

# Strategic Analysis Paper

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## The End of Sri Lanka's Insurgency: Implications

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### Summary

The crushing military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), also known as the Tamil Tigers, has set an uncommon precedent in the annals of insurgent warfare, in that it debunks the popular notion that intractable and established insurgencies are unwinnable. The victory over such a formidable organisation as the LTTE has brought Sri Lanka into a new era which provides a

historic opportunity for the country to prosper like its Asian neighbours. Although the insurgency is now over, the LTTE overseas network, however, still remains largely intact and continues to sustain the LTTE cause, namely its struggle for a separate Tamil state.

### Analysis

#### *Significance of the Victory*

Given the nature of the LTTE defeat, it appears to be unlikely that an LTTE resurgence in Sri Lanka remains possible: 'We have destroyed the LTTE leadership's first, second and third rungs. The LTTE is over. They may do a bit of hit-and-run tactics, but they are militarily over, stated General Sarath Fonseka, the Sri Lanka Army's Chief of Defence Staff and former commander. The LTTE lost over 22,000 combatants killed in action; over 9,100 have surrendered; all its bases and 15,000 square kilometres of territory have been overrun. Among insurgent groups worldwide, the LTTE was considered the trend setter in military innovation and development at the organisational and tactical level; it was also the only insurgent-terrorist organisation to field an army, maritime force and air capability. Moreover, according to the US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) website, the LTTE:

'Perfected the use of suicide bombers, invented the suicide belt, pioneered the use of women in suicide attacks, murdered some 4,000 people in the past two years alone; and assassinated two world leaders [Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa] – the only terrorist organisation to do so.'

What the FBI does not mention is that the LTTE pioneered and refined the use of suicide terrorism – on land, sea and air – feats that even al-Qaeda has not achieved. In fact prior to the Second Gulf War, the LTTE led the world in the most number of suicide attacks.

According to the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence, the LTTE participated in a sustained campaign of ethnic cleansing against ethnic Sinhalese and Muslim populations in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, which from 1984 to 2009 saw at least 257 attacks that killed 4,485 civilians, wounded 5,897 and displaced around 150,000-200,000 Sinhalese and Muslims. Additionally, the LTTE insisted that it was the sole representative of the Sri Lankan Tamils and ruthlessly suppressed dissident Tamil voices. According to Sri Dharan, the dissident Tamil leader of the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front-Naba faction (EPRLF-Naba), the LTTE allegedly eliminated somewhere between

13,000-18,000 rival Tamils from 1986-2006 (EPRLF claims to have lost over 1,400 members). In direct terms, the military defeat of the LTTE translates as a victory of a democratic state over an extremist anti-democratic movement inspired by radical Tamil nationalism, or what some commentators have referred to as Tamil fascism. The defeat of a formidable terrorist organisation has also sent a strong message to aspiring insurgent groups in the South Asian region, a point emphasised to *The Nation* by Narayan Swamy, an Indian Tamil journalist who authored two books on the LTTE:

‘The defeat of the LTTE is a defeat of the politics of no-compromise. It also marks the defeat of arrogance. Having embraced militarism and a mindset that saw every compromise as surrender... The LTTE’s refusal to embrace politics, to compromise, to take some and give some, and its failure to understand that the world would never accept an independent Tamil Eelam led to its demise.’

Crucially, the void created by the LTTE defeat has dramatically altered Sri Lanka’s political landscape and extracted the country from its darkest and bloodiest era, which in turn has offered opportunities and new challenges.

### *Implications for Sri Lanka*

In Sri Lanka the defeat of the LTTE has given vital space for previously suppressed Tamil democratic parties to engage in the democratic process without fear of assassination, as evidenced recently during the Norwegian-moderated Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) of 2002-2006, where over 200 Tamils from rival political parties and groups were killed by the LTTE. Additionally, the defeat of the LTTE has removed its violent dominance over Tamil politics and has enabled the process of reconciliation to start afresh. Aptly, President Mahinda Rajapakse who leads the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) coalition government, (which includes 13 Tamil ministers and four allied Tamil parties) is scheduled next year after Sri Lanka’s presidential elections to deliberate on the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) recommendations to negotiate a political settlement with Sri Lanka’s Tamil community. Furthermore, a newly formed and special committee has been appointed composed of seven Tamil political parties to examine the grievances of the Tamil community (out of 16 registered Tamil political parties, six have parliamentary representation).

Recently, the UPFA held two elections in August, 2009, namely the Vavuniya Urban Council and Jaffna Municipal Council elections which were the first democratic elections held in the Northern Province in almost a decade. Although voter turn out was low, these local elections were seen as a necessary step to foster the culture of democracy to pave the way for the much larger Northern Provincial Council election (likely to be held early next year), which will lead to the election of the province’s first ever Chief Minister. In the Northern Province, the Sri Lankan government intends to emulate its experience in the Eastern Province. For example, after the military recaptured the Eastern Province in July 2007, the reintroduction of democracy saw the Batticaloa Municipal Council election held in March 2008 followed by the Eastern Provincial Council election in May 2008. In both elections, the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), formerly the breakaway LTTE eastern faction emerged victorious allied with the UPFA. As such, two former LTTE commanders are now key ministers. Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan (alias Pillaiyan), the incumbent TMVP leader was appointed the first ever Chief Minister of the Eastern Province and Vinayagamorthy Muralitharan (alias Karuna Amman), who was recently appointed the non-cabinet Minister of National Integration and Reconciliation and also a Vice-President of the SLFP. Such appointments reflect the major political changes in Sri Lanka, especially in co-opting former LTTE leaders into the democratic mainstream.

On the other hand, while the LTTE is critically weakened in Sri Lanka, its immense supporting infrastructure overseas still remains largely intact and will continue to present a threat. ‘The LTTE can be revived. They can take all their activities outside Sri Lanka and build up the diaspora. It can also encourage the few remnants of the LTTE back home,’ affirmed Senaka Walgampaya, Sri Lanka’s High Commissioner to Australia in an interview with *ABC News*. As such, although the LTTE has lost practically all of its experienced frontline commanders and fighters, there is still the

potential for it to reignite militancy among elements of the hundreds of LTTE fighters and operatives that have fled, largely undetected, to the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, and also among the 9,100 former LTTE combatants currently interned in Sri Lanka, which could disrupt the process of reconciliation and hinder the prospect of a political solution between ethnic Sinhalese and Tamils. Hence, Sri Lanka has indicated the importance of dismantling the LTTE global network as emphasised by Dayan Jayatilaka, who until recently was the former Sri Lankan Ambassador to the United Nations: 'The pro-Tiger Tamil Diaspora has emerged as a highly organised, mobilised and lavishly funded formation which has to be taken seriously as an adversary ... as the most important element within the separatist terrorist cause.'

### *Ramifications for the Diaspora*

Even though the defeat of the LTTE in Sri Lanka means that the achievement of a separate Tamil state is no longer plausible, LTTE supporters within the Tamil diaspora will not easily relinquish the struggle, inculcated by decades of LTTE ideology. This was seen at the end of Sri Lanka's insurgency, where many violent incidents were perpetrated by LTTE supporters in Western countries, notably against dissident Tamils and elements of the Sinhalese expatriate community. According to Dr. Rajasingham Narendran, a dissident Tamil activist:

'The propaganda of the LTTE abroad is so powerful. The diaspora is suffering from a syndrome. As a result they are unable to forget the past. They are ready to swallow whatever is told to them. Any story you tell about the Sri Lankan Government or the Sinhala people, they believe. It is very difficult to bring out from their present mind set. So if we take the stance of the diaspora, 40 percent are fully committed [to the LTTE], another 40 percent stand in the middle and 20 percent are totally convinced that the LTTE is not the way forward.'

Presently, the LTTE functions through dozens of front organisations in over 30 countries worldwide, which continue to serve as its base of support and platform for its operations, as confirmed by a US Department of Justice press release in January 2008: 'The Tamil Tigers relies heavily upon supporters throughout the world to raise and launder money, acquire intelligence and purchase military use technology.' The crucial support from the estimated 800,000 strong Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora was the single biggest factor which sustained the LTTE war effort all these years. As such, the Chennai (Madras) based think-tank, the Institute for Conflict Management, estimates that the LTTE gathers somewhere between US\$10-\$30 million (\$10.7 million - \$32.3 million) per month through a plethora of front organisations which operate as businesses, charities and NGOs. Recently this was emphasised in an article on July 20, 2009, in the Canadian newspaper *National Post*, which quoted a key segment of a report conducted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police: 'Canada's Tamil community has been among the LTTE's largest sources of funds, having contributed up to C\$10-\$12 million (\$10.5-\$12.5 million) annually in the past years.' According to a 2006 Human Rights Watch report, entitled: *Final War: LTTE Intimidation and Extortion in the Tamil Diaspora*, many Canadian Tamil families are often press ganged into giving between C\$2,500-\$5,000 (\$2,600-\$5,200) and businesses are compelled to give much more, often ranging from C\$10,000-\$100,000 (\$10,440-\$104,400). As quoted in *The Hindu*, in France according to sociologist Angelina Étiemble (an expert on the French Tamil diaspora):

'The LTTE was so well organised that every individual Sri Lankan Tamil was more or less forced to pay between €536 and €839 (\$840-\$1,313) per year – the rate was €2.32 (\$3.63) per day, deemed to be a 'decent' living wage for those engaged in the cause or deprived of their livelihood by the war. Shop owners had to pay up more, between €1,678 (\$2,626) and €2,287 (\$3,578) per establishment.'

In large measure this would explain how the LTTE network within the Tamil diaspora provided funds, sourced weapons and ammunition, and transported it to Sri Lanka using its own fleet of warehouse ships. The nature of the assistance was amply demonstrated during Eelam War 4 (c.2006-2009), where the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) destroyed eight LTTE warehouse ships containing over 10,000 tons of war-related material. 'These vessels were carrying over

80,000 artillery rounds, over 100,000 mortar rounds, a bullet-proof jeep three aircraft in dismantled form, torpedoes and surface-to-air missiles. There were also a large number of underwater swimmer delivery vehicles and a large quantity of diving equipment. There were radar equipment as well as Outboard Motors with higher horse power,' stated former SLN Commander Admiral Karannagoda in *Business Today*. Presently, according to LTTE expert Shanaka Jayasekera, Associate Lecturer, Macquarie University, there is evidence to suggest that the LTTE still possess four warehouse ships.

Not surprisingly, the West has taken an increasingly disparaging view of LTTE activities as interpolated by Canadian-Tamil journalist, DBS Jeyaraj:

'...the activities of pro-Tiger elements in the West have often been provocative and blatantly defiant of Western laws governing terrorism. In spite of the LTTE being banned under anti-terrorism laws, the diasporic Tiger supporters have flagrantly flouted them.'

Although the LTTE was first banned overseas in India in 1991, only in 1997 did the US classify the group as a foreign terrorist organisation. The European Union and Canada only banned the LTTE in 2006. Principally, over the last five years LTTE activities in the Tamil diaspora, such as extortion and violent repression of dissenting Tamil voices, involvement in arms procurement, narcotics, consumer and commercial fraud, counterfeiting, human smuggling and links to outlawed foreign terrorist groups led Western law enforcement and intelligence agencies to launch a major security crackdown. Subsequently, this led to a spate of arrests of senior LTTE operatives in Western countries such as Australia, Britain, Italy, Canada, France and the US. The salient examples were seen in France and the US: on 1 April 2007, the LTTE leader of operations in France and 17 other LTTE suspects were arrested by French police and, on 25 April 2007, the FBI arrested the director of LTTE operations in the US.

Since January 2009, the LTTE faced an increasingly critical military situation in Sri Lanka and was compelled to restructure its international organisation by appointing its senior most surviving leader overseas and chief arms procurer Selvarasa Pathmanathan (alias Kumaran Pathmanathan), as the head of its self-styled Department of International Relations. After the LTTE was militarily defeated on 19 May 2009, Selvarasa Pathmanathan (also a fugitive wanted by INTERPOL and India), declared the establishment of an LTTE government in exile, entitled the "Provisional Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam" (PTG) in June 2009, which also saw him appointed as the new supreme leader of the LTTE. As such, this new body consists of a representative committee of LTTE leaders from the Tamil diaspora largely within the Western world. Such an enterprise coming from a group that is recognised as a terrorist organisation in 31 countries and viewed by the FBI as: '...the Tamil Tigers are among the most dangerous and deadly extremists in the world ...its ruthless tactics have inspired terrorist networks worldwide, including al-Qaeda in Iraq,' is another attempt at reforming its image to continue its separatist agenda. Among dissident Tamils the legitimacy of the PTG has been viewed with indignation, as seen by prominent scholar and activist, Dr. Rajan Hoole, who heads the University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna (UTHR-J):

'As with the LTTE, the interests and arrogance evident in the PTG's attempt to continue a politics detrimental to the Tamil people inside [Sri] Lanka, is more about attempting to sustain a bankrupt enterprise abroad through further lies, mobilisation and collection of funds.'

However, the LTTE international apparatus has been plagued by serious factionalism which has manifested in the emergence of a major split between Selvarasa Pathmanathan and another faction led by Veerakulasingham Manivannan (alias Castro) who allegedly oversees finance and intelligence gathering in the Tamil diaspora. However,

Selvarasa Pathmanathan's tenure as the LTTE chief ended abruptly when he was arrested in Malaysia on 5 August 2009, in a joint sting operation with Malaysian and Sri Lankan intelligence agencies. His arrest, coupled with the large amount of intelligence gathered from surrendered LTTE commanders and overrun bases in Sri Lanka, is a major

setback for the LTTE network overseas, which continues to reveal crucial high-grade intelligence and insights into its key people, assets and operations. While this is certainly a major breakthrough and will have a lasting impact on the LTTE overseas, the prospect of the organisation regenerating overseas, even on a smaller scale, should not be underestimated.

**About the author:** Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe is an analyst who has published widely on South Asian and Indian Ocean security issues.

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