Risking Peace: Comparing Mistrust-Reducing Strategies in the Sri Lankan Peace Processes

Kristine Höglund & Isak Svensson

Address for Correspondence

Department of Peace and Conflict Research,
Uppsala University, Sweden
Email: isak.svensson@pcr.uu.se

Paper submitted for the

9th International conference on Sri Lanka Studies,
28th – 30th November 2003,
Matara, Sri Lanka
Risking Peace

Comparing Mistrust-Reducing Strategies in the Sri Lankan Peace Processes

Kristine Höglund & Isak Svensson
Department of Peace and Conflict Research
Uppsala University
kristine.hoglund@pcr.uu.se
isak.svensson@pcr.uu.se
DO NOT QUOTE!

ABSTRACT
Lack of trust between parties involved in negotiations to solve an armed conflict has been widely used as an explanation for why some negotiations fail to produce peace. However, we know little about how mistrust can be reduced between belligerents involved in negotiating peace, so that the process does not break down. In order words, why are some confidence-building strategies more successful than others? This paper explores strategies to reduce or manage mistrust in two attempts to negotiate peace in Sri Lanka: in 1994–95 and the current peace process initiated in 2001. In this paper, we argue that the parties during the current peace process to a larger extent has been successful in reducing mistrust than in the 1994–95 process, because they have taken measures which has involved deliberately imposing costs on themselves. In this way they have been able to credibly convey their willingness to solve the conflict through negotiations. Using a theoretical framework built on the concept of trust, this communicative signalling process between the parties is analysed.
**Introduction**

How can mistrust be reduced between the parties to an armed conflict so that a process to negotiate peace does not break down? In the post-Cold War period, peace agreements have become an increasingly common way of ending civil wars (Wallensteen 2002). A growing literature on intra-state conflict resolution have attempted to identify the dynamics of the processes leading up to settlement and the conditions under which they are more or less likely to succeed (Darby and Mac Ginty 2000; Darby and Mac Ginty 2003; Hampson 1996; Hartzell 1999; Hartzell, Hoddie, and Rothchild 2001; Licklider 1993; Licklider 1995; Licklider 2001; Ohlson 1998; Stedman 1991; Stedman 1996; Walter 2002; Zartman 1985/1989; Zartman 1995a). A number of factors that influence this dynamic have been suggested, such as the terms of the settlement, the presence of third party guarantees, the role of spoilers, and the regional and global context. Lack of trust and the inability to build confidence between parties involved in negotiations to solve an armed conflict, has been widely used as an explanation for why some negotiations fail to produce peace (eg. Darby and Mac Ginty 2003; Mitchell 2000; Walter 1999). But how can trust and confidence be built between belligerents involved in negotiating peace? What can the parties themselves do? And, most importantly, why are some confidence-building strategies more successful than others?

This paper explores strategies to reduce or manage mistrust in two attempts to negotiate peace in Sri Lanka: the Kumaratunga initiative in 1994–95 and the current peace process under Prime Minister Wickremasinghe which was initiated in 2001. A theoretical framework is applied to these cases, which highlights confidence-building strategies to handle the problem of mistrust in negotiations, based on the belligerents’ attempts to deliberately impose a cost on themselves, as a way of demonstrating their willingness to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.

As such, this paper contributes to the understanding of strategies that can be used to manage and reduce mistrust between belligerents in order to solve an armed conflict. This exploration also provide insights into why the 1994–95 process collapsed and why

---

1 The term “Kumaratunga Initiative” and Wickremasinghe Initiative” is short hand for initiatives under the regime of Kumaratunga resp. Wickremasinghe. We do not mean that it is necessarily the presidents’ initiatives.
the current peace process has lasted much longer and seems more stable than the previous attempts. Although the outcome is still uncertain, fighting has ceased for the longest period of time since the intense, long and bloody conflict emerged in 1983. This, no doubt, is a considerable achievement.

Furthermore, the parties have made considerable changes in their positions regarding the basic incompatibility, the status of the North- and Northeastern parts of Sri Lanka (state-formation). The government under Wickremasinghe stated directly after the election in 2001, that everything short of a state would be considered as a potential solution of the conflict. Even federalism has been discussed, which has up until then been an anathema in the political debate since the 1950s. Likewise, the LTTE, in the beginning of December 2002, gave up their long-held position of a Tamil, sovereign state, and stated that they would be satisfied with “internal self-determination” (2002).

The peace process has run into numerous difficulties, such as cease-fire violations, political impasse and increased tensions between the parties. Still – and from a historical perspective this is remarkable – the parties do trust each other enough to stay in the process and have, as of yet, not gone back to war.

In contrast, the short peace process of 1994–95, ended after only 5 months of cease-fire, in April 1995, when the LTTE unilaterally resumed hostilities. The negotiations held, were mainly related to procedural questions and the reconstruction of war-torn areas, and the parties were unable or unwilling to make any substantial concessions, which could have opened up for a potential bargaining space.

In this paper, we argue that the parties during the current peace process to a larger extent has been successful in reducing mistrust than in the 1994–95 process, because they have taken deliberate measures involving costs for themselves. In this way they have been able to convey their willingness to solve the conflict through negotiations.

2 The research in this paper is partially based on two field trips to Sri Lanka carried out in August–October 2001 and November–December 2002.


5 We assume, for the sake of the argument, conciliatory intentions by the parties, and focus on the different strategies on how to communicate such conciliatory intentions. This is a somewhat problematic assumption: both the LTTE and the President Kumaratunga have, quite naturally, accused each other of having malign intentions and for wanting the peace process to collapse. We leave such speculations aside, mainly because it is difficult to judge the earnest intentions of the parties. The questions for this research is,
We do not argue that the difference in mistrust-reducing strategies is the sole explanation for the different outcome in the two peace processes. There are numerous explanations for the failure of the 1994/95-peace process and the partial success of the present one, for example, the presence of a third party, the “September 11” factor and the degree of war weariness. Our present argument does not in any way falsify any other of the current explanations. We what do claim, however, is that different degree of cost can partially account for the difference in outcome.

Confidence-Building in Negotiation Processes

Rebuilding trust between belligerent has been pointed out as one of the central tasks in any conflict resolution process. Trust has been studied by many different disciplines (e.g. sociology, political science and economy) and from various approaches (e.g. social-psychological approaches and rational choice approaches). Trust is an elusive concept and lacks an established definition. According to Hoffman, there is substantial agreement about the elements that any definitions should either include or imply:

First, trust refers to an attitude involving a willingness to place the fate of one’s interests under the control of others. … Second, scholars agree that trusting relationships are behavioral manifestations of trust. … Third, the intensity and scope of trust and trusting relationships are capable of variation. … Fourth, trusting others involves making predictions about their future actions. … Finally, actors access the risk of entrusting their interests to others using subjective estimates of the probability their trust will be honored. (Hoffman, 2002, 376-379)

Previous research has indicated that mistrust is a significant obstacle to the resolution of armed conflict. De-escalation processes and trust-building have been studied though concepts such as GRIT (Gradual Reciprocation in Tension Reduction), CBMs (Confidence-Building Measures) and conciliatory signaling (eg. Kydd 2000; assuming that the parties had conciliatory intentions, why are the parties more successful in building trust in the current peace process, than they were in 1994–95?  

Several case studies have been carried out, for instance on the Middle East case (Kriesberg 1992), the conflict over the Falkland Island between Great Britain and Argentina (Mitchell 1991), the Middle East conflict (Mitchell 2000; Stein 1991) and South Africa (Kriesberg 1998). However, we still lack studies which involve an empirical evaluation of different theories on confidence-building strategies in negotiation processes to solve intra-state armed conflict.

The reduction of mistrust between belligerents in a conflict is an integral part of any negotiation process with the ambition of bringing sustainable peace. However, rather than the more idealistic notion of creating some higher level of trust, the most important task is to lower the level of mistrust. As argued by several scholars, trust is not a necessary condition for cooperation (Hoffman 2002; Kydd 2000), however, as argued by others, trust is important since it encourages problem solving (Kimmel et al. 1980). In addition, trust is key to conflict resolution, since whereas “perception about battlefield changes can change quickly, ... perceptions about the trustworthiness of an opponent change slowly” (Stedman 1996, 351).

These questions have not been adequately addressed in previous research. In line with previous thinking on the topic, we suggest that the lack of trust can be dealt with through unilateral actions by the parties themselves. This is not meant to underestimate the importance of measures taken by third parties.7

Confidence-Building Strategies By the Parties Themselves

For a confidence-building strategy to be successful, a party has to demonstrate that it is trustworthy, both in its willingness and capability to pursue peace. But how do actors convey their willingness to solve the conflict?

---

As argued by scholars such as Mitchell and Kydd, to demonstrate its trustworthiness, a party has to take actions which involve imposing a deliberate cost on oneself, including running a risk of losing a benefit if the target takes advantage of the vulnerability. As put by Mitchell: “a party seeking trustworthiness needs to place itself in a position of increasing its own losses as a result of its failure to fulfill verbal promises or commitments by subsequent deeds” (Mitchell 2000, 175). Due to the history of rivalry and the potential benefits of bluffing the other party into a de-escalatory situation which can be manipulated to its own benefits, any attempt to signal conciliatory intent will be marked by severe problems of credibility. Given this credibility problem, it is the cost-dimension for the initiator that is the crucial element in this strategy, because, as Mitchell argues, “a party will obviously trust another’s intention to fulfill commitments the greater the costs for not carrying out the initial promise” (Mitchell 2000, 175). In this strategy, the initiator places himself in a position such that the target can take advantage and impose costs if he chooses. Thus, the ‘sticking one’s neck out’ strategy, involves either imposing a deliberate cost on oneself (a unilateral concession or reward) or deliberately running a risk of losing a benefit if the target takes advantage of the vulnerability (Mitchell 2000, 177). Thus, by taking a conciliatory initiative that is costly, the conciliatory intentions can be communicated.

What kind of costs can the parties impose on themselves in order to reveal conciliatory intentions in the context of armed conflict? Rubin et al argues that theoretically, there are three different kinds of potential costs involved in a de-escalation process (Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim 1994). First, there are those costs that are related to loosing the image and prestige, which may effect the reputation and image of the party as weak (image loss). Second, there are costs that are related to loosing the bargaining position, which may effect the final agreement (position loss). And third, there are costs related to loss of information, regarding strength, commitment and other kind of vital information in the context of conflict (information loss). Building on Rubin et al’s categorisation, we will discuss costs related to three different areas in the Sri Lankan peace processes: 1) image, 2) security and 3) information.
Comparing the Peace Processes

In the following section a comparison is made between two peace initiatives in the longstanding armed conflict in Sri Lanka between the Tamil rebel group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Singhalese dominated government. The conflict has its roots in two competing forms of nationalism, and has been manifested in the LTTE's demand for an independent Tamil state in the north and east of Sri Lanka. Following the cease-fire between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government in February 2002, the economic sanctions in LTTE held areas have been relaxed, the four year old ban on the LTTE has been removed, and the rebel group has been allowed to open political offices in the government held areas in the north and northeast. Consequently, the expectations for peace were high, when representatives of the Tamil tigers and the government met in Thailand in mid-September 2002, to initiate negotiations for the first time in seven years. Since then, the process has progressed in a rapid manner. At a press conference held in Oslo in the beginning of December, after only three rounds of talks, the parties announced that they decided to “explore a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking people based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka.” (2002). Thus, the parties had agreed on a formula for the resolution of the conflict, which by itself is a historical event and an indication of the commitment by the adversaries to find a negotiated solution.

In a similar manner hopes were high that the talks would result in a break through in 1994, when direct talks between the LTTE and the government was initiated in October, following the regime change which brought Chandrika Kumaratunga and the People’s Alliance (PA) to power. On the military front, the government and the LTTE initially pursued their negotiation contacts without attempting to halt the armed clashes. Later, in January 1995, the negotiations yielded a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. However, the agreement was never really put in place and allegation of cease-fire

---

violations were being made by both parties against each other and widely reported in the press. In April 1995, the LTTE unilaterally resumed hostilities and the period since the negotiations ended came to be the bloodiest in the history of independent Sri Lanka.

**Image Costs**

With regard to image costs, the comparison between the two peace processes in Sri Lanka, displays an interesting contrast with regard to 1) internal criticism, 2) media attention and 3) recognition of the other party as a legitimate actor. Image loss refers to those costs that are related to loosing image and prestige. These issues are important due to the fact that they may effect the reputation and create an image of the parties as being weak. Furthermore, image costs may also be a problem, because this may result voiced criticism and accusations of betrayal of the cause from within the own party.

First, in the current peace process, the government has faced more severe internal criticism and constraints than in the 1994–95 process. Thus, the current government has, to a larger extent than in 1994, exposed itself to image loss when initiating talks with the LTTE. The Wickremasinghe government has faced more severe internal criticism than the Kumaratunga government, for two reasons. Firstly, in 1994–95 the PA had both the President position and the Prime Minister position. Contrary, in 2001, Kumaratunga’s party lost the Prime Minister post (and subsequently the government), but Kumaratunga still remains President. In this position, she has criticized and also threatened to hinder the peace process. In addition, in 1994, the Singhalese extremists were to a large extent marginalized, and instead there appeared to be some degree of consensus among the two main Singhalese parties, the UNP and the PA, for the first time in a long time. Both parties seemed to recognize that LTTE had to be part of a solution, if the conflict was to end (Shankar 1994, 8). The critics of the peace process were therefore in a more powerful position in 2001–02.

Secondly, during the period following the 1995 breakdown of talks, the maoist-nationalist party *Janatha Vimukti Permuna* (JVP), who today represents some of the most

---

9 A complicating factor in the pursuit for peace is the internal Singhalese party-politics, which ever since the independence of Sri Lanka, have obstructed a potential solution to the conflict. Repeatedly, the problem has been that every attempt by the party in government to strike a bargain with representatives of the
extreme-nationalist Singhalese elements in Sri Lanka, has grown in power. On several occasions, the party has organised demonstrations where thousands of (militant) Buddhist monks have protested against the cease-fire and the peace process. Also within other influential interest groups such as the Buddhist Maha Sangha and the hard-line Sri Lankan navy, there are strands of opposition towards a resolution of the conflict. Although there existed nationalistic groups opposed to the peace process in 1994, they did not have the mandate that JVP has today, with 16 places in the 225 strong national parliament. In this way, although the “anti-peace” forces are still a minority of the population (polls have estimates about of 20%), in the current peace process they have been more outspoken and raised their criticism with much more outrage.

The conclusion drawn from analyzing these two aspects is that the internal criticism was more severe in the 2001 peace process, compared to the 1994 peace initiative. Given this larger amount and strength of the resistance to a peace settlement, the fact that the government nevertheless initiated a negotiation process with the LTTE, can be seen as a costly signal which communicated conciliatory intentions, in a credible way. In this way, mistrust was reduced.

Second, extensive international media attention, can also make the parties more exposed to image loss. Under the Wickremasinghe initiative, both parties, and in particular the LTTE, has received more media attention than in 1994–95. This partly has to do with the increasing internationalization of the conflict. The LTTE has made serious attempts to improve their tarnished international image. A notable illustration of this is the press conference in April 2002, held by the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. Prabhakaran, who has kept hidden in the jungle and most often dismissed interviews by the media, stepped forward, and – in civilian clothes rather than the mandatory military uniform – met the gathered international press in a LTTE held area in the north of Sri Lanka. More that 300 local and international journalists attended the press conference. The message was clear: LTTE welcomes a negotiated settlement to the conflict and, given that a settlement that meets their aspirations is reached, will transform themselves into a political party. By exposing themselves to the media, the LTTE has shown that Tamils, have been resisted by the opposition. To further its power position, Singhalese-nationalist arguments have often been used by the party in opposition.
they seriously have committed themselves to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict. A return to war would deal a serious blow to the organisation’s credibility. That is, if the LTTE would once again take up their arms and end the cease-fire, the international credibility cost would be significant.

There was no such exposure of world opinion during the 1994–95 talks (Pravada, 2002, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 11). Consequently, in the 1994–95 process, the parties were less exposed to image loss because of international media attention, than they are today. The exposure to the international community’s attention, in general, and the international press and media, in particular, pose a major risk if the LTTE has the intention of returning to the war. In this regard, it can be seen as a costly signal of conciliatory intentions by the LTTE.

Third, the parties to a conflict can also expose themselves to image loss, by giving recognition to the other party. Granting this recognition is costly, because legitimacy and recognition is one of the things that the rebels are fighting for and one important resource that they are lacking in their relationship with the government (Guelke 2003; Zartman 1995b). Recognition is an asset that not easily can be taken back. Recognition of the other party as a legitimate actor is also difficult, costly and risky, since it involves the potential loss of credibility of stature within one’s own party. To recognize the other party will also expose oneself to the threat of being treated as a traitor to the cause, because of the willingness to cooperate with the enemy. The willingness of the government to recognize the LTTE as an equal partner in the negotiation process can be illustrated by looking at two areas: the way the negotiation teams were put together and the way in which reconstruction has taken place.

It is clear that Wickremasinghe’s negotiation strategy is to handle LTTE as an equal partner. Parity is also a premonition of what is to come in the peace agreement. The striving for parity and recognition of the LTTE as a legitimate negotiating partner, is reflected in the composition of the negotiation teams. Wickremasinghe’s government delegation is made up of high-level politicians, in the inner circle of the government, with substantial power and close relations to the Prime Minister. Furthermore, the leadership of the Sri Lankan Government’s Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) is drawn from the foreign services, which imply that they have competence to handle
negotiations with equal parties. In contrast, the PA government’s unwillingness to
recognize the LTTE as an equal partner in the negotiations 1994–95, were also reflected
in the way in which the negotiation team on part of the government was put together. The
members were low-ranking and by their profession, they did not have the competence to
conduct serious, negotiations at a governmental level. The delegates were even
discouraged to contacting negotiators from previous round (Schaffer 1999, 132).
Regardless of the intentions behind this selection of negotiations team, this increased the
perception on the LTTE-side that the government were not serious in their attempts to
find a solution to the conflict (Balasingham 2000, 145; Puleethevan 2002). Consequently,
by selecting these people to the negotiation team, the Kumaratunga regime did not
transfer a high degree of recognition to the rebel-group.

In addition, whereas the LTTE in 1994–95 was not allowed to be part of the
reconstruction of the war-torn areas, the government has now been seeking partnership in
these activities, thereby reinforcing the perception of parity between the parties. The
restoration of normalcy in the war-affected areas has been a longstanding demand of the
LTTE. In the step-by-step approach that is used in the current peace process, emphasis
has been on increasing the living conditions of the people living in the North and North-
East, by for instance opening up the A9 highway to Jaffna, remove the embargo on
products to war-effected areas, and provide major funding to a common rehabilitation
fund. What is striking about all these developmental activities and reconstruction efforts
is that Wickremasinghe does it in cooperation with the LTTE. After a Donor Conference
in Oslo, in December 2002, the parties agreed to set up a joint commission for
management of international funding (government whitepaper). In this way the
government is in fact strengthening the LTTE, because it is the LTTE that is delivering
the increasing living standards to the Tamil people. As evident in this process, the
government is not trying to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people (Perera,
interview 2002-11)

In comparison, during the 1994 peace process, the government spokespersons
publicly stated that the peace talks would help separate the Tamil people from the LTTE
(Perera 1998, 244). At the time, the LTTE had control over the North. With the initiation
of the peace process, there was a fear within the LTTE of being marginalized. This was reinforced by the public support among the Tamil people, as seen in the election results as well as in spontaneous demonstrations in support of the government negotiations teams. In addition, president Kumaratunga was making deliberate attempts to win the heart and minds of the people. An expression of her popularity in the North following her promise to initiate talks to end the conflict, was that shops were selling “Chandrika bangles” and “Chandrika soap” (1994). This policy, instead of signaling conciliatory intent, was interpreted by the LTTE as an attempt to decrease the public support for the insurgency.

Thus, in the current peace process, the government has to a larger extent exposed itself to an image loss by recognizing the LTTE as an equal partner. This stands in sharp contrast to the situation in 1994–95, where no such signals of equality were sent.

In conclusion, in the current peace process, the parties have to a larger extent than in 1994–95 exposed themselves to image loss, because of more severe internal criticism, increased media exposure and by recognizing the other party as an equal. All these measures can be seen as costly, and would indeed imply a major political cost if the parties did not have sincere, conciliatory intentions.

Security Costs
Security costs refer to those costs that involve a situation in which the parties lower their security-measures and increase their own vulnerability, thus risking being exploited by the opponent. In the case of Sri Lanka, the government took two measures during the current peace process, which stand in stark contrast to the peace process under Kumaratunga: they lifted the security barriers in Colombo, and they have implemented a relaxation of embargo on the LTTE-held areas in the North- and the Northeast.

First, parties may loose power and positions on the ground. In a rather dramatic decision by the Wickremasinghe Government, the security barriers in Colombo were

---

10 Normalization is dangerous for rebel movement, because rebel groups build their support base from the fact that the ground situation is not “normal” but indeed need to be radically changed (Zartman 1995). Subsequently, the LTTE’s possibility to mobilize against the Singhalese repression will be much more difficult given that the ground situation is sufficiently improved, if such normalisation is the product of governmental measures. Not surprisingly, question of the equality in the “normalization” process was intensively sensitive in the 1994-95 peace process.
lifted in December 2001 (Perera 2001). Given the potential inflow of suicide-bombers, the Black Tigers, this measure must be described as bold and imply a high degree of risk-taking. Likewise, the opening up of access to the parties’ territory, may be a security risk. All these measures, communicate good intentions and willingness to take risks for the sake of peace. In contrast, no such measures were taken during the 1994–95 process.

Second, although the governmental embargo against the North and North-East has major humanitarian implications, relaxation of this embargo could also be seen out from a security perspective. Increased resources, whatever their kind, could be used in order to strengthen the capacity of the LTTE. In 1994 the relaxation of embargo by Governmental was aimed as serving as a gesture of goodwill in relation to the First round of talks. However, there are two reasons why this was not interpreted in that way by the LTTE. First of all, a large amount of items remained on the list of prohibited products to be allowed to the region. This meant that for instance cement, an item necessary for re-building houses, remained a rare commodity in the war-torn areas (Uyangoda 1995, 20). Furthermore, the decision of relaxation was badly implemented by the governmental servicemen on the ground, foremost due to foot-dragging on the ground (Perera 1998, 244). On the contrary, the Wickremasinghe government decided to relax the embargo in a more comprehensive manner and has followed though with its implementation.

Information Costs
Information costs refers to costs related to strength, commitment and other of vital information in the context of conflict, which, by being revealed, may influence the bargaining leverage of the parties. In the 2001 peace process in Sri Lanka, the parties made three significant changes that increased transparency and revealed information about each other. As is made clear by the comparison, no such measures (at least not on the same scale) were taken during the Kumaratunga initiative. The measures relate to 1) monitoring by a third party, 2) organizational design of the negotiations, and 3) the transformation of the LTTE.

First and foremost, as part of the cease-fire in 2001, the parties decided to invite the representatives from the Nordic countries to supervise the cease-fire, in the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM). SLMM increased the transparency by monitoring,
reporting and spreading information about the activities of the parties on the ground. The task of SLMM is to observe any violation of the cease-fire and facilitate the resolution of disputes over implementation. The SLMM was initially led by the retired Norwegian generals Trond Furuholme and is now headed by Tryggve Tellefsen. The mission consists of about sixty personnel from the Nordic countries located in six districts and the headquarters in Colombo. The local monitoring committees are made up by field-monitors from the Nordic countries and representatives from the government and the LTTE. Their task is to “conduct international verification through on-site monitoring of the fulfilment entered into.”

The Cessation of Hostilities agreement of 1995 also made provisions for a monitoring team to oversee the cease-fire. The mission was to consist of representatives from Canada, Norway, Netherlands, ICRC and “from among retired judges or public officers, religious heads and other leading citizens” (Cessation of Hostilities Agreement as cited in Rajanayagam 1998, 204). Contrary to the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) established in 2001, the mission did not have a clear structure with regard to who would be in charge of the mission. Following the agreement, foreign monitors arrived to oversee its implementation, but the monitoring committees were unable to operate since their functioning had become a matter of dispute between the parties. Therefore, the mission could not serve as a vehicle for building confidence between the parties, by increasing transparency.

Secondly, although the actual negotiations have been conducted in secrecy, organizational designs have been made in order to enhance the transparency. In particular, the government has made institutional efforts in order to make the coordination of decision-making related to the peace process more effective. As a result, SCOOP has made that decision-making on part of the government more transparent. The creation of SCOPP during the current peace process, was a decision made based on experience from previous peace initiatives, including the 1994–95 process, in which the political and administrative decision-making process relating to the peace process had

---

11 See the Cease-fire Agreement, article 3. The SLMM has largely been successful in their mission to oversee the cease-fire. In September 2002, the SLMM reported that the number of complaints had decreased by 40% since June, indicating a subsiding trend.
been divided between various departments (coordinated by President’s office) and therefore harder to overlook (Gooneratne 2002).

Thirdly, the transformation of the LTTE has also increased transparency. LTTE has started to develop its political wing, opened up political offices and welcomed foreign journalists to visit the LTTE-held areas. A peace secretariat has been established at the political office in Kilinochi. Hence, one important aspect of the transformation of the LTTE into a viable political actor is that information about its strength and people’s support for the LTTE will increase transparency for the outside world.

**Discussion**

Mistrust can be reduced when parties reveal their conciliatory intent by exposing themselves to costs and risks that they would not be ready to accept if their intentions were less conciliatory. What does such “conciliatory risk-taking” mean in the context of intrastate, armed conflicts? Building on Rubin et al (1994), we argue that there are three basic types of costs involved a de-escalation process, which all could be used by the belligerents in order to communicate their conciliatory intentions. Parties interested in reducing the enemy’s mistrust may take measures that risks loosing image, implies security risks or reveals valuable information.

With regard to image costs, the comparison between the two peace processes in Sri Lanka, displays an interesting contrast with regard to 1) internal criticism, 2) media attention and 3) recognition of the other party as a legitimate actor.

As we have argued above, the two peace processes were different in that the parties were ready to take a larger degree of “image risks” in the later process than in the former. By initiating and responding to conciliatory moves, the parties exposed themselves to inside critique and took the risk of being perceived as weak and losing their face in front of their enemy. Turning from the conflict phase to de-escalation involves challenging, often long-held, cognitive perceptions and emotional attitudes concerning the enemy (Gross-Stein). Leaders who are involved in de-escalation may, in such circumstances, be accused of betraying their own cause. The magnitude and strength of the opposition that is against de-escalation and peace settlement determines the level of these internal image costs.
In 1994, the opposition against compromise and conciliation was weak, unorganized and did and not have a central power position within the political system. The political leadership was led by one party and could not be challenged when it took conciliatory measures. Quite contrary, in 2001, a small but highly visible opposition (JVP) challenged the peace process and accused the Prime Minister of dividing the country. The political leadership at the centre, moreover, was divided. Chandrika Kumaratunga, who held the Presidency, was an outspoken critic of the design of the peace process, even though she expressed her basic support for the process. However, the existence of a strong opposition against the peace process was sized by the Wickremasinghe government. It gave an opportunity for the Prime Minister to make a credible commitment to LTTE, indication that the government was ready to stick their neck out in order to reach a peace agreement with the rebel group. The LTTE, on the other hand, exposed itself to international media, and thereby committed itself to seeking a negotiated settlement. Phrabakaran’s press-conference in the Wanni jungle gave the picture to an international audience that LTTE was seriously committed to peace and the restoration of normalcy. Given this effort to internationalise the peace process, backing down from its commitment to peace will seriously hurt the image of LTTE.

The Wickremasinghe government, in contrast to the Kumaratunga government, has recognized the power and legitimacy of the LTTE, by giving it a central role as a partner in reconstruction and development in the war-torn areas. By meeting the LTTE on equal terms and to engage in conciliatory, peace-building and humanitarian efforts in joint cooperation with the LTTE, the Prime Minister has recognized the rebels in a way Kumaratunga never did. Quite contrary, her efforts to build confidence was directed more toward the Tamil people and not towards LTTE. Consequently, the rebel organization, with the ambition of being the “sole representative” of the Tamil people, feared being marginalised as a result of the peace process. Thus, mistrust between the primary parties was not reduced. The efforts to re-build infrastructure in the North was structured in different manners in the two peace process. In 1994/95 the reconstruction efforts were conducted as governmental projects, while in 2001 they were (at least initially) planned as joint ventures between the government and the LTTE. Thus, Wickremasinghe took the
risk of recognizing his enemy, which showed to be a successful mistrust-reducing strategy.

The two peace processes were also different with regard to the security dimension of costs. The parties were ready to take “security risks” in order to reveal their conciliatory intentions. By security risks we mean risks of loosing control of territory, weapon-systems or other material sources of security and power. Taking such risks increase the credibility of one’s commitment, since an increased vulnerability may be exploited by the opponent in order to gain strategic advantages. Subsequently, the Wickremasinghe government lifted security barriers in Colombo and elsewhere, which were set up in order to hinder the inflow of LTTE-suicide bombers to the city. The Kumaratunga government did not implement such drastic reforms. Moreover, both in 1994/95 and in the 2001 peace process, decisions were taken to lift the embargo against the North-East regions. Those decisions had security implications for the government, because some of the material could be used for military purposes. However, in the Kumaratunga peace process, the lifting was not fully implemented on the ground. LTTE was able to see that there was a gap between the declarations and the actions on the ground, and concluded that the promise to lift the embargo was only “cheap talk”. Quite contrary, in 2002, the Wickremasinghe government seemed to have learned the lesson from the former peace process and made sure that the decision to lift the embargo was fully implemented on the ground. Thus, willingness to take security risks for the sake of peace was not only declared, but also implemented.

The third category of risk that we have elaborated upon in this paper is the risk of revealing valuable information. To increase the transparency is costly because it reveals vital information on the party. Information about strength and commitment will be more evident when transparency increases. Two aspects are of interest. The first aspect concerns a risk of revealing information about the capacity and strength of the parties. Opening up the territory for access, control and monitoring for the enemy or a third party, may reveal information about where forces are located, their military magnitude and capacity, how many forces and men in armed service, etc. The enemies may use this kind of information if a war relapses. The cease-fire agreement of 1994/95 opened up both the government’s territory and the territory controlled by the LTTE. The Memorandum of
Understanding of 1 January 1995, on the other hand, did no such opening up. The flow of goods and people did increase even more when the A9 highway was opened. Furthermore, the role of third parties may be seen in this light.

The presence of third parties is related to a second aspect of information risks, namely revealing information about the intentions and commitment of the parties. Knowledge about the reservation line of the other party can be used at the negotiation table in order to get a better deal. Decision to let third parties enter into the process signalled information about the primary parties’ resolve and degree of conciliatory intentions. As argued by Walter, “Outside intervention provides important information about what type of opponent each side is facing, distinguishing predators from non-predators. Domestic groups who are intent on aggression are unlikely to accept outside interference since this would jeopardise their ability to carry out any malicious plans” (Walter 1999, 306). Thus, the decision to let SLMM monitor on the ground in the current peace process stands in stark contrast with the role of third parties in 1994/95. LTTE did not allow the third party monitor events on the ground (accusing them of being partial) (Balasingham 2000).

The creation of the secretariat of the co-ordination of the peace process (SCOPP) was an organisational devise aimed at enhancing the transparency in the process. In the 1994–95 process, however, the political and administrative decision-making process relating to the peace process had been less transparent. Furthermore, the LTTE’s organisational development, for example with the creation of a Peace Secretariat, increases the insights from the outside. Information about the LTTE’s support-base among the population increases as the LTTE-controlled areas opens up for the outside world. The increased transparency has revealed, for example, the opposition against the LTTE by the Muslim community in the East. Divisions in the eastern provinces affect the bargaining power of LTTE and are thus costly to reveal for the LTTE. The willingness of the LTTE to nevertheless open up its territory so that such type of information can flow more freely makes their commitment to the peace process more credible.

All these costs, relating to the parties’ security, their image or the degree of revealed information, were used strategically by the actors in the current peace process, which plausibly resulted in a lower level of mistrust between the former belligerents.
Hence, in the current peace process, the willingness to ‘stick the neck out’, by taking costly measures from both sides, for the sake of peace, revealed intentions in a credible way. As we have argued in this paper, this strategy can be seen in stark contrast to the 1994–95 peace process where measures generally did not impose costs or imply risks for either of the parties. Measured taken aimed at building trust in the mid 1990s were generally considered “cheap” (from an image-, security- or informational approach) and was therefore unable to reduce mistrust between the belligerent. Quite contrary, in that process, mistrust was gradually generated over time to the point when the peace process broke down.

**Conclusions**

What do the findings from this exploration say about mistrust-reducing strategies?
One important implication follows the analysis above. The analysis has compared the 1994–95 peace process with the process up to the end of 2002. Can this analysis help us understand the development in the peace process from then on, when the peace process went into an impasse? Although this is not the primary focus of the paper, it can be argued that the confidence built in the first year of the peace process was significantly decreased during the first months of 2003. The timing of the turning point of the peace process is interesting: it coincided with the Sri Lankan government’s unilateral financial meeting at the US Department for Foreign Affairs on April 14, 2003, in Washington. The meeting arose strong protests from the LTTE. The decision of the government to unilaterally go to Washington seriously questioned the government’s recognition of LTTE as an equal partner in the process. It was when this equality between the parties were threatened that the current political process reached a deadlock. Thus, the analysis shed some light on why the decision by the government and the US government to arrange a meeting which excluded the LTTE from participation, severely affected the peace process. Granting the rebels a sense of parity is, as we have argued, a costly sign of conciliatory intentions from the government. When this equality was threatened, the emerging trust between the former antagonists started evaporating, and consequently the peace process ran the risk of breaking down.
REFERENCES


Mitcham, Surrey: Fairmax Publishing Ltd.


Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd.


