

# Cascades Across An “Extremely Violent Society”: Sri Lanka

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# Cascades Across An "Extremely Violent Society": Sri Lanka

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In the "Peacebuilding Compared" research project violence is seen as cascading across space and time within and between war-torn societies. This article illustrates the cascade lens as a framework for hypothesis generation. Both violent actions and violent imaginaries cascade. The recent history of Sri Lanka is used to illustrate three cascade dynamics: crime cascades to war, war cascades to more war and to crime, and crime and war both cascade to state violence such as torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial execution. Sri Lanka is also a case that cascaded new technologies of crime-war globally, such as suicide bombing vests. These are not the only important cascade dynamics, just neglected ones. The implications of our cascade analysis are not mainly about building positive peace – peace with justice, participation, truth and reconciliation – at the end of tragic cascades. They are more about securing negative peace preventively at the onset of cascades.

## 1. The Cascade Concept

This essay contributes in a modest way to an ambitious research program on how violence begets violence, and obverse mechanisms whereby nonviolence begets nonviolence. Gerlach (2010) argues that extremely violent societies are not violent in some cultural or essential way. Rather societies transition in and out of extremely violent periods of their histories as a result of crises. Karstedt's (2012) work on her Violent Societies Index shows empirically that extremely violent societies experience disparate kinds of violence that are highly intercorrelated. This essay is about one dynamic that might be responsible for that empirical result – violence cascades across space and time from one kind of violence to another.

As in the cascading of water, violence and nonviolence can cascade down from commanding heights of power (as in waterfalls), up from powerless peripheries, and can undulate to spread horizontally (flowing from one space to another).

The cascade metaphor has a long history in geology (Kun et al. 2014) and physics; water is not the only matter that cascades: a spark causes fire to cascade up a mountain, down a gully, and across a plain. In particle *physics*, a shower is a *cascade* of secondary particles produced by a high-energy particle interacting with dense matter. In medicine, infection happens through particles that activate other biological particles to spread through cascades known as contagion. The cascade concept has been used before in the social sciences, in Sunstein's (1997) norm cascades and Sikkink's (2011) cascades of criminal enforcement for crimes against humanity. In the social sciences, phenomena like violence cascade through the agency of human actors, and through physical flows – of suicide bombs, of bodies of refugees. These cascades of objects can provide hospitable contexts for cascades of violent action.

This essay seeks inductively to illuminate how violence cascades, using Sri Lanka as a least-likely case study (Eckstein

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1975). The cascades framework we are in the process of developing conceives cascades of violence as recursively related to cascades of militarization and cascades of authoritarianism (Braithwaite and D'Costa, forthcoming). The particular contribution of this article is to complement our earlier (Braithwaite and D'Costa 2012; Braithwaite 2012) and forthcoming empirically grounded hypotheses on cascade dynamics with just three additional propositions:

1. Crime cascades to war;
2. War cascades transnationally to more war and more crime;
3. Both crime and war cascade to state violence such as torture.

These three cascades occur in almost all twenty-five armed conflicts where the preliminary core fieldwork has been completed (and seven hundred variables preliminarily coded) in the Peacebuilding Compared project (<http://peacebuilding.anu.edu.au>). This is an utterly non-random sample of armed conflicts in which follow-up is required for another decade (all are post-1990 conflicts). The Peacebuilding Compared team led by John Braithwaite that is conducting the broader and longer term research will not assess this pattern as credible unless it continues to hold up in the years ahead for these twenty-five cases and until fieldwork-based coding has been completed on a more geographically representative sample of at least fifty, hopefully sixty, armed conflicts. This statistical approach to inference in the Peacebuilding Compared project is relentlessly complemented by a more historical and ideographic attitude to inference contained within single cases.

As illustrated by Sri Lanka's three recent armed conflicts (only two of which qualify for the coding framework of Peacebuilding Compared), a single society, a single war, includes many degrees of freedom that support qualified inference about explanatory dynamics. For example, there are many ethnic riots, many assassinations at different points in the history of a society, from which theoretically relevant consequences might or might not flow. Sri Lanka

is selected as a single society case to assist in the diagnosis of cascade dynamics, first because it is an outlier as an extremely violent society, second because it is a "least likely case" (Eckstein 1975), a case we expect to be least likely to validate hypotheses about violence begetting violence (because violence has worked decisively in ending Sri Lanka's wars). The hope is that better theory emerges from a project that runs for more than twenty years when theory is continuously, provisionally, developed from partial data along the way. Perhaps this is especially so when it is confronted with least likely cases, rather than rushed in a flurry of publication at the completion of overly abstracted data collection.

In the earlier published work on the various cascade dynamics so far detected as recurrent in Peacebuilding Compared, we have considered many other cascade dynamics, such as the way refugees flowing across borders cascade imaginaries of violence and recruitment opportunities for entrepreneurs of violence among the desperate residents of refugee camps. Violence cascades, we hypothesise, when cascades of refugee flows interact with cascades of militarization and authoritarianism.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Lanka was the most consistently violent Asian society across recent decades on Karstedt's Violent Societies Index (2012), though no longer in her most recent data (2014), where Pakistan is the most violent society in Asia and indeed globally. When Sri Lanka was confronted with an existential threat, it responded with security sector crimes that included summary executions, disappearances, torture, intentional bombing of Tamil hospitals, and rape of Tamil refugees (International Crisis Group 2011, 2013; Human Rights Watch 2010; United Nations 2011). These are familiar claims for most readers. They go to hypothesis 3 above (crime and war cascade to state violence). Following a brief overview of the Tamil radicalisation and class radicalisation that are relevant to our arguments, we provide an analysis of early phases of Sri Lanka's conflicts to illustrate hypothesis 1 (crime cascades to war). Then we

<sup>1</sup> Here Sri Lanka is not used as a case study of this wider explanatory framework, but only to consider the above three propositions.

move to hypothesis 2 (war cascades transnationally to more war and more crime). Finally we return to hypothesis 3 on cascades of state crime after considering the paradoxical quality of cascades of crime-war in Sri Lanka.

## 2. Context: Tamil and Class Radicalisation

Sri Lanka's nationbuilding process and the ethnic identity politics of difference (Wickramasinghe 2006; De Silva 2005) are deeply intertwined through a discursive process initiated by the predominantly Sinhalese-Buddhist state elites who took control of the postcolonial state (D'Costa 2013). Class politics, as we will see, was also intertwined with a push-back by radical Sinhalese youth against state elites that cascaded to terrible violence in 1971 and 1987. In our narrative, we will attempt to unpack intersections between the kind of oppression in the Marxist imaginaries of these Sinhalese youth and in the ethnic identity politics of Tamil resistance to their oppression by state elites.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was formed on May 5, 1976, under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran. LTTE was a political party with various military wings, notably the Tigers (armed infantry), Sea Tigers (navy), Air Tigers (airforce) and Black Tigers (expertise in terrorism, including suicide bombing and assassinations).<sup>2</sup> While there were serious ethnic riots alleged to be orchestrated by state actors in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1979, and 1981, the anti-Tamil pogrom commonly known as "Black July" that started on July 23, 1983, was a turning point in Sri Lanka's history. An estimated three thousand Tamils were killed and more than 150,000 became homeless in mob violence that continued for three days. Many viewed the riots as triggered by an LTTE attack in Jaffna, in the Northern Province, that killed thirteen soldiers. A large number of Tamils were displaced and many who were able to leave

moved to other parts of the globe. The LTTE declared its first "Eelam war," marking the beginning of Sri Lanka's long civil war.

After the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of July 29, 1987, the Indian Peacekeeping Forces (IPKF) moved in to enforce peace. The last IPKF contingents withdrew in March 1990, after which the second phase of the "Eelam war" was declared. During this phase the LTTE displaced nearly 75,000 Muslims from the North.<sup>3</sup> After an unsuccessful peace agreement with President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government in 1994, the LTTE declared the third "Eelam war," causing mass displacement and a humanitarian crisis, especially in the Jaffna peninsula and the Vanni region in the north. After a four-year ceasefire, the fourth "Eelam war" was declared following the collapse of the peace process in July 2006.

The LTTE's deliberate recruitment strategies, which in earlier decades might have been supported by some of the population, gradually came to be dreaded. They increased the vulnerabilities of the Tamil population in the Northern and Eastern provinces. While LTTE originally started to recruit women, it also began to recruit children in late 1980s after the India-Sri Lanka Accord. Fighting an insurgency of this composition soon became an enormous challenge for the IPKF.

The fighting cadre of the LTTE comprised 30 percent women. Between 1987 and 2002, it is estimated that four thousand women were killed in combat, including over one hundred suicide bombers from the Black Tigers. Women in the LTTE were responsible for the deaths of prominent figures including Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who was assassinated on May 21, 1991, during his election campaign.

2 The Air Tigers were commanded by LTTE leader Prabhakaran's son Charles Anthony, while the Sea Tigers, an amphibious warfare unit, which mainly consisted of lightweight boats was headed by Col. Soosai, a.k.a. Thilayampalam Sivanesan. A suicide commando unit called the Black Tigers (Karunku Puligal), which launched one of its first attacks against the Sri Lankan army in 1987 causing forty deaths, and an internationally operating intelligence

unit (TOSI) were both headed by Shanmugalingam Sivashanker, better known as Pottu Amman.

3 Although the Muslims from the Tamil-dominated North speak Tamil, they are not generally considered ethnic Tamils. Before 1990s, nearly 5 percent of Sri Lankan Muslims lived in the Northern Province. However, after the emergence of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress in 1981, LTTE leaders perceived Muslims as a threat to the mono-ethnic Tamil

nation and forced them to leave their homes. Researchers estimate that close to 75,000 Muslims were forcibly displaced during the late 1980s and early 1990s ("Briefing: Sri Lanka's Muslim IDPs 25 years on," <http://www.irinnews.org/report/97297/briefing-sri-lanka-s-muslim-idps-25-years-on>, accessed 8 March, 2015).

The majority of the child recruitment by the LTTE occurred in the Vanni region. The United Nations estimates it to comprise 64 percent boys and 36 percent girls. Following LTTE's collapse, there is no new evidence of children being recruited. Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty suggest that the breakaway Tamil Makkal Viduthala Puligal (TMVP), formerly led by Sri Lankan politician and former militant Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (also known as Karuna), has been reconstituted and is now under the control of former LTTE cadre Sivanesanthurai Chandrakanthan (also known as Pillayan). At least sixty persons who were originally recruited as children and are now adults are still associated with the group.

Between September 2007 and May 19, 2009, the Sri Lankan Army carried out a renewed military offensive in the Vanni using large-scale shelling that caused a large number of civilian deaths. Despite the grave danger, the LTTE refused civilians permission to leave and used them as hostages. Throughout the final stages of the war, the LTTE also continued carrying out suicide attacks against civilians outside the Vanni. A panel of experts appointed by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon to advise him on accountability for killing during the final stages of the conflict found "credible allegations" indicating war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by both the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE (UN Report 2011). The Sri Lankan government has refused to comply with repeated United Nations resolutions calling for an international investigation into allegations of serious abuses by both sides in the country's quarter-century civil war, where in the final six months of the conflict up to forty thousand civilians were killed and another six thousand forcibly disappeared (UN Report 2011).

The state's imposition of an economic embargo on the conflict zone between 1990 and early 2002 has been the single most important cause of severe economic and social decline of the Northern and Eastern provinces (Sarvanan-

than 2007).<sup>4</sup> The embargo was in force when the LTTE gained control of Jaffna Peninsula and almost the entire Northern province. Because it was a high security zone (HSZ) and heavily militarized area, peoples' livelihoods were destroyed. Restrictions on fishing and subsistence farming, landmines in agricultural areas, collapse of infrastructure, especially major roads all were results of the area being declared as an HSZ. This intensified ethnic grievances and generated deep divisions between the northeast and the other parts of Sri Lanka. During this period the number of serious crimes also escalated in these areas.

Extreme poverty in the Northern and Eastern provinces contributed to huge regional economic disparities with other regions of Sri Lanka. These two provinces comprise 28 percent of Sri Lanka's total area and 14 percent of the total population. The LTTE controlled 44 percent of the area and 20 percent of the population.<sup>5</sup> While no household survey data are available to include the refugee camps and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the Vanni was perhaps the worst affected by the protracted conflict. The inequality and the economic vulnerability of the population were exacerbated by the fact that two parallel economic authorities existed in the provinces – the government and the LTTE. Illegal taxation by the LTTE to finance its activities and the formation of some administrative units by the LTTE such as the Tamil Eelam Police and the Tamil Eelam Judicial Service squeezed resources from the already vulnerable and impoverished communities. The LTTE was also involved in transnational crime, took relief goods from local and international donors and then sold them to the black market, and forcibly took lands from minority communities (D'Costa 2013).

### 3. Crime Cascades to War in Sri Lanka

Historians do not always take seriously the proposition that crime often cascades to war (MacMillan, 2013). In a sense they are right that this should not be the most central element of cascades of violence theory. Yet perhaps his-

<sup>4</sup> The embargo was in force between 1990 to 1996 on the Jaffna Peninsula and until January 2002 in the Vanni region. Also, there was no electricity in the Vanni region between 1990 and 2002.

<sup>5</sup> This data is valid until July 2006, before the final round of full-scale hostilities between the rebels and the government security forces. For details see Sarvananthan (2007).

torians should treat it more seriously than they do. Sparks that ignite conflagrations matter. At the height of the tinder-dry Australian bushfire season, the structural conditions are of large fires waiting to happen, awaiting the spark that causes the inevitable. Yet there can be no doubt that there would be more fires without education campaigns to dissuade smokers from throwing cigarettes from car windows, campers from lighting fires, rapid response to lightning strikes and to electricity lines needing repair. Likewise, we could think of effective counterterrorism to protect Archduke Ferdinand from assassination in 1914 as a noteworthy path to war prevention not taken (Clarke 2013).<sup>6</sup> It is dangerous to neglect spark prevention. It is a conceit that one could understand structural conditions so well that one could know that a war, especially a world war, is so inevitable that it is hardly worth bothering with the sparks.

Of course most crime does not cascade to war. Most of us commit crimes in our lifetimes, sometimes major ones, without ever causing a war! Likewise, smokers dispose of cigarettes carelessly countless times, without causing a fire that destroys a town. To date in the Peacebuilding Compared data set, some kinds of crimes are repeatedly coded as sparking armed conflicts. Political assassinations, major terrorist acts, and murder and rape in the context of ethnic/religious riots seem particularly important crimes to minimize for societies that seek peace.

The crime-cascades-to-war argument is easier to make today because few would question that the terrorism of September 11, 2001, resulted in a "War on Terror" which included invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran of LTTE for an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka was critical to the escalation of violence. At the start of that war, the LTTE was just one of five major armed groups and another thirty minor ones pushing for Tamil independence. During the 1980s Prabhakaran assassinated leaders of competing groups who did not submit completely to him, liquidating all competing

Tamil insurgency groups. He also murdered LTTE members who questioned his judgment. Understanding the biography of a man who turned his society upside down is no easy matter. Frances Harrison (2012, 234) sees him as an example of trauma being "transmitted from one generation to another, storing up trouble for the future." One story told by his father that greatly affected him was of a Hindu Brahmin (most Tamils are Hindu) in the 1958 riots tied to a bed by the Buddhist Sinhalese mob, doused with petrol and burnt alive (Clarance 2007, 41). Prabhakaran also repeatedly used narratives of other violent crimes committed against Tamils to call for an armed struggle against the state. In a 1984 interview with an Indian magazine, Prabhakaran dubbed the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 the "July Holocaust" and claimed that this experience united all sections of Tamil masses. He stated: "Armed struggle is the only way out for the emancipation of our oppressed people" (Thottam 2009). Prabhakaran is not the only Tiger leader for whom such crimes figured in their biography of their turn to violence.

The assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India in 1991 was both a crime caused by war and a crime that escalated war. It was an event that decisively changed the dynamics of Indian engagement with Sri Lanka's war. After this, the Indian state and intelligence service was no longer playing a balancing game between sometimes currying favor from Tamil politicians in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu by supporting the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka, sometimes supporting the Sri Lankan state to enhance regional stability. After the young female suicide attacker killed Rajiv Gandhi, India's regional military and intelligence might was committed to the ultimate defeat of the Tigers and played a major role, mostly covert, in delivering that military result. It was a result that did not come, however, until domestic Sri Lankan military leaders became convinced that they could and should win militarily. Assassination attempts were also relevant to that change of heart.

<sup>6</sup> Otto von Bismark had a politician's rather than a historian's or sociologist's sensibility when he said "some damned foolish thing in the Balkans" would one day cause a great European war (Harold Evans, "On the Brink", New York Times, 9 May 2014).

Some of our military informants in Sri Lanka argued that their failed assassination attempts on Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, Sri Lankan Secretary of Defence and brother of the President, and army commander General Sarath Fonseka were even bigger LTTE mistakes than assassinating Rajiv Gandhi. These were the two men who persuaded the army that they could defeat the LTTE. Prior to their leadership of the late 2000s, the Sri Lankan military was persuaded by the militarily unsophisticated analysis of the international diplomatic community and Sri Lanka's own strategic elite that LTTE was the world's most militarily powerful terrorist organization. In retrospect, its accomplishments seem less formidable than those of the mujahidin of Afghanistan in driving out the Soviet army and then NATO. One Sri Lankan commander jumped from recognition of the undoubtedly formidable military capability of the LTTE to the inference that defeating it would prove as impossible as it was for France to defeat Ho Chi Minh's army in Vietnam. According to our interviews, this was the answer one of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga's five most senior military commanders gave on one occasion when she asked each for their assessment of the feasibility of abandoning peace talks in favor of a fully military solution. It was an answer that reflected the thinking of the Norwegian leadership of the post-2002 peace process,<sup>7</sup> of European Union diplomats generally, and of the US State Department.<sup>8</sup> Fonseka served as the commander of the Sri Lankan army from December 2005 until mid-July 2009 and led the military to victory against the LTTE. However, he fell out with the government and challenged President Rajapaksa unsuccessfully during the subsequent election. Two weeks after his defeat, he was arrested and convicted by a military court on four counts of corruption in defence deals,

bypassing military procedures in purchasing equipment, and nepotism.

The military defeat of the Tigers in 2009 can be read as a refutation of the cascade hypothesis. While thousands were killed in the final year of the long conflict, the government victory has resulted in a cessation of war deaths and almost complete cessation of Tamil terror. In other words, instead of cascading to more violence, the extreme violence of 2009 seemed to end further violence rather decisively (for more examples, see Toft 2010). There is strong evidence that as long as LTTE leader Prabhakaran was alive, he would have used peace talks to regroup, recruit, and eliminate Tamil leaders who supported peace. Thus, it may always have been the case that a military solution was feasible and the most likely path to ending the killing. We do not argue that violence always cascades to further violence. Rather in our forthcoming book we make good use of the Sri Lankan case to inductively build an account of the contexts and ways in which violence does and does not cascade. As with all social science propositions, often it proves downright wrong that violence cascades. Nevertheless, even at this point of maximum invalidity in South Asia, we diagnose the cascade framework as providing fertile insights and correctives to offer the discerning analyst. Let us then turn to how one should salvage explanatory relevance of cascade hypotheses even in this least likely case (Eckstein 1975) of violence ending violence. A least likely case is a tough test of an explanation because it explores a context where the explanation is least likely to be true.

The hypothesis that violence cascades causes us to critique the maximalist way the Sri Lankan army conducted the

7 "[Lead Norwegian diplomat] Eric Solheim had a meeting with President Rajapaksa in late March 2006 where he told the president that Prabhakaran was a military genius and that it would be suicidal to take him on" (Chandraprema 2012, 312).

8 In our interview with the Sri Lankan military commander General Sarath Fonseka, he said that during the 2000s Pentagon analysts would engage very sympathetically with his analysis that he could militarily defeat the LTTE quite quickly. While US military leaders found that credible, State Department officials saw military defeat of the LTTE as unrealistic. Fonseka described the reaction of the

British High Commissioner in Sri Lanka after the July 21, 2006, LTTE provocation of closing the sluice gates that cut off Eastern province farmers from irrigation for their crops. After the LTTE had been routed in the region around the gates by August 14, Fonseka said the High Commissioner warned him that he should not assume that military victory in this region could be replicated across the North. Fonseka's critique of Western diplomats was that they were always talking up the impossibility of military defeat of LTTE. Among the people who believed the Western diplomats' analysis was the LTTE itself and the Tamil diaspora who funded

LTTE's military folly and kept pushing for a maximalist military solution. From the moment of that military defeat around the sluice gates, Western diplomats should have been warning Tamil leaders that they must persuade Prabhakaran that military defeat was certain if he did not genuinely embrace a political settlement. General Fonseka's comment in our 2013 interview was: "It probably would not have worked. Prabhakaran probably would not have been convinced. But that would have been the right way to go for the international community and the political leadership of Sri Lanka to work together to end terrorism."

final slaughter of the war. The insistence of the Sri Lankan government that the United Nations quit the North of Sri Lanka eight months before the final onslaught and the lack of UN insistence on its responsibility to protect civilians permitted a more vast slaughter than would otherwise have occurred. Greater slaughter, in the cascades account, builds the potential for larger future cascades of violence. A minimally sufficient military victory will induce lesser cascade dynamics. The ruthlessness and authoritarianism of the unaccountable power afflicted on the Tamil civilians of 2009 became part of a vicious cycle of unaccountable and violent authoritarianism imposed by the victorious regime over all Sri Lankans. Ending the war was politically popular, especially among the Sinhala majority; it was sold as a necessary kind of unaccountable power of the military and the President. Once a long period of wartime unaccountability is entrenched, those who hold power are reluctant to surrender it, especially when they can sell a narrative about the risk of the enemy rising again. Torture and disappearances for the opposition, and impunity of the regime for war crimes, are not the best policies for averting long-term cycles of violence. As Goodhand and Korf put it:

The Rajapaksa government may have thrown off the shackles of the "peace trap", and successfully, in its own terms, pursued a war for peace, but escaping the "war trap" may be more difficult, as the coalitions and alliances constructed to pursue the war may impede its ability to forge a new broad-based political settlement for lasting peace (Goodhand and Korf 2011, 2).

The Sri Lankan state became a family firm of President Rajapaksa until his defeat in 2015, a state sheared of many of the constitutional checks and balances of its independence constitution. As one party leader put it in our 2013 interview: "The country today is run by criminals. Big business belongs to the criminals."<sup>9</sup> Sri Lanka under President Rajapaksa acquired a form of crony capitalism where the ruling Rajapaksa brothers got a slice of the action from much of both the legitimate economy and the criminal economy. Two of President Rajapaksa's brothers were the two most influential members of his government's inner

circle. The military was that part of the family firm controlled by Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa. Before the Rajapaksa government, Sri Lanka was significantly under the control of a shadow government of a handful of criminal business entrepreneurs who used their income from control of gambling, drugs, prostitution, smuggling, and human trafficking to buy individual journalists, television stations, and newspapers in order to shape the political environment. From that base, these business criminals moved up to control blue-chip companies. After the 2009 military victory, the shadow government of organized business criminals who were once the puppeteers of political leaders became the puppets of the brothers. Sri Lanka waits in hope to see whether the defeat of President Rajapaksa in the 2015 election by a senior defector from his own regime, President Maithripala Sirisena, will temper crony capitalism.

Blame for the maximalist slaughter and war crimes also lies with Prabhakaran. His engagement with a succession of peace processes was always tactical, less genuine than anyone on the other side of the table. Even at the end, LTTE orders to shoot civilians who tried to surrender contributed to the slaughter (one war crime causing another). So did Prabhakaran's decision to have his commanders attempt to sneak through the enemy lines wearing suicide vests to use should they fail (Harrison 2012, 67). They all did fail. When they were shot in suicide vests, the army could use this to justify murdering surrendering civilians. They also used an incident in February 2009 when the Tigers sent a female suicide bomber to mingle with a group of escaping civilians; this operation killed twenty soldiers receiving them plus eight civilians (Harrison 2012, 102). That is not to excuse the mass murder of civilians, thirty-two artillery or air attacks on hospitals recorded by Human Rights Watch or the Red Cross, or the indiscriminate bombing of the final UN food convoy of the war (Harrison 2012, 90–91, 240). It does, however, help explain mass murder in terms of a cascade of violence involving suicide vests (invented by LTTE to be cascaded globally mainly by Islamic jihadists). From Iraq to Afghanistan to Yemen to Pakistan, innocent

<sup>9</sup> This was the leader of the Marxist Party, JVP, which led the uprisings discussed in the next two sections of this paper.



civilians are now repeatedly killed somewhere in the world on suspicion of being a suicide bomber.

Somasundaram argues that the development of the Tamil militancy and the LTTE suicide bombers can best be understood in terms of socio-cultural and political contexts (2010, 423). He observes that while Tamils in Sri Lanka had often been stereotyped as somewhat submissive, the suicide cadres had developed very quickly following the 1983 riots. Somasundaram argues that "social sanction for a group to behave violently can bring out aggressive acts they had learnt or seen" and this increased the participation of Tamil youth in suicide attacks (2010, 422). Prabhakaran also advocated the cult of cyanide capsules to Tamil rebels who were instructed to commit suicide rather than be captured by the state. This was the worst way that violence cascaded globally from Sri Lanka. It was the cascade of violence that gave the Sri Lankan state the green light from the United States, India, and China to "do what it takes to fight terrorism." The prominence of that terror cascade in the calculations of the great powers was heightened by the Sea Tigers' innovation of a suicide boat that speeds toward a navy ship; this was replicated by jihadists against the USS Cole in 2000.

A cascades analysis does not say military solutions never work. Our least-likely case analysis suggests that military solutions, even when they work, cascade violence. Hence, it warns that maximalist military solutions risk more virulent cascades of violence than minimalist ones. Second, it counsels mobilizing the spectre of military defeat to motivate peace negotiations when military defeat is in reality a credible possibility (as in Iraq-Kuwait 1990, Sri Lanka 2009). This is a better option with the Saddam Husseins and Prabhakarans of this world than purely facilitative diplomacy that fails to be assertive with military reality checks. It is a philosophy of preventive diplomacy as something that must be asserted, fail and fail again in multiple creative modalities before taking the risk with cascades of violence. One of those last chance modalities involves laying out the full brutality of the worst possible military consequences of

shunning a political settlement. This is not best done by making threats, but by third party diplomats laying out the military reality check. Western diplomats share some blame for the cascades of violence from Sri Lanka for their failure to open their minds to the military reality and then to use it to try to motivate a diplomatic solution.

#### 4. Crime-War and Security Dilemmas of the JVP: From Class Struggle to Ethnic Separatism

This section continues the analysis of hypothesis 1 (crime cascades to war). It does so, however, by considering two other wars that immediately preceded the take-off of the Tamil insurgency. The first of these JVP civil wars was in 1971. War recurred in 1987–1989 when a Sinhala nationalist and Marxist political party, the Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna (Peoples' Liberation Front, hereinafter JVP),<sup>10</sup> took up arms against the state. Many JVP activists had disappeared before the conflict and thousands by the end of it. Many were also tortured and female activists were raped by the security forces (as also happened with LTTE women). This state crime was important to the onset of the cascade of violence that occurred.

The various phases of conflicts demonstrate that economic interests have played a major role in Sri Lankan ethnic rivalry. The class theories model of ethnic conflict (Horowitz 1985, chap. 3) demonstrates that there may be diversity of conflict motives among different classes of the society. The economic rivalries between traders vs traders, clients vs traders/merchants, landowners vs labourers, labourers vs labourers may all further accentuate differences marked by ethnic lines. In the mid-1980s, JVP's financial support base was small entrepreneurs based in Colombo who either experienced rivalry from Tamil businesses or had difficulty in obtaining credit from banks that they believed were under disproportionate Tamil influence (Ponnambalam 1981). JVP led an unsuccessful youth rebellion in 1971, which was crushed with a loss of four to ten thousand lives, and another armed uprising in 1987–89 that again was put down at a cost of perhaps forty thousand or more lives (Gunaratna 2001, 105, 269).

10 Following the split within the Ceylon Communist Party in 1963 roused by the Sino-Soviet conflict, Sri Lanka's largest leftist party, JVP, was founded in

1965. JVP has been described as "hydra-headed" and "phoenix-like" for its ability to regenerate despite being violently annihilated by the state.

Just as the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and the attempts on Rajapatsa and Fonseka were crimes that escalated plans for war, we can see that kind of cascade in the origins of the JVP uprisings in Sri Lanka. In our interviews, JVP leaders stressed that they turned to armed struggle because their party was being tyrannized by state violence in the form of arbitrary arrests, torture, and disappearances. In the literature (Gunaratna 2001, 269) and in our interviews, it was often said that the most fatal mistake JVP made was to announce that if members of the military and the police did not defect to them, they would kill their families. Some JVP members, without actually being ordered to do so by the JVP leadership, then indeed proceeded to kill family members of the security forces. They had delusions about their own power because they had already persuaded two thousand soldiers to desert, many to join JVP (Gunaratna 2001: 328).<sup>11</sup> Erroneously, they calculated that by threatening military families in the conditions of extreme uncertainty they had created by December 1988, when around a hundred people were being assassinated every day (Gunaratna 2001: 267), larger sections of the military might defect to them. Instead, JVP triggered a cascade of slaughter of their own cadres. The security forces recruited hit squads of soldiers and police whose family members had been killed by JVP (Gunaratna 2001, 333, 338–39). They had no compunction about executing the systematic killing of the entire leadership of the JVP. Once almost all Politbureau and Central Committee members had been killed, the insurrection collapsed. On the other side, it was likewise a case of crime enabling civil war: "The JVP concentrated on recruiting members from houses set on fire and families in which brothers or fathers were killed or a female harassed or raped" (Gunaratna 2001, 295).

With the JVP uprisings, a Marxist imaginary cascaded violence:

Where there was a lot of influence on both JVP and LTTE from Marxism was when it comes to armed struggle. People thought, especially oppressed people thought, the best way was armed

struggle because of the Marxist influence. They thought that killing was a good way to liberation. . . JVP and LTTE had the same heroes. It was not Gandhi. It was [advocates of violence like] Bose, Mao, Che, Castro. (1971 JVP leader interview 091338 in 2013)

Assassinations on both sides in the failed JVP uprising of 1971 motivated both to settle scores in 1987. The security forces argued that the government had erred in not wiping JVP out in 1971. In 1987 this perception also encouraged the security forces to believe that unless we wipe them out first, this time they will wipe out not only us but our families. This perceived security dilemma magnified and cascaded common criminal threats into an imperative for war.<sup>12</sup> Deputy Inspector General of Police Premadasa Uduganpiola, the most efficient, ruthless death squad leader, who had lost his wife, children, mother, and brother to JVP said: "I did not want a Pol Pot regime to come" (Gunaratna 2001, 340). Even more interesting is the considerable data supporting the analysis that the JVP prematurely resorted to armed struggle against the government by attempting to capture the armouries of seventy-four police stations on April 5, 1971, and then abduct the prime minister and senior ministers, because of their analysis that if they did not strike first, the state would wipe them out in the way that the Indonesian government had wiped out its communist party in 1965 (Cooke 2011, 122, 135; our interviews). That security dilemma analysis of JVP in 1971 was exaggerated because the Sri Lankan security forces did not see JVP as the threat that the Indonesian security forces saw in their communist party of 1965; the latter was the largest in the world outside China and the USSR and already wielded great power inside Sukarno's government. Cascades of imaginaries can be as important as cascades of action. Imaginaries of pre-emptive violence are spread by networks, in this case Marxist networks that conceived a security dilemma, even if it was not fully grounded in reality. What the security dilemma realities are matters little if key actors imagine that when they fail to act decisively to kill the enemy, the enemy will do so to them.

<sup>11</sup> Others among these deserters and the estimated twenty thousand deserters from the long war against the Tamil insurgency (Gunaratna 2001, 368) became members of armed criminal gangs who did armed

robberies, kidnapping for ransom, and contract killing, among other activities (a war leads to crime dynamic internal to the victorious army).

<sup>12</sup> So far in the Peacebuilding Compared coding, security dilemmas mediate the magnification of violence in only some of the cases.

Preventive diplomacy was needed in 1971 to persuade JVP that they were not in that security dilemma and that parliamentary politics was a more plausible path to power (which became a reality in 2004 when JVP became the third force in the Sri Lankan parliament with forty-one seats and various ministerial portfolios). It was true that state crime against JVP cadres was also a cause of the 1971 uprising. So what we have here is serious state crime that needed to cease combined with an imagined security dilemma imported from state violence in Indonesia that triggered a cascade of JVP violence, that in turn triggered a cascade of state violence. All this was allowed to cascade for want of preventive diplomacy to provide a reality check to the immature political minds of the JVP cadres of 1971, whose average age was twenty (Gunaratna 2001, 119). More mature minds might have persuaded them that they were not in as dire a security dilemma as they believed (or propagandized).

Our hypothesis is that the two JVP uprisings helped create a culture of violence and a legacy of untreated trauma in Sri Lanka. Beyond these profound ways that JVP violence contributed to crime (hypothesis 2), and was caused by it (hypothesis 1), in both uprisings common crime to steal guns was the principal way JVP armed. In addition, there were hundreds of major robberies planned by JVP from September 1986 of money, gold and other valuables that allowed them to buy guns (Gunaratna 2001, 267). Gunaratna describes this crime wave as contributing to anomie, a state of disorder where citizens no longer knew who was in charge or what the rules of social order were:

The gradual build up of crime and the accompanying brutalization of the society was followed by the emergence of a lawless, a policyless and a leaderless nation. Two governments had emerged [JVP was called the "night government"] and the people did not know whom to support and follow. (Gunaratna 2001, 270)

##### 5. Paradoxes of the Cascades Between LTTE and JVP Violence

This section pursues greater complexity and nuance with hypothesis 2: that war cascades to more war and more crime. JVP always tended to be a Sinhala nationalist group and still is. It chose to reignite its uprising in 1987 because it believed that Sinhala dignity was challenged by the presence of an Indian peacekeeping force on Sri Lankan soil. JVP

argued that the Sri Lankan government was allowing their country to be held hostage to Tamil division and Indian imperial designs. There was paradox therefore that LTTE had provided weapons, landmines, explosives, and training to JVP to weaken a Sri Lankan military that would have to fight on two fronts (Gunaratna 2001, 133). The LTTE threat cascaded through the intentional agency of LTTE strategists of violence who helped make JVP a more credible threat.

In the late 1980s the Sri Lankan state was suffering military defeats at the hands of the LTTE. It seemed to lead a society that was disintegrating. For that reason, the state at first welcomed Indian peacekeepers. Initially, Sri Lankan leaders hoped the Indians could get LTTE under control while they concentrated on subjugating JVP in the South. The next paradox was that JVP nationalist propaganda pilloried the state for its weakness in surrendering Sinhala sovereignty to the Indians. Indian intervention redefined JVP politics in Sri Lanka (Uyangoda 2008). This resonated in the South and built support for JVP. It helped destabilize President Jayewardene, who lost power in 1989. Consequently, his successor, President Premadasa, was minded to convince the unpopular Indian peacekeepers to leave. Then came the next paradoxical cascade, of the government of Sri Lanka replenishing the firepower of its principal enemy, the LTTE, so it could inflict more losses on the Indians. This it did, killing twelve hundred Indian peacekeepers. The peacekeepers had initially been fairly popular among Tamils; many Tamils were protected from the LTTE by the peacekeepers, and protected as a result of the pause from the more general ravages of war. LTTE maneuvered to undermine this Tamil civilian goodwill by firing on Indian troops from inside places of worship and other locales where Indian return fire would kill many Tamil civilians. Incidents of rape of Tamil women and other misconduct by demoralized Indian peacekeepers, who in our interviews found it hard to understand why they were there being killed, also made the cascade worse.

When a country at war has four combatants – a state military, the Indian military, JVP and LTTE – and where, as we have seen, some combatants chose not only to escalate violence against enemies but also against "friends" who might resist their enemies as a result, cascades of violence can become convoluted and virulent (see Karstedt 2012 for a

discussion of this phenomenon including in the waves of violence in Sri Lanka). Organized crime then sees opportunities to enrol political parties to their projects, even to seek to take them over as some interviewees alleged organized crime interests did with the JVP. More mundanely, a climate of extreme violence created opportunities for Sri Lankan organized crime to promote protection rackets, in turn nurturing a political culture of corruption. Suicide (self-violence) also trebled between the 1960s and 1990s in Sri Lanka (Gombrich 2006, 25). Sri Lankans became inured to a culture of disappearances.

While we do not document cascades of state crime and combatant crime in detail here, it must be noted that abductions, disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, rape, and sexual violence were rampant in Sri Lanka during its twenty-six years of protracted warfare. Human rights organizations and the United Nations document narratives of torture and killings (see Amnesty International 2013; Human Rights Watch 2011; UN Report 2011). Various regimes were quite open about making the fact of torture a common knowledge. "Disfigured heads and bodies were displayed openly to serve as a warning to the public. Such atrocities became commonplace. The existence of at least eight such torture chambers was discovered by a Commission investigating disappearances in four provinces" (Commission of Inquiry into Involuntary Removal or Disappearance of Person in the Western, Southern and Sabaragamuwa Provinces 1997, 34). In our interviews, Tamil activists also reported that there had been an increase in disappearances following the failed 2005 peace process. Human rights activists and Sri Lankan Tamils living in Jaffna and Colombo were frequently "white vanned". White vans without number plates picked up people who were usually never seen again. Incidents of enforced disappearances continue even at present, though at a much lower level. A recent in-depth report that includes interviews with forty witnesses of sexual violence and torture notes that the witnesses had only been released after their family paid a large bribe to the security forces, most often brokered by a member of the EPDP or by well

connected persons in Sri Lanka (Sooka 2014, 43).<sup>13</sup> Domination dynamics that cascade from cascades among the four major combatant forces down to individuals take many forms: cascades of exclusion, militarism, cronyism, corruption and money politics, cascades of state terror and cascades of class politics, among other domination dynamics.

### 6. Conclusion: Multiplicity in Crime-War Dynamics

Archer and Gartner (1984) showed that homicide rates rise after nations participate in wars at home or abroad (supporting hypothesis 2). There are other war-crime dynamics beyond those considered here that feed this result. We have illustrated but a few. These include war in Sri Lanka cascading to rape, during the war and in refugee camps afterwards, followed by murder to eliminate witnesses; war cascading to militarization of a society in which army officers steal land and businesses from people; war cascading to crony capitalism in which a ruling family loots the nation, corrupts accountability institutions and causes political opponents to disappear. In our forthcoming book, we catalogue in more detail war to crime cascades across South Asia in and between India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Afghanistan (Braithwaite and D'Costa forthcoming).

Many of the data points that drive the Archer and Gartner (1984) result are countries that experience elevated homicide rates after participation in wars that end with a peace forged by military victory – World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War. At one level, major cases like these and Sri Lanka where peace is achieved through military victory do refute the simple hypothesis that war cascades to more war (consider Toft 2010). A cascade approach helps us unpack simple causation models that read Sri Lanka as a case of nonviolence secured through violence. We might likewise unpack World War I, World War II and the Indo-China War as cases that each included a cascade to genocide (to a Turkish genocide against Armenians with World War I, Nazi genocide against Jews, Roma, and other non-Aryan peoples such as disabled and LGT people with World War II, and Khmer Rouge genocide against class enemies of the new

13 The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) is a political party and a pro-government paramilitary organization in Sri Lanka.

Maoist Cambodia that included supporters of the defeated pro-US Lon Nol government, non-Maoist intellectuals, professionals, monks, and people of Vietnamese and Chinese ancestry with the Indo-China war). Each of these genocides cascaded refugees who triggered other conflicts in places like Palestine; refugees from the Khmer Rouge (who mostly fled to Vietnam) encouraged the cascade to a Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. *Within* each of these wars where military victory caused a peace, a war between A and B drags in C, which in turn drags in D and E. The fact that the cascade dynamics internal to these wars are so profound is what leads us to call two of them World Wars and to call what started as the Vietnam War the Indo-China War. Sri Lanka is not a case like these mega wars where large numbers of national armies are dragged in. Yet we can see the state military victory in the first JVP uprising as creating conditions not only for peace, but for the second JVP uprising and the Tamil war, just as we can see this with respect to World War I creating conditions for World War II.

So we have illustrated how we must unpack cascades internal to a country case, and internal to a single war, to understand the ways in which the peace-through-war script in Sri Lanka is not quite right. Just as Sri Lanka is not a case that cascades to world war, it is also not a case like Iraq (2003), El Salvador (Richani 2007), and various African cases where more people are killed by homicides, state violence, and armed gang violence after the peace agreement was signed than were being killed during the war. Even so, Sri Lanka powerfully demonstrates the cascade dynamics of homicide leading to war and war leading to homicide.

Our research program conceives these as rather general dynamics. For example, in deciding to invade Iraq, Presi-

dent Bush's inner circle undertook a static analysis of the cost and desirability of regime change in Iraq (see Woodward 2002, 2004; Loban 2013) rather than any recursive analysis of possible cascades. Our policy inference, of course, is that such decisions will be better if they are open to recursive diagnosis of cascade risks. President Bush did not weigh the costs of a crime wave in Iraq that took more lives than the invasion (Iraq Body Count 2012). More academics have been killed in Iraq (448) through kidnapping, suicide bombs and other violence than coalition forces up to the time of President Bush's "Mission Accomplished" declaration (Griffis 2014). President Bush did not weigh waves of traumatized young American soldiers returning home to inflict violence on their families and on themselves. Nor was there any factoring in of the threat to American constitutional values that state crime at institutions like Abu Graib, Guantanamo Bay, extraordinary rendition to totalitarian regimes like that of Libya, would have on the fabric of American society or on the lives of young Americans like Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning who exposed these state crimes. He did not weigh the risk of cascades to civil war that could empower something like Islamic State, led by a former inmate of Abu Graib prison.

Obversely, our analysis causes us to reconsider the importance to war prevention of sharpened security sector and crime prevention competence. Improved democratic policing that might have prevented the anti-Tamil riots of 1956, 1958, 1977, 1979, 1981, and 1983 that so shaped the imagination of young LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran,<sup>14</sup> improved policing that might have prevented his assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, are counterfactuals we can-

14 In this context, we mean democratic policing that is not captured by a ruling party or a dominant ethnic group, but that acts decisively to protect the rights of citizens of all ethnicities and parties. Across South Asia – in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, as well as Sri Lanka – there is a deep pathology of police being politicized rather than playing an independent role in a separation of powers that sees them douse sparks of communal violence, whichever group is injured first. Braithwaite and D'Costa (forthcoming) see this as a cascade of violence from a colonial policing of the Raj that was politicized to

defend British interests. We see the importance of this policing pathology in Wilkinson's (2004) research that shows a history of cascades of violence of this type across hundreds of such communal riots in India. Where the police do show resolve to prevent violence from spreading, to smother the sparks, they have overwhelmingly succeeded in doing so throughout Indian history. Wilkinson found that the cases where there is a lot of killing are cases where the police fail to show resolve. Failure of resolve in turn occurs because their state government is politically reluctant to allow the police to control a group

that delivers electoral support to the party in power. One reason low-intensity Maoist insurgencies afflict some rural areas of half India's states is that state political leaders have tolerated them or encouraged them. State leaders' tolerance is because the insurgents mostly killed party-political opponents of those state leaders in the regions Maoists control (Chadha 2005: 375-6; Routray 2012:319). Likewise in Nepal, the king tolerated Maoist killings for years because they were killing his republican enemies in the democratic parties (Braithwaite and D'Costa, forthcoming).

not empirically test.<sup>15</sup> Yet we can hesitate to dismiss them as sparks that if extinguished would inevitably be followed by other sparks that light identical conflagrations. Extinguishing sparks that ignite wars is not as important as tackling root causes of those wars such as the domination of Tamils, discrimination and violence against Tamils by a Sinhala nationalist state. Yet it is important.

Peacebuilders can be attentive to redressing root causes of regional cascades of violence at the same time as they also work at dampening all types of cascade dynamics. States

and the UN can be moderate in deploying military power to guarantee a responsibility to protect civilians. It is possible to demand a political process and political transition backed by military might that threatens regime change, without moving with maximal force to war as the instrument of regime change. When diplomacy and military deployment becomes more like that, extremely violent legacy societies like Sri Lanka, parts of the former Yugoslavia, and Palestine can become less common. That at least is one policy hypothesis that motivates the ongoing inductive work of Peacebuilding Compared.

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<sup>15</sup> Similar arguments about improved policing can be made about Archduke Ferdinand's assassination in 1914 that sparked the Great War.

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