

Military Presence in the Northern Province after the War and Challenges to Peacebuilding

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Background

The most terrorized period in the contemporary history of Sri Lanka was ended with the defeat of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009. Consequently, Northern Province Council election was held in September 2013 and Tamil National Alliance (TNA) won it exclusively. However, it is appeared that ending of a war also brings some internal and communal needs that need to be addressed (Ramsbotham, et al:2005), transformation of deep-rooted armed conflicts into peaceful one does not come easy (Rupasinghe:1995) and Sri Lanka is not exceptional (Orjuela:2002). TNA along with 'Tamil Diaspora', some European countries and international organizations alleged that military still occupy lands and houses, systematically building up its deployment and strength in the peninsula, and thereby obstructing the progress of the province with its heavy military presence. The foremost demand of them is removal of military apparatuses and stop military being mingled with the public in Northern Province (TNA Manifesto: 2013). Government refuted that, citing deployment of military in Northern Province is for national security as in all other provinces and military still has a role to play in post-war situation. Thus, this research is engaged to explore rationality of these two standpoints.

Research Problem

Peaceful environment in Northern Province after the war is characterized with military working side by side with civil organisations and government agencies, from security to infrastructure development. That apparent military presence seems to indicate that there should be some rationality in the Sri Lankan state's decision to continue military presence in the Northern Province despite the LTTE's military defeat, especially in the absence of possibilities for an armed struggle in near future. How it affect the peacebuliding effort in the Northern Province after the war, and whether it poses a challenge to the same need to be ascertained in unearthing that rationality.

Objectives

1. Explore the rationality behind the deployment of military in Northern Province where there is no apparent armed action or any likelihood of disturbance at present.
2. Identify the common challenges in relation to military presence that posed at the stake holder after the war.
3. Ascertain the role of military in post-war Northern Province and how well it is being accepted by the people.

Research Methodology

In order to view these issues objectively, government and military officials were asked to explain the rationality behind the deployment of military where there is no apparent armed activity. Politicians from Northern Province, community leaders and common people were asked how they view the role of military in post-war Northern Province and how well military is being accepted. Then all stake holders were asked about the challenges they face and perceived in their effort towards peacebuilding. Having aligned with Positivism, the research gathered opinions of the stake holders by employing both quantitative and qualitative data collecting tools, and compared and contrasted them each other and the data obtained through the literature review to avoid any bias opinion in the overall outcome.

The argument of this research is that, in order to achieve ‘positive peace’ without limiting to ‘negative peace’ (Galtung, 1976), actions of civil actors and military actors in post-war should be focused on different levels of people’s ‘needs’ and address the ‘interests’ of people without trying to change their ‘positions’ (Maiese:2004). The research formulated a model named “Conceptual Pyramid” as illustrated by the Figure 1 below, incorporating the “three dimensions of post-conflict peacebuilding” introduced by Barnett et al (Barnett:2007), Key Elements of the “Agenda for Peacebuilding” of UN (UN, 1992) and also Claytons’ ERG Theory (Alderfor:1972), ascending through which one can reach up to the ‘positive peace line’.

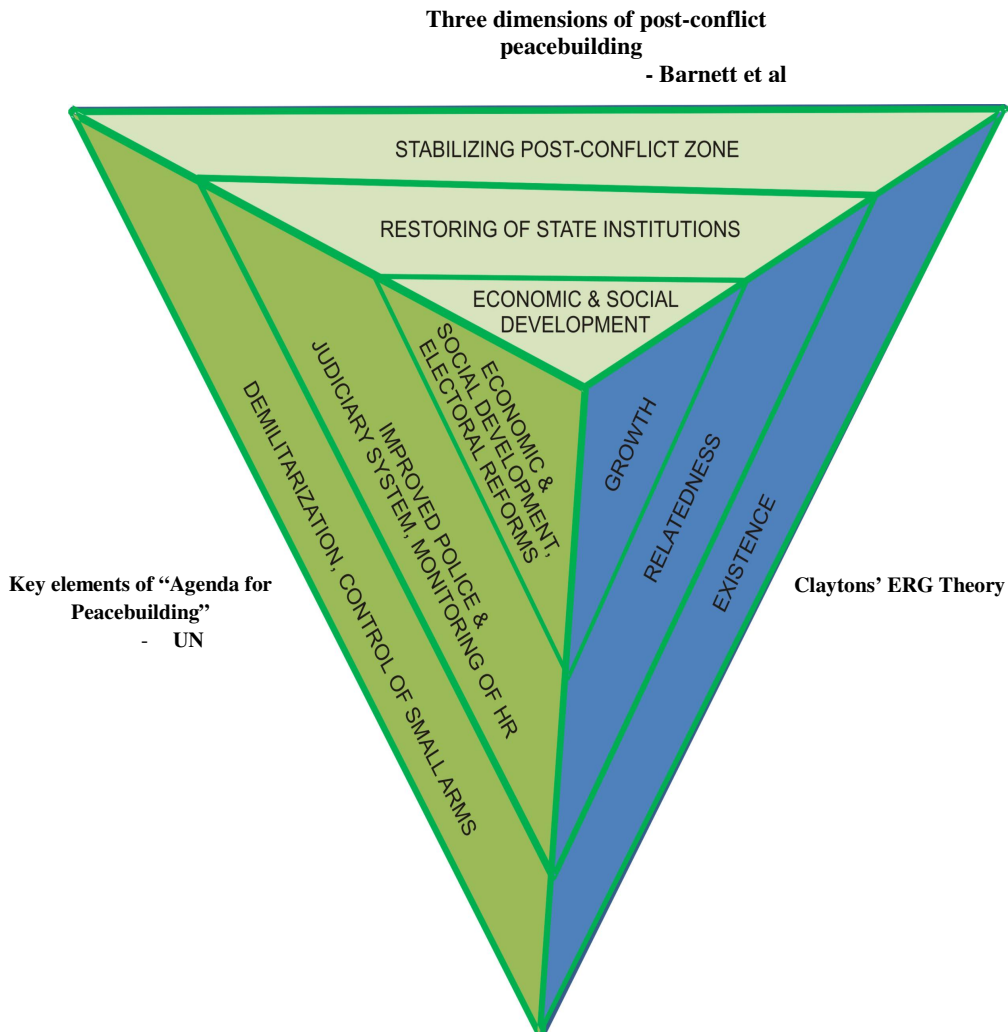


Figure 1: Conceptual Pyramid

Key Findings

1. More than ‘normal’ military presence after a war has been a common factor in the contemporary world and security is inevitably a priority in a post-war too. Nevertheless, military should be seen as complementary, not competitive to the effort of peacebuilding.

2. According to Public and military officials, the Northern Province is of utmost important to the national defence and territorial integrity, and military presence is essential for even general and social reasons such as coastal defense, anti-smuggling operations and disaster relief. Challenges in relation to military presence are;

- a. Separatist ideology.
- b. Support from abroad for extreme elements, smuggling of war-like equipment and revamping armed groups.
- c. False allegation of war crimes/sexual abuses/HR violations.
- d. Resettlement of IDPs.
- e. Demining.
- f. Releasing of private lands occupied by military.

3. According to Northern Province politicians, challenges in relation to military presence are:

- a. ‘Militarization’.
- b. Occupying of lands by military.
- c. Sense of fear within Tamil women, and army trying to do the duty of police.
- d. Destroying Kovils and constructing Buddhist shrines where there are no Buddhists live.

4. However, the only issue that the sampled population shared as a challenge, out of the issues mentioned in paragraph 2 above was, ‘occupying of lands by the military’.

5. Opinions of the sampled population:

- a. Check points:

| | |
|------------------------------|----------|
| “Should be manned by Police” | - 55.81% |
| “Should be manned by Army” | - 36% |
- b. Continuation of the involvement of military in social works:

| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| “Should continue” | - 71.56% |
| “Should not continue” | - 22.56% |

- c. Number of Army Camps:
 “Army camps should be less than the number of Police stations” - 55%
 “No army camps at all” - 0.73%
- d. Ability of Police in handling armed gangs and provide security for individuals and villages:
 “Police cannot” - 48.52%
 “Police can” - 45.98%
- e. Possibility of Armed Gangs in Future:
 “There is no possibility” - 63.63%
 “There is possibility” - 30.07%
- f. Role of the military after the war:
 “Army is doing what they should be doing after the war” - 66.59%
 “Army is not doing what it should have been doing after the war”- 24.89%
- g. The most critical issues (as illustrated by Figure 1):
 Employment, Education and other needs (“Needs”) - 58.56%
 Peace and Freedom (“Environment”) - 35.25%

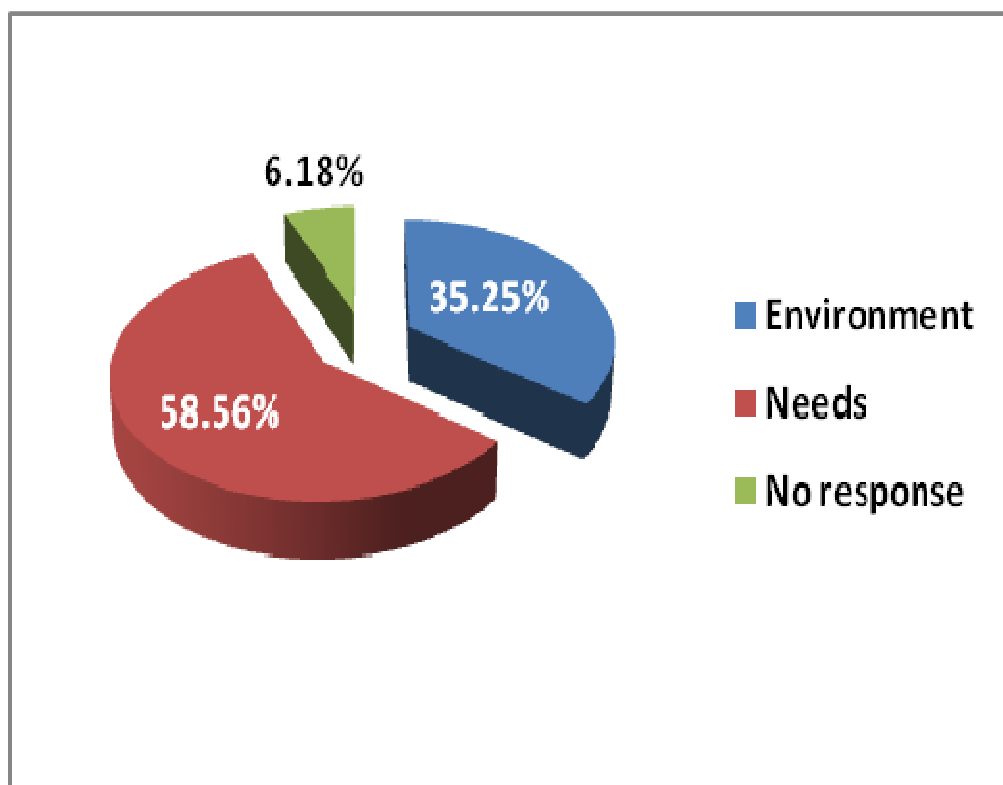
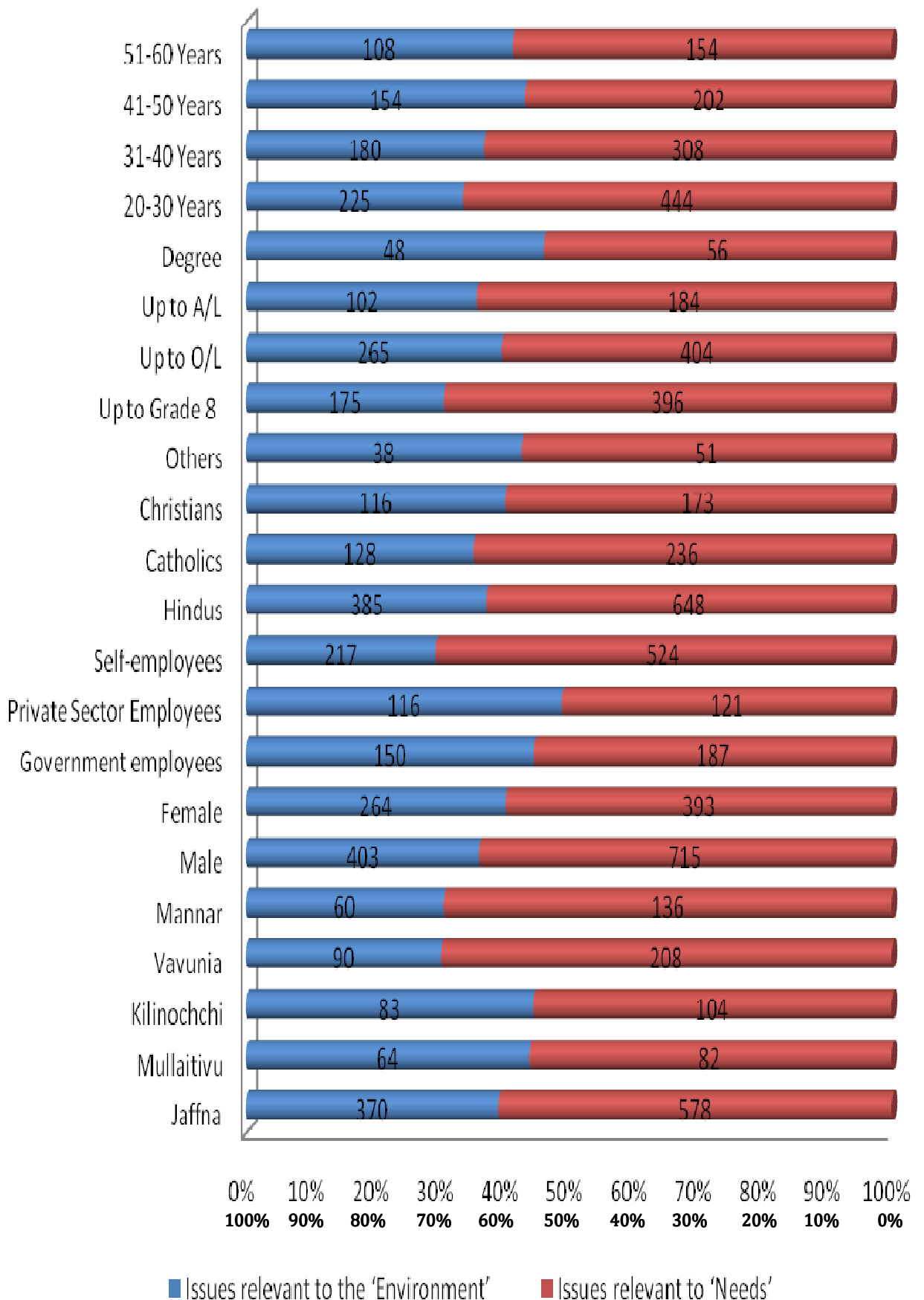


Figure: 1 “Environment” vs. “Needs”

Opinions of the sub societies of the sampled population above in identifying the most 'critical issues' are further illustrated by the Graph1 below:



Graph 1: Opinion of Sub Societies - Environment vs. Needs

The Graph 1 above brings out following:

- (1) High concern of the 'Self employees' as a whole on the "Needs" (education, employment, other needs) over the "Environment" (peace, freedom) is finely demonstrated by 70.71% to 29.287% in favour of 'Needs'.
- (2) Within the sampled population in the categories of Jaffna, Vavunia, Mannar, and also the Male, Hindu, Catholic and aged 20 - 40 have shown one common trend. The number that says 'Needs' is the most critical issue is almost twice the number that says 'Environment' is the most critical. This trend is appeared in all education groups as well (up to Grade 8, up to O/L and up to A/L) except 'Degree holders' category.
- (3) Another significant factor emerged is the almost equal amount of concern for both factors i.e. "Environment" and "Needs", shown by the 'Private sector employees' and 'Degree holders'. It's a kind of behavior in line with the teaching of Claytons' ERG Theory, i.e. even when the focus is for higher 'Needs', a person may regress to lower level needs.

Conclusion

Military presence in Northern Province has been a contentious issue between the Government and the Provincial Council from its inception. Although it is a common belief that security and peace should move ahead abreast, connotation of those two words appeared different to different parties and seems to be based on rather 'positions' that leaders maintained over the years according to their perceptions, than contemporary 'interests' of the commons on the ground. It is evident that although war is over and 'negative peace' as articulated by scholars was ushered, the 'positive peace' is yet to be dawn and challenges to peacebuilding are out there in abundance, which need to be arrested by both government and Northern politicians together for a better tomorrow, not only for Northern Province but for whole Sri Lanka.

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