

How the LTTE was destroyed

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Consider for a moment if it was possible to defeat the Hezbollah or Hamas. The achievements of the Sri Lankan security forces are of a comparable scale. There were no coalition troops or hi-tech geospatial imagery or other hi-tech equipment; it was the strength and courage of the indigenously trained Sri Lankan security forces that accomplished a feat considered by many as impossible. The Sri Lankan forces militarily decimated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), regarded as one of the most dangerous and deadliest terrorist groups in the world.

The LTTE was considered a trail blazer in terms of terrorist technology and innovation. The hallmark of the LTTE, the suicide body suit was perfected by the LTTE and proliferated globally as the most lethal terror device used by terrorist groups today. The LTTE, over a period of three decades, progressively graduated from a guerrilla group to a formidable outfit with conventional capability with control over territory. At the time of the ceasefire agreement in February 2002, the LTTE had military dominance over most parts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The group was founded on an autocratic dictatorship that lasted from its origins to the very end. In a way, having a single leader for 30 retarded its decision making capacity and that of the Tamil community. The group was centered round the cult of Velupillai Prabhakaran and his intransigent worldview. His zero sum mindset which considered no alternative but a separate state, was unattainable and unrealistic when over 40% of the Tamil population lived in the south of the island.

However, for Prabhakaran, it was military gains that brought him closer to achieving a separate state. He mirrored the LTTE on the structures of a standing army. It had several combat formations (Charles Anthony Brigade, Imran Pandiyya Brigade, Jejantha Brigade, Leopard Commando Unit), Women's units (Malathi Brigade, Sothiya Brigade) artillery and mortar units (Kutti Shirri Mortar regiment, Victor anti armor unit), intelligence (TOSIS), suicide unit (Black Tigers), maritime (Sea Tigers), Telecom/radar unit.

Shipping/logistic support (Sea Tigeons) and air wing (Sky Tigers). The support units consisted of the recruitment wing, weapons procurement (KP Department), finance (Thamilanthi group), mobile health (Theleapan Health

Units), Overseas diaspora (Castro division), propaganda/publicity, satellite television (NTTE, Nitharshanam), political affairs, social services (TRO), IT support (Vanni Tech), war veteran welfare (Mahaveer), internal security (TE Police) and tribunals (TE Courts).

The military capability of the LTTE provided the space to develop the trapping of a de-facto administration in areas controlled by the group. The international network and logistic facilities provided resources and weapons for Prabhakaran's army.



In this image made available by the Sri Lankan army, a group of Sri Lankan soldiers pose for photographs in Mullivaikkal, Sri Lanka, Monday, May 18, 2009.

The decline of the Tamil Eelam project came following the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The LTTE, which was armed and trained by the Indian intelligence RAW, had lost its most important support base politically and militarily which they could never regain. The LTTE, in the 1990s, grew in strength due to political incompetence and rampant corruption in military procurement in the Sri Lankan government. The reversals faced by the Sri Lankan forces in Operation 'Jaya Sikuru' and 'Agni Kheela', as well as the LTTE operation 'Unceasing Waves III' which captured Elephant Pass redefined the LTTE as a formidable military power.

The appointment of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, brother of the President as Defence Secretary in November 2005 changed the military landscape in Sri Lanka. He provided decisive political leadership to the military. Over a two year period (2006-2008) he expanded troop numbers by almost 40%, with the induction of over 70,000 new troops to the three armed services and 40,000 new guards to the civil defence force.

The government exploited the defection of the LTTE Eastern commander Karuna

Amman and the disbanding of young combatants by capturing the entirety of the Eastern Province by July 2007.

The Sri Lankan navy undertook deep sea operations in international waters and destroyed nine merchant vessels of the LTTE between March to October 2007. The regular induction of weapons and ammunition to the LTTE, using its merchant fleet was critical to maintain its military power. The destruction of the LTTE supply chain capability was the single decisive factor that changed the LTTE from being a formidable military force to a group gasp-

ing for survival. The almost complete destruction of the LTTE shipping fleet was possible due to advanced technical intelligence and satellite data provided by the US Pacific Command to the Sri Lankan Navy. It demonstrated the close counter terrorism cooperation between the Bush administration and Sri Lanka prior to the Senator Leahy amendment.

The international network of the LTTE was disrupted in the five major fundraising countries. The law enforcement authorities in the United States, France, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia detained key LTTE leaders. The networks had to be reorganized, systems redesigned and rebuilt which was an unnecessary distraction to the LTTE at the time.

The Indian security paradigm had changed. Indian security was threatened by the proliferation of un-governed territory in the sub-continent. In Pakistan, large areas of un-governed, in Nepal the Maoist had taken control of territory and in Sri Lanka the LTTE had control of the Vanni. The LTTE had acquired stand-off weapons, a naval force and an air wing which all had potential threat implications to India. It was in the broader interest of Indian

security to permit the elimination of the LTTE.

Sri Lankan diplomacy exploited what could be called the new world order in a post economic crisis era. The rising influence of India and China as important global actors, and the decline of the west in international politics was effectively used by Sri Lanka to minimize any external intervention.

The combination of these factors and the superior ground tactics adopted by the Security Forces prevailed in the final battle. The victorious security forces not only defeated the LTTE, but also rescued over

recovered, providing valuable insights into the operations of the LTTE. Over 7100 LTTE combatants have surrendered voluntarily to the security forces.

Since 19 May 2009, the only representation of the LTTE remains among the overseas Tamil diaspora. The international network of the LTTE operated under the leadership of Veerakathy Manivannam (alias Castro) up to 30 January 2009. Facing imminent defeat at the hands of the Sri Lankan security forces, Prabhakaran appointed the head of weapons procurement based in Thailand, Selvarajah Pathmanathan (alias Kumaran Pathmanathan, KP), as the new head of LTTE international relations.

Selvarajah Pathmanathan (KP), had been sidelined due to personality clashes, especially with political head Tamiliselvan. Furthermore, the KP Department which undertook procurement activity was sidelined during the ceasefire period, with a flood of diaspora activists dealing directly with LTTE seniors in Kilinochchi. The LTTE international network that was developed by Castro (Castro network), had distanced itself from the KP network. Furthermore, in the absence of KP in the forefront, the Castro network had taken control of LTTE international finances. The funds collected by the LTTE and stored in secret bank accounts by Sanna (Netherlands) and Nehrujee (UK) were being controlled through the Castro network. In addition, the LTTE had a very active overseas intelligence wing (Aiyanna network) which kept watch over diaspora activity and reported directly to Kilinochchi.

As Selvarajah Pathmanathan (KP), attempts to take control of the LTTE international network using a remote office in Oslo, the Castro network and the Aiyanna network do not recognize his authority. The most recent statement by Pathmanathan announcing the death of Prabhakaran was dismissed by the Castro network (now called the LTTE Department of Diaspora Affairs). The three groups are scrambling to take control of LTTE overseas assets; there will be blood spilt and a few will benefit personally given LTTE records have been destroyed. The LTTE battle ground will shift overseas to the Tamil diaspora with each group attempting to define its territory, geographically or thematically.

The LTTE networks overseas will remain dissociated from the conflict if they do not build ground capability in Sri Lanka. Each group will attempt to revive at least a minimalist guerilla capability as soon as possible. It is imperative for the overseas elements to demonstrate control over ground operations, firstly to achieve credibility and recognition, secondly to

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” boost the morale the depressed Tamil diaspora and thirdly, discredit the government's claim of destroying the LTTE. It is likely in the short term attacks on soft targets could be carried out to demonstrate the continued existence of the LTTE. This will also facilitate overseas leaders to assert authority over the LTTE network.

In the Northern Ireland situation, dissatisfied members of the IRA formed the "Continuity-IRA" and remained militarily active after the IRA ended hostile activity. In Sri Lanka, such a scenario can develop given the stocks of weapons buried and yet undetected in the Northern Province. There is a likelihood that senior and middle level combatants will have difficulty integrating into the community due to issues of respect and status without the LTTE. Therefore, the screening and rehabilitation process of the 7,100 combatants who have given themselves up should be managed professionally to avert such a situation.