliation Resource](#)'s Accord Insight Series, titled '[Reconciliation and Peace Processes](#)', is just out. Now the personal interest confession: I am the Guest Editor of this excellent new publication.

If you've an interest in the role of reconciliation in efforts to resolve the conflicts in Colombia, the Philippines/Mindanao, Northern Ireland or Georgia/Abkhazia—the four case studies covered in the report – or broader issues regarding the relationship between reconciliation and peace processes, then this spanking new publication is the one for you!

Below is a section taken from the Report's Introduction

Making peace with the past: transforming broken relationships

Policymakers and practitioners increasingly acknowledge the importance of reconciliation to sustainable peace. Yet it is often viewed belatedly, as a purely post-conflict concern. There is uncertainty about what type of reconciliation activity is possible at different phases of a peace process, and how to connect initiatives at different levels – from grassroots to elite.

This third Accord Insight reflects on practical approaches and challenges to address the legacies of violent conflict. Case studies from the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Colombia, Mindanao (Philippines) and Northern Ireland offer important insights into a diversity of approaches (successes and failures) in societies with different histories of violence and at very different stages on the conflict spectrum.

“The past is a central dimension of reconciliation. But reconciliation is essentially about the future: moving from a divided past towards a shared future. And so it means, at its core, building relations for the future” Dr David Bloomfield, Accord Insight expert contributor

“Reconciliation means much more than forgiving the perpetrator and understanding what happened; it implies ensuring that the conditions that gave rise to the conflict change deeply, and trusting that the state will never again cause or allow that situation to occur” Rosa Emilia Salamanca, Strategic Director, Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE), Colombia

They illustrate the importance of a diverse range of efforts to support peace processes and the reconstruction of post-conflict societies, and stress the need to ‘transform relationships’ away from past antagonisms in order to secure a more peaceful future.

“Healing starts when those who acknowledge their violent acts propose how to ‘mend’ such wrongs. Accounting for past actions is an important element of healing and reconciliation; it is also among the first steps toward transforming relationships at different levels” Rufa Cagoco-Guiam, Director of the Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao, Mindanao State University

*** A joint analysis workshop held in November 2015, which brought together 35 experts, policymakers, practitioners and

stakeholders, greatly informed the analysis and conclusions of this *Accord Insight* publication. Read Accord Insight 3 issue editor Mark Salter's workshop report [here](#)

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<http://www.c-r.org/accord/reconciliation-and-peace-processes-insight>