

External Intervention and Conflict Outcome: Analyzing the Effects of Intervention Strategies in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Recent empirical research on the topic of the role of outside state intervention in civil war duration has tended to suggest an overwhelming common and consistent pattern of argumentation that interventions in general tend to prolong the expected duration of civil conflicts, regardless of the form and strategy adopted by the intervener. In the mean time, management of internal conflicts has become increasingly important since the end of the cold war (Regan, 2000) particularly through the involvement of individual states and multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and other regional organizations. In Sri Lanka, the civil war between the Tamil Tigers and the government has experienced a series of outside interventions aimed at its management from its onset in the early 1980s. Past academic studies on the issue, however, tend to suggest a mix of outcomes that resulted from such interventions which constitute either shortening or lengthening the duration of the civil war depending on the assessment criterion developed by the general empirical studies (Regan, 2000). For instance, the major goal of intervention is the cessation of hostilities, regardless of the factors that motivated the intervention (Regan, 2000). Similarly, if there was a cessation of hostilities between the combatants for a period of more than six months after an intervention occurred it is coded as successful in shortening the expected duration of the conflict (Regan, 2000).

This contrasting picture captured by these two literatures leads to some important questions to be raised and answered over the existence of difference between the two literatures. Firstly, how does intervention actually affect the conflict in Sri Lanka? Secondly, what kind of relationship does exist between intervention strategies and the course of the conflict in Sri Lanka?

Methodology

To facilitate the data analysis, an integrated descriptive analytical framework consisting qualitative methods related to process analysis

and major patterns of empirical arguments are utilized to examine the relationships between the various independent and other variables, and the changes in the course and the level of violence of the conflict. To carry out this the data utilized for the analysis are treated at two levels. The first one focuses on the features associated with the conflict, and includes variables such as the nature and dynamics of the conflict, the number of interveners involved, whether the interventions are in support of a group or on behalf of both sides, if there was any involvement by other actors, and changes in the group's rebellion level, among other factors. The second level treats the various aspects of each intervention attempt and includes variables such as the type of state intervener, the forms of assistance furnished, the intensity of the aid, the recipients and the length of the interventions.

Results

Results derived from this analysis show dichotomous findings that that intervention strategy and course of the conflict are positively correlated, and the extent of this correlation is conditioned to the function of the subjective factors, which, while supporting the empirical argument that interventions in general, and strategies in particular, influence the expected duration of a civil war, casts skepticism and criticism on the conclusion that intervention leads to longer civil war. This skepticism lies primarily with the inadequate nature of the empirical models to address the role and effect of some subjective factors on the intervention outcome.

Discussion

Intervention in general prolongs the expected duration of the conflict in Sri Lanka regardless of form, strategy and sequence of execution, although Norway-led multilateral intervention made a difference on this general understanding in its early years. This finding supports the understanding and argumentation upheld by the general empirical scholarship. Further, it is evident that there exists a positive correlation between intervention strategies and

the conflict outcome in the Sri Lankan context. This in some sense stands contrary to the general argumentation of the empirical literature that intervention in general tends to prolong the expected duration of conflict regardless of form, strategy and sequence of execution. This divergence of effect can be attributed to the possible existence of some theoretical and methodological defects in the treatment of the role and effect of other unobservable factors in analyzing factorial role and effects on intervention outcome, and thus it could be that the existing theoretical and methodological design suffer from inadequacy in capturing a comprehensive and more plausible picture of the phenomenon. However, it can also be argued that certain strategic (tactical) and contextual (conflict) factors tend to make a difference in the overall effect of intervention in Sri Lankan context. This on the other hand provides a new insight and emphasis of aspects that had been either overlooked or downplayed by past studies on the issue.

Conclusions

There exists a strong correlation between intervention strategy, as an exercise of conflict management and the instrument of achieving it, and the course of a conflict. This correlation, however, is seriously affected by strategic and contextual factors at least in the Sri Lankan context, where political and strategic uncertainty between the protagonists turned the exercise of differing intervention strategies by different interveners at different times into a deadlocked and protracted peace process. Thus, it can be concluded that interventions in general tend to increase the expected duration of the conflict in Sri Lanka, although the Norway led multilateral intervention differed slightly from this overall outcome.

References

- Regan, P.M. (2000) *Civil War and Foreign Powers: Outside Intervention in Intrastate Conflict*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press.