

12-1-2000

Trends. The Unconditional as Conditional: We Are All Tamils

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2000) "Trends. The Unconditional as Conditional: We Are All Tamils," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 18 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol9/iss18/6>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Trends. The Unconditional as Conditional: We Are All Tamils

Author: Editor

Volume: 9

Issue: 18

Date: 2000-12-01

Keywords: Peace Talks, Sri Lanka, Tamil Tigers

Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Tamil Tigers--termed by various observers as a separatist, terrorist, and/or guerrilla organization in Sri Lanka--recently has stated that he is ready for unconditional peace talks with the Sri Lankan government. The problem is the nature of "unconditional."

In the context of negotiations, "unconditional" can denote the desire to engage in conflict resolution without any reservations whatsoever. Or, it can denote the intent to engage in conflict resolution without any bottom line beyond which the terms and/or process of resolution cannot go. The term also can serve as a cover. In this case, under the flag of conflict resolution through talk, planning and actions for conflict resolution through military and paramilitary intervention continue, accelerate, and then are actualized.

Of course, even with the most sincere of intentions, parties to unconditional talks do not engage unconditionally. The status of various strategic, tactical, moral/ethical, and domestic political considerations must range within various intervals of acceptability. And, certainly, some negotiated end points just cannot be accepted. So, is Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake correct to question the unconditional nature of the Tamil Tigers' offer? Sure. But all participants to all negotiations can be so questioned. Although this questioning may vary from suspicions of outright deception to concerns about recalcitrant diplomatic positions, the Sinhalese and all the rest of us are all Tamils. (See Donohue, W.A. (1998). Managing equivocality and relational paradox in the Oslo peace negotiations. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 17, 72-96; Druckman, D. (1997). Dimensions of international negotiations: Structures, processes and outcomes. *Group Decision and Negotiation*, 6, 395-420; Dugger, C.W. (November 28, 2000). Leader of Tamil Tiger rebels says he is ready for peace talks. *The New York Times*, p., A7; Matsu-Pissot, C. (1998). On the experience of being unconditionally loved. In R. Valle (Ed.). *Phenomenological inquiry in psychology: Existential and transpersonal dimensions* (pp. 321-334). Plenum Press; Milburn, T.W. (1998). Psychology, negotiation, and peace. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 7, 109-119; Munro, J.D. (1997). Using unconditionally constructive mediation to resolve family-system disputes related to persons with disabilities. *Families in Society*, 78, 609-616.) (Keywords: Peace Talks, Sri Lanka, Tamil Tigers.)