

Choosing War Over Peace. (1995, May 11). *India Today*.

>Date: Thu, 11 May 1995 15:19:08 +0200

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CHOOSING WAR OVER PEACE

INDIA TODAY

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>As hopes of peace in the strife-torn island nation lay buried under the
>wreckage of two gunboats and the corpses of at least 60 soldiers killed in
>renewed LTTE attacks last fortnight, familiar ghosts were back to haunt
>Sri Lanka. And Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga - the President who staked
>so much on the peace process, despite warnings not to trust the Tigers and
>despite evidence that they used the negotiations to buy time - was facing
>the prospect of preparing for battle. "We have no choice but to retaliate
>now," she told *India Today*.

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> Although there is still talk of peace, there are more indications
>that the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE are going to sink back into an
>all-out war with each other. Fears that the LTTE had used the 100 days of
>truce to infiltrate Colombo became reality when two gunmen shot dead the
>adviser to the president on ethnic affairs, Kumaraswamy Vinodan, a Tamil,
>whose crime was that he had dared to associate with the Government and speak
>on its behalf.

> The message, that the LTTE could still strike at will, escaped no one.

>And the army, though still on a tight leash with a brief to carry out only
>what are described as 'limited operations', have been hitting back at the
>Tigers. Since the agreement to cease hostilities between the two sides came
>to an end on April 19, about a hundred people have died. After the attack on
>the gunboats and the ambush of a military camp in Batticaloa, the hostilities
>escalated as the army and air force assaulted LTTE camps 10 km north of
>Vavuniya, killing 21 Tigers. The LTTE retaliated by attacking a major military
>camp on Kayts Island, killing 19 soldiers.

> Chandrika has no option but to fight back as, despite her mandate for
>peace, she now risks a Sinhala nationalist backlash. "Peace is possible now
>only if the LTTE is disarmed," says Dinesh Gunawardane, former MP and
>president of the MEP, which represents the voice of the Sinhalese hardliners.
>"It is clear from what has happened that all that the LTTE wanted was to
>consolidate its position. And when there was nothing further they could
>achieve, they called it off".

> At the fourth round of talks between Colombo and the LTTE, the
>government lifted the embargo on fuel supply to the north and relaxed
>restrictions on night fishing, a concession that is believed to have helped
>the Tigers in their gunboat attack. It came just hours after the expiry of
>their deadline for the Government to accept two other demands that have dogged
>the negotiations since January: dismantling of an army camp in Pooneryn,
>north-west of Vavuniya; and permission for its cadres to carry arms.

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> Colombo refused, arguing that these demands were military in nature
>and would give the LTTE strategic advantages that it hadn't seized through
>war. Two days after the gunboat attack, hundreds of heavily-armed LTTE cadres
>ambushed a military camp in eastern Batticaloa, leaving 28 soldiers dead and
>over 45 injured.

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> Chandrika's response was cautious. Declaring that the peace process
>would carry on 'with or without the LTTE'. She ordered the reimposition of
>the embargo on essential items, and put the curbs on fishing back in place.
>The measure were politically essential for two reasons: one, to assert her
>position as the senior partner in the talks; second, to pre-empt criticism
>by her Sinhala constituency.

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> Actually, the embargo has been imposed only on 11 out of the 50 items
>that were being allowed to go to the north during the truce. Even so, Tamil
>groups called the steps 'hasty' and dismissed the possibility of the
>Government bypassing the LTTE. "The task of everyone genuinely interested in
>a solution to the demands of the Tamils should be bring the LTTE and the
>Government back to the negotiating table," says M. Shivasithambaram, president