

THE SRI LANKAN INSURGENCY:  
A REBALANCING OF THE ORTHODOX POSITION

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by  
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April 2016

## Abstract

The insurgency in Sri Lanka between the early 1980s and 2009 is the topic of this study, one that is of great interest to scholars studying war in the modern era. It is an example of a revolutionary war in which the total defeat of the insurgents was a decisive conclusion, achieved without allowing them any form of political access to governance over the disputed territory after the conflict. Current literature on the conflict examines it from a single (government) viewpoint – deriving false conclusions as a result. This research integrates exciting new evidence from the Tamil (insurgent) side and as such is the first balanced, comprehensive account of the conflict. The resultant history allows readers to re-frame the key variables that determined the outcome, concluding that the leadership and decision-making dynamic within the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had far greater impact than has previously been allowed for. The new evidence takes the form of interviews with participants from both sides of the conflict, Sri Lankan military documentation, foreign intelligence assessments and diplomatic communiqués between governments, referencing these against the current literature on counter-insurgency, notably the social-institutional study of insurgencies by Paul Staniland. It concludes that orthodox views of the conflict need to be reshaped into a new methodology that focuses on leadership performance and away from a timeline based on periods of major combat.

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## Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to those who allowed me to interview them, despite the risks to themselves and their families, as well as those within the Sri Lankan and Indian Governments who have provided an insight into various agencies and reporting which has hitherto been most secret. I will continue to protect their identities.

I am most grateful to the UK Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Intelligence Services for facilitating my research, and specifically to Commodore Phillip Thickness Royal Navy (Retired).

Finally, I am indebted to my wife and family who encouraged me to continue work when I thought my analysis had been stolen by nefarious actors.

## Introduction

### Research Question, topic and significance

The Eelam Wars were a twenty-year campaign in Sri Lanka that took place between the majority Sinhalese government of Colombo and Tamil insurgents, centered on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).<sup>1</sup> The conflict ended in a decisive victory for government forces in March 2009, without any political access or role in governing the disputed territory for the insurgents and there has been no significant resurgence in Sinhala-Tamil violence to date.<sup>2</sup> The current orthodoxy of the campaign states that the outcome was entirely due to the reinvigoration of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces, physically as well as cognitively, acting under inspired leadership from President Mahinda Rajapaksa and army General Sareth Fonseka between 2005 and 2009.<sup>3</sup> That narrative is agnostic of the changes to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the same timeframe, due to a lack of evidence. The current analysis of the wars are primarily based on sources provided and facilitated by the government in Colombo, including with those intricately involved in the campaign: but only from the actors on one side.<sup>4</sup> The research conducted for this thesis complements that current work by introducing the Tamil perspective to form the first comprehensive account of the conflict. By examining new information from LTTE sources, amongst others, it presents a different history, one in which the failures of the insurgents and their leader Prabhakaran were as important for the outcome of the war as were the activities of the government in Colombo. This thesis will integrate these Tamil accounts of the wars into the existing

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<sup>1</sup> Major General Raj Mehta, *Lost Victory: The Rise and Fall LTTE Supremo V Prabhakaran* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2010), M R Narayan Swamy, *The Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Men* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 1994), *Tigers of Lanka: from Boys to Guerillas* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2002), *The Tiger Vanquished* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2010), and *Inside an Elusive Mind* (Colombo: Srilankabooks, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Farrell, "Sri Lanka Tamils subjected to horrific abuse after 2009 civil war, says report", *Guardian newspaper*, 21 March 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/21/sri-lanka-tamils-subjected-to-horrific-abuse-after-2009-civil-war-says-report> accessed 20 January 2016.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, C A Chandraprema, *Gota's War*, (Colombo: Piyasiri Printing Systems, 2012), Gordon Weiss, *The Cage* (London: Vintage Books, 2012), and Ahmend Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins: Sri Lanka's defeat of the Tamil Tigers* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> C A Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), p.14, Gordon Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), p.xxvi, Ahmend Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2013), p.19.

historical accounts and will then go on to analyse the new evidence to derive a conclusion as to why the decisive outcome came about, pointing to leadership and the decision-making paradigm in which the LTTE operated as a central factor.

### **The orthodox position**

There is what this author would call an ‘orthodox’ position on the Eelam Wars, one that this study will challenge, as stated above, and so it is important at this stage to detail fully what this position is, what are its strengths and weaknesses, and it how this position will relate to this dissertation. To do this, this section will first detail the orthodox literature as it stands before providing a critique. This author is describing the literature as orthodox because it has become a commonly held belief and has been enabled by interviews by members of the Sri Lankan ruling government at the end of the conflict.<sup>5</sup> There have been no official counters to statements made in the government-assisted literature after publication. Since 1996, thirteen books by nine authors have been published specifically related to the Eelam Wars: four authors of these accounts used government sources, two used Tamil sources, and three were personal experiences. Gordon Weiss was a UN diplomat in Sri Lanka between 2004-2009. In his book, *The Cage* (2012),<sup>6</sup> Weiss concluded that the result came about directly because of the determined attritional approach adopted by the Sri Lankan government, specifically from the Defence Secretary, Gotabaya Rajapaksa – the president’s brother.<sup>7</sup> Sri Lankan academic C A Chandraprema makes a similar conclusion in his potted history of the conflict between 1956 and 2009, *Gota’s War* (2012), which examined the war from a political perspective centred on Colombo.<sup>8</sup> Weiss integrates LTTE activities that were made public but admits his own failure to understand the LTTE, despite meeting some of the LTTE leadership (although, notably, not the leader, Prabhakaran)<sup>9</sup>, whilst Chandraprema completely ignores any non-Sinhalese sources.<sup>10</sup> Ivy league academic Ahmed Hashim tackled the conflict from a counterinsurgency perspective in his book, *When Counterinsurgency Wins* (2013), again concluding that the result came about as a direct result of the approach of the

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<sup>5</sup> “Orthodoxy: authorized or generally accepted theory, doctrine or practice.” *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.1310.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Weiss, *The Cage* (London: Vintage Books, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.xxvi.

<sup>8</sup> C A Chandraprema, *Gota’s War*, (Colombo: Piyasiri Printing Systems, 2012), p.12.

<sup>9</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), p. xxvi.

<sup>10</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota’s War* (2012), pp.11-13.

Sri Lankan army.<sup>11</sup> The only military analysis was conducted by Indian Major General (retired) Raj Mehta in his 2009 publication, *Lost Victory*.<sup>12</sup> Mehta stated that the philosophy of Prabhakaran was deeply revolutionary and nationalistic with tendencies towards iconoclasm<sup>13</sup> – key facets associated with Maoism.<sup>14</sup> Despite identifying some of the changes that occurred in the LTTE at the time, Mehta again concluded that the actions of the Sri Lankan armed forces were the critical factor that determined the outcome.<sup>15</sup> Each of these authors placed significant weight on interviews with key personalities within the Sri Lankan government between 2004-2012, and there is no doubt that there is a strong case, from their evidence, that the authorities in Colombo had every right to claim victory.

Two authors have previously published research regarding the Tamil side of the equation. Shri Murari, a former Associate Editor of the Indian newspaper, *The Deccan Herald*, covered the totality of the LTTE campaign in 2011 in his book, *The Prabhakaran Saga*.<sup>16</sup> The research contains a wealth of information and detail particularly on the LTTE chief's early life but is focused on the international perspectives of the conflict – specifically the Indian involvement both overtly and covertly. Narayan Swamy, an India-based journalist, covered the conflict in news reports for various media between 1987 and 2009 including two interviews with Prabhakaran himself.<sup>17</sup> Again, each of his four books examines the conflict through an Indian lens becoming increasingly taken with the Norwegian-led peace process. But Swamy is a reporter and not an analyst: his recounting of events as they unfolded did not go further to assess the impact or potential causes. He also lost his access to the majority of his sources from 1991-1996 when he began to write more from the perspective of Colombo –

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<sup>11</sup> Ahmend Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins: Sri Lanka's defeat of the Tamil Tigers* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013), p.214.

<sup>12</sup> Major General Raj Mehta, *Lost Victory: The Rise and Fall LTTE Supremo V Prabhakaran* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), pp.220-221.

<sup>14</sup> Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.231, Deborah Davis, *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: the potential for autonomous community in Post-Mao China*, (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.3.

<sup>15</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), p.xi.

<sup>16</sup> S Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga: The Rise and Fall of an Eelam Warrior* (New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> M R Narayan Swamy, *The Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Men* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 1994), *Tigers of Lanka: from Boys to Guerillas* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2002), *The Tiger Vanquished* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2010), and *Inside an Elusive Mind* (Colombo: Srilankabooks, 2003).

a move in line with the alignment of India with the Sri Lankan government after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE in 1991. Both Swamy and Murari have a local knowledge of Dravidian politics and social context that is almost impossible to fathom to a casual outsider. Their analysis of the Sri Lankan conflict, or Eelam Wars, has been exceptionally useful in determining who and how to approach sources.

More recently, the Tamil perspective has been documented by D'Souza and Malathy, Shameela Ali and Malaravan. Radha D'Souza and N Malathy's account of the conflict, *A Fleeting Moment in my Country*, records Malathy's personal reflections as a member of the Tamil diaspora in New Zealand having made two short trips to Sri Lanka in 2002 and 2004, followed by a longer term move to Vanni between 2005 to 2009.<sup>18</sup> The authors admit themselves that this is not a balanced account but merely a personal perspective.<sup>19</sup> The same is true of Malaravan's book, *War Journey*, whose subtitle, "Diary of a Tamil Tiger", clearly articulates the perspective from which this account was written.<sup>20</sup> Originally penned in the Tamil language in 2009, the text was translated by Malathy just one year after she and D'Souza published their own account. Given that neither book presents evidence beyond personal experience and that the translation of *War Journey* includes some editorial changes to the original<sup>21</sup>, it is difficult to view these accounts as corroborative. Finally, there has been a short book produced by Shameela Ali, *Ethnic Conflict has a military solution*, which argues that the military defeat of the LTTE has not defeated the movement itself, but does not cover the conflict or organisation itself.<sup>22</sup>

### **Shortcomings of existing work**

Having described the literature, what are its shortcomings and how will these shortcomings provide an opening for the new study presented here? These authors have provided historical accounts of the conflict and analysis of the wars by using sources exclusively from the Sri

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<sup>18</sup> Radha D'Souza and N Malathy, *A fleeting moment in the history of my country* (USA, Atlanta: Clear Day Books, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.16.

<sup>20</sup> Malaravan, *War Diary: Diary of a Tamil Tiger* (London: Penguin, 2013), translated by N Malathy.

<sup>21</sup> Conversation between the author and Shashank Joshi, a Senior Research Fellow at Harvard University, Department of Government during 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Shameela Ali, *Ethnic Conflict has a military solution* (London: Amazon Printing, 2014).

Lankan government, security agencies and political and military leadership intimately involved in the campaign, but not from the LTTE. Weiss<sup>23</sup>, Chandraprema<sup>24</sup> or Hashim<sup>25</sup> all admit frustration at the lack of documentary evidence available from the LTTE, and their inability to gain access to the LTTE inner circle (or, at least, those that remained). Recollections and works by Tamils (such as D'Souza and Malathy, Shameela Ali and Malaravan) are personal perspectives and recount their own experiences. As such their insights are fascinating but do not aim to provide wider analysis of the conflict or the outcome. Indian perspectives on the Tamil movement (Swamy and Murari) either did not cover the entirety of the campaign or shifted their research emphasis to the Sri Lankan side post 2005.

Each author acknowledges that they had not been able to codify the behaviour or factors that saw such a remarkable shift in fates for the LTTE, and its leader, within their research. Weiss, Chandraprema, Hashim and Mehta all explain changes to the LTTE as having little impact on the final outcome of March 2009. Thus, they say, the actions of the Sri Lankan authorities were the single cause for the outcome. This has become the orthodoxy of the campaign: a one-sided reflection of events written by the victor. It is clear how this orthodox position needs challenging, the challenge taken up by this study.

### **Source base**

An exciting, new dimension to this thesis is the source base employed, one that allows it to make a new argument on this bloody, seminal conflict. Some brief discussion here on sources is vital to show how the analysis here can provide new insights. The author was involved in the campaign between 2006 and 2009 as part of a British military study to gather relevant lessons from the campaign and provide advice to the Sri Lankan military. The author is aware of this remarkable engagement with the study at hand, and has made the following a self-reflexive approach. The author's position as a serving officer drew him to the Sri Lankan armed forces, with which he was serving. Such identification with the subject has been the subject of a number of studies by Professor Helena Cerreiras and the author has been

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<sup>23</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), p.xxvi.

<sup>24</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), p.14.

<sup>25</sup> Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2013), p.19.

critically aware of his position.<sup>26</sup> That said, as the conflict unfolded, and with it the author's engagement, there developed a more balanced, critical view of operations, one that led to the study here. The author developed a far more nuanced view of the LTTE's conduct of operations and the reasons behind the war and this made for a passionate engagement with the subject, a position augmented by this academic study and its concomitant engagement with methodology and ethics. Exposure to advocates from both sides allowed a developed and nuanced view to emerge, alongside a nationally and ethnic neutrality. The author overcame preconceptions about the conflict, having emerged from 20 years as a western military officer, indoctrinated in western military approaches, a liberal societal upbringing, and first-hand knowledge of the conflict between 2006 and 2009. Acknowledging potential critics of bias, the author immersed himself in the social culture of Sri Lanka and South East Asia for several years taking in a variety of views. It was in seeking an understanding of both sides of the campaign that led the author to many of the primary sources exposed in this research.

Having discussed the author's personal position regarding the Eelam Wars, it is now necessary to detail in depth the source base used for existing studies, where there are gaps, and how this study uses new sources to make new arguments. Both military and political leaders from the Sri Lankan government had, until recently, been proud to discuss their activities during the wars, and their own views on why it ended as it did. The Tamil side have been reticent to do so in a more honest way. The efforts by belligerent parties to establish post hoc authoritative accounts of the conflict continue to take place on social media,<sup>27</sup> yet these accounts rely on an already established orthodoxy, or a direct counter to that narrative. They have little use in terms of scholarly research material. In gathering research evidence, this author applied the doctrine of elite interviewing<sup>28</sup> and access to primary documentation to support overall research goals and to answer both specific and wider research questions. Gaining sources from three initial contacts (in Canada, Indian Tamil Nadu, and in Jaffna, Sri Lanka), the author used these sources to develop a wide array of contacts within the Tamil diaspora that enabled contacts with different people across the

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<sup>26</sup> Professor Helena Cerreiras (ed), *Researching the Military* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Both *TamilNet* and the [www.defence.lk](http://www.defence.lk) (the official website of the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence) were used extensively by both factions to influence national and international audiences in messaging for the purpose of both propaganda and psychological operations.

<sup>28</sup> Seldon and Papworth, *By word of mouth* (London, 1983).

world who were linked, and sometimes deeply involved, in the conflict. Corroboration of their accounts and perspectives was challenging due to the inherent secrecy of the insurgent organization and lack of documentary records by the LTTE made the problem equally as complex. Research in Colombo, Sri Lanka also became more complex after 2010 as source material was destroyed, and communication with some contacts ceased in response to allegations of war crimes and news of potential prosecutions were released. Access to archive material from Sri Lankan Chiefs of Staff meetings and National Security meetings of the Rajapaksa administration (specifically between 2005-2009) was obtained and permission given for use provided it was not quoted or copied directly. Similarly, access to classified and restricted security and intelligence records and archive material in New Delhi of the Indian Army, the Indian Army General Staff and their intelligence services on the condition that it would not be replicated or directly quoted. Where information from these sources has been used it has been referenced to reports that have had one or more key details removed (the author, reference number or date of publication). This method of footnoting was agreed with Indian officials. Diplomatic communiqués (often referred to as Diplomatic Telegrams or DipTels), between international governments have also been provided to the author for the purposes of research on a similar caveat. It is fortunate that the “wikileaks” website has allowed some of the documents to be made available for corroboration: where used these have been quoted and referenced. In an effort to gain additional sourcing, semi-structured interviews have been quoted from a variety of individuals from each side. Where the interviews have provided sufficient evidence they stand alone, albeit supported by now destroyed documentation. If the sub-text of interviews has not supported the thesis, commentaries remain but the points are backed by secondary reporting. The referencing methodology of interviews is slightly unusual, but had to be agreed with interviewees prior to release of information being approved: thus individuals are referred to by an alpha-numeric code which was acceptable across the subjects.

The conduct of interviews and the exposure of sources from different sources became both corroborative and additive. Finding the initial entry point for access to subjects was a task in itself. There are collections of journalist reports in India that provide perspectives on each stage of the war.<sup>29</sup> Additional evidence has been available on both the ‘Deep Net’ (ie

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<sup>29</sup> The Indian Journalist M R Narayan Swamy (*Indian Times*) is perhaps the authoritative source of Indian knowledge of the Sri Lankan insurgency, having gained first hand interviews with both Prabhakaran, his Lieutenants as well as many Government officials during the conflict. His collected

information which is not currently mapped to search engines), and the dark Internet (information on computers that can no longer be reached via the internet but rather through file sharing networks), that may be exploited by someone with the requisite knowledge. The author used connections to network engineers in Cheltenham, UK to mine and exploit that information for contacts, and then corroborated benchmarks of their evidence against available documentary sources. Where it could be achieved (only successful in less than one in five of those initial contacts), these sources became the starting point for the development of other contacts, thus extending the network. The diversity of initial access points allowed for a diverse group of interviewees, few of who knew each other but where they did, this added additional veracity of their evidence. It can be seen that the source engagement of this thesis allows for the development of the new argument on the internal dynamics of the Tamil Tigers. It also raises ethical questions, which now need to be discussed.

### **Ethics**

This dissertation is hugely exciting and topical, but also ethically charged. To deal with the sensitive subject here, the author put in place a careful programme of ethical engagement, one detailed in full here. The research has been subject to considerable ethical examination, both during the research<sup>30</sup> and subsequently, during 2014 and 2015, by an independent panel of the University of Brunel chaired by the Chair of the University's Research Ethics Committee.<sup>31</sup> The documentation provided to that panel in written form, and the subsequent oral hearing found that the research had been conducted within the University's academic Code of Ethics.<sup>32</sup> All those interviewed in the course of the research acted autonomously and

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writings *The Tiger Vanquished: LTTE's Story* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2010), were often the starting point for this author's own research.

<sup>30</sup> Permissions for the interviews were granted from various government personnel (Defence Attache and UK High Commission staff), although they never knew the names or locations of the interviews being conducted. The ethical requirements for research with my primary supervisor, Dr Gustavfson, several times, notably in December 2010 in Washington DC when the signed an ethics proforma was submitted. The nature of the subjects, their parent organizations and the exploitation of their evidence were discussed at length in presentations given three times throughout the research during Brunel PhD Presentation days. Concerns were not raised at any of these, nor during the PhD annual review process at the University of Brunel.

<sup>31</sup> The interview between the author and the University Board members sent recommendations to the University's Ethics Advisory Committee, who in turn accepted that the research was conducted in accordance with the University's Code of Research Ethics. Email: Mr Jim Benson, University Secretary, to the author dated 11 March 2015, 15:31.

<sup>32</sup> The majority of the research was primarily governed by The Brunel University Code of Research Ethics Version 7, issued on 28 July 2010. This does not require informed consent forms to be

were in a sound psychological state to do so. Subjects understood the nature of the research and its risks, knew their rights, and were willing participants. No coercion or undue influence was used in gaining their participation in the research: they were all capable of making deliberate decisions to partake that was a personal choice for each one. The author was tested against that framework in 2012 when two key sources requested that all of their evidence be destroyed and excluded from the research. No payment was made to any subject in the form of travel expenses, subsistence, refreshments or gratuities.

Contextually, the LTTE ceased to exist as a functioning organisation in 2010, and the research was therefore into historical events. However, interviewees were *former* members of that organisation and, despite part of the reintegration process, required complete anonymity was the guarantee for their participation in research. This included disposal and destruction of source recordings once used within the research.<sup>33</sup>

### **Methodology**

The source base discussed above works within a well-thought out methodology, one that will be discussed briefly here, especially in relation to interviewing of insurgents and rebels, developing points made above about sources. The methodology of the dissertation is the exploitation of qualitative interviews and documents, corroborated by secondary sources and current evidence. Analysis and examination of new evidence is made against a new typology of insurgent typology through the social-institutional lens that supports oral and documentary evidence.

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obtained in every circumstance, a requirement only made in Version 8 of the document issued in May 2013. Version 7 also allows, “Schools themselves have been accorded considerable freedom as to the method(s) they wish to adopt to ensure conformity with the requirements of the University”. Therefore whilst signed forms were not used, this was within the governance regime in place at the time. That approach was actually far more contextually valid for the subjects used as part of the research who trusted the researcher’s ‘word’ rather than a written document – their experience of life thus far was to draw distrust from such documents rather than reassurance.

<sup>33</sup> The computer used for research was the author’s personal property, enabled with Commercial Level 4 Encryption (now known as IL4 by the UK government): the system employed File and Disk level encryption (FLE and FDE) along with a Self Encrypting Disc (SDE) process. SDE provides a further level of protection and two keys to unlock it – a Media Encryption Key and a Key Encryption Key. No back ups were kept in accordance with the wishes of the subjects interviewed. The computer was disposed of and the hard drive was magnetically wiped clean of information and digital data coding. It was subsequently destroyed in acid.

As previously discussed, the author became involved in the Eelam Wars from a professional perspective. Access to western intelligence and analysis of the campaigns was facilitated by state security agencies, but remains classified. That analysis was second or third hand reporting, contextual to national interests and contained significant western bias in understanding the campaign designs and engagements. In addition, the current public literature and analysis was, as previously outlined, incomplete in terms of source base. The methodology for the thesis therefore needed to broaden the evidence base, build primary sources and accept a non-western decision-making paradigm by the actors.

The personal contacts made during visits to Sri Lanka between 2006-2009, and later between 2010-2013, enabled the author to build contacts within both the Colombo government, Indian security services and with some Tamils. The latter group provided contact details for Tamil diaspora members in the UK, Brussels and Canada. Over a period of 18 months the author used these contacts to break into smaller and more discrete Tamil groups, some in hiding and others more open. These were conducted after an initial literature review had been conducted and the research question narrowed. Initial contact meetings with sources were not recorded, but served to build trust by both parties into expanding the contact group and in verifying some statements about the positions held by interviewees.

In building the evidence base, the author conducted another series of informal interviews with sources, in turn using them to provide contact details of other actors in the conflict who might be open to interview, and to ascertain whether their evidence was applicable to the research. The Tamils encountered all agreed to having their interviews recorded (handwritten only), subject to certain constraints in how they could be identified in the final publication. As trust progressed, informal interviews developed into qualitative research interviews,<sup>34</sup> ie those that seek to describe the meaning of central themes to uncover the ‘factual and meaning level’.<sup>35</sup> This qualitative approach was useful in overcoming interviewees bias and potential fallacies in recollection of events, although many of the initial interviews were indeed tainted by perceptions of what happened rather than being actual experiences. In assuring the

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<sup>34</sup> Steinar Kvale, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (USA: Sage Publications, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> Campion, M.A., Campion, J.E., & Hudson, J.P., Jr. “Structured Interviewing: A Note on Incremental Validity and Alternative Question Types”, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79, (1994): 998-1002.

veracity and reliability of the evidence therefore, corroboration of sources and their accounts and opinions was vital. By applying a doctrine of “Elite Interviewing”,<sup>36</sup> the evidence was not simply corroborated by people who did not know each other necessarily, but it was also additive to create a parallax view of events. This dissertation followed the guidelines of Anthony Seldon and Joanne Papworth in evaluating and calibrating the strength of accounts and recollections of interviewees.<sup>37</sup> Where less reliable, this has been indicated within the text and footnotes. Inference from interviews, and deductions made from corroborated evidence is used in the analysis and conclusion of this thesis.

Corroboration of evidence became a key factor during the research. It was possible for some of the accounts provided by interviewees to be corroborated by secondary sources, such as newspaper reporting from the media in Tamil Nadu, or by early reporting within the regional newspapers, as was revealed by the literature review. This method of corroboration was limited because of the lack of journalistic access provided by protagonists to commanders and the front line.<sup>38</sup> Other sources of corroboration came from government and security agencies. Many of these were (and remain) classified and subject to restricted access. The author’s previous position gained him access to many of these closed archives. Access to archive material from Sri Lankan Chiefs of Staffs meetings and National Security meetings of the Rajapaksa administration (specifically between 2005-2009), was provided on the condition that it was not quoted or copied directly. Since viewing them, many of the records have been destroyed: as previously stated, the fear of recriminations in International War Crimes Tribunals was cited by several sources. Similarly, access to classified and restricted security and intelligence records and archive material in New Delhi from the Indian Army, the Indian Army General Staff and their intelligence services was made available on the condition that it would not be replicated or directly quoted. Diplomatic communiqués (often referred to as Diplomatic Telegrams or DipTels), between international governments have

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<sup>36</sup> Philip Davies, “Spies as Informants: Triangulation and the Interpretation of Elite Interview Data in the Study of the Intelligence and Security Services”, *Politics* 21:1 (2001): 73–80.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony Seldon and Joanne Papworth, *By Word of Mouth: Elite Oral History* (London: Methuen Young Books, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> This feature of the campaign is also recorded by Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (1994), p.x, and Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), pp.138-139.

also been provided to the author for the purposes of research on a similar caveat. Corroboration from the wikileaks website<sup>39</sup> has been quoted and referenced.

Having conducted initial interviews and subsequent corroboration work, a second round of qualitative interviews was conducted with select Tamil personalities from the first set of interviews. These were semi structured in nature, with an allowance for divergence from the key questions to pursue discrete avenues and digressions. This was on the basis that their provenance and initial evidence had been triangulated and found to be meeting the requirements of scholarly research.

### **Locating the research**

We turn now to the question of locating this work within scholarly research within the fields of Strategy, Leadership, Insurgency and Counter-insurgency theories. Whilst understanding that strategy, grand strategy and strategic theories is important in comprehending the entirety of any campaign, there is insufficient space to provide a detailed analysis of all strategy here.<sup>40</sup> Rather this thesis will examine the Eelam Wars as part of insurgent strategy, a subject that has only been relatively recently codified. Indeed, it was not until Peter Paret's revision of *Makers of Modern Strategy* in 1986 that revolutionary strategy was addressed as a formal academic subset.<sup>41</sup> As John Shy and Thomas Collier point out, "in 1942, no such body of work [on strategy in Revolutionary War] existed".<sup>42</sup> In discussing insurgent strategy, this dissertation locates the research within a subset of that strategy, specifically the theory of insurgent organisation as part of social-institutional theory.<sup>43</sup> The dissertation's new

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<sup>39</sup> <https://wikileaks.org>

<sup>40</sup> A fuller appreciation of the literature that identifies revolutionary strategy as a subset of broader strategic theory is found within Peter Paret's, *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Oxford University Press, 1986), Beatrice Heuser, "Guerilla warfare" in G Martel (ed.) *Encyclopedia of war* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Hew Strachen, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2013), amongst others.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p.815.

<sup>43</sup> James Moody and Douglas White, "Social cohesion and Embeddedness," *American Sociological Review*, 68(2003): 103-127, Patrick Johnston, "The Geography of Insurgent Organisation and Its Consequences for Civil Wars: Evidence from Liberia and Sierra Leone," *Security Studies* 17, no.1 (2008), 107-137, and Paul Staniland, "States, Insurgents and Wartime Political Orders," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no.2 (2012): 243-264.

evidence on the Sri Lankan conflict will illustrate Paul Staniland's exciting new work on insurgent party frameworks, one that breaks down insurgencies (and their resulting success or failure) into four types: vanguard, parochial, fragmented and integrated.<sup>44</sup> In classifying groups by these subsets, according to Staniland, it is possible to understand their workings, mechanics and the likelihood of success against both internal and external challenges. His theory is based on social institutional theory that identifies leadership and control as critical facets to insurgencies, with each of the subsets differing in their ability to exercise control, respond to threats and challenges, and execute belligerent activity to achieve their ends. This thesis – following Staniland – will prove that the LTTE was a *vanguard* type organisation (one in which there is a robust central leadership but fragile local control), which became a *semi-parochial* (one characterised by weak central leadership with some strength in commanders at the local level) group after shortly after 2005, before degenerating into a *fragmented* (one that has no central leadership, nor an ability to exercise control at a local level, and sees a good deal of internal dissent) organisation.<sup>45</sup> By understanding the LTTE through this framework, the criticality of internal Tamil leadership and decision-making come to the fore.

This thesis augments the corpus on insurgency and counter insurgency, partly through its empirical study of the Sri Lankan war but more specifically by its analysis of leadership and strategy as the critical factors leading to the end of the war. To do this, the analysis here exploits extant research on organisational leadership,<sup>46</sup> alliance formation,<sup>47</sup> societal embeddedness,<sup>48</sup> insurgent strategy,<sup>49</sup> and democratic failures in military campaigns<sup>50</sup>: fields subject to much recent debate and research specifically related to insurgency and counter

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, pp.7-9. These are addressed in detail in chapter 4.

<sup>46</sup> Christiane Demers, *Organizational Change Theories: A synthesis* (London: Sage, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Fotini Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (MIT: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (2014).

<sup>49</sup> Beatrice Heuser, "The history of the practice of strategy from Antiquity to Napoleon", in J Baylis, JJ Wirtz, and Colin Gray (eds.), *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, 5th edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 17-32.

<sup>50</sup> Gil Merom, *How democracies lose small wars* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), and Christopher D Kolenda, *The Counterinsurgency Challenge: A parable of leadership and decision making in modern conflict* (USA: Stackpole Books, 2012).

insurgency.<sup>51</sup> It does not aim to impose western campaign thinking (i.e. a linear, militarily-dominated framework that imposes structure on an assessment of warfare activities) retrospectively but rather seeks to analyse the evidence in order to introduce balance into the existing work of other authors.<sup>52</sup> Thus it is important as an account of the wars, an analysis of their outcome, and the roles played by leadership and strategy by both parties.

Having defined the research questions to be addressed by this study, it is now necessary to outline briefly current theories on insurgency and counter-insurgency as they will relate to the analysis that follows, to provide scholarly context and help guide the reader. The thesis starts from the basis that the LTTE was an insurgency, as defined by Bard O’Neill:

*Insurgency is defined as a struggle between a non-ruling party and the ruling authorities in which the non-ruling group consciously uses political resources (eg organizational expertise, propaganda and demonstrations) and violence to destroy, reformulate or sustain the basis of legitimacy for one or more aspect of politics.*<sup>53</sup>

That definition is derived on Maoist doctrine, an important element of understanding the study here of Sri Lanka. This is because Mao Tse-Tung was the first to codify the requirements and strategy that should be employed in executing a successful insurgency or Revolutionary War.<sup>54</sup> His texts have been subject to analysis and expansion, and some writers have made comparisons between the strategy adopted by the LTTE and Maoist Revolutionary Warfare doctrine, emphasising the importance of Mao to the examination here.<sup>55</sup> Doctrines of insurgent and revolutionary warfare as espoused by Mao Tse Tung and

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<sup>51</sup> Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: exposing the myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> There was a temptation to impose western (NATO) style campaign analysis onto the Eelam Wars and the research associated with it. A process such as the NATO Strategic Headquarters Campaign Design Framework (<https://www.nshq.nato.int/nshq/about/mission/nshqcampaigndesignframework/> accessed 20 January 2016) does not take into account different social and cognitive biases and preconditions that existed in Sri Lanka for either the Sinhalese government or the Tamil insurgents.

<sup>53</sup> Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, (London: Brassey’s. 1990), p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> Mao Tse Tung, *Selected Military Writings*, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1963).

<sup>55</sup> Specifically see, Thomas A Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*, (London: Frank Cass. 1996).

expanded upon by John McCuen.<sup>56</sup> Bard O'Neill used these works in his 1990 dissertation for examining modern (i.e., post-colonial) insurgencies against a Maoist-McCuen framework, including an examination of the LTTE itself under such guises.<sup>57</sup> The analysis of the LTTE's fighting doctrine and their strategy disputes claims by Marks and Ian Beckett that the organisation was Maoist in nature,<sup>58</sup> but that issue does not sit at the core of this analysis and is therefore not a central theme of this dissertation. Mao is not irrelevant, nor is the insurgent's methodology of fighting, but—counter to the claims of others—whether or not the LTTE was Maoist in nature is irrelevant to the findings in this work.

Turning to the counter-insurgency, there is a growing body of literature on what makes for a successful counter-insurgency, an issue key to this thesis since the current orthodoxy outlined above states that it was the actions of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces as counter-insurgents that provided victory, often through the use of disproportionate force. Understanding the theory surrounding those actions therefore makes it possible to discount counter-insurgency actions alone as a reason for the complete defeat of the LTTE. Counter-insurgency (COIN) theory in colonial (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and post-colonial eras has addressed the use of both force and civilian-military balance of effort in such activities with differing perspectives on utility and success.<sup>59</sup> Understanding the differences of approach according to COIN theory is important as it provides the reader with an insight into why successive Sri Lankan governments adopted the strategies that they did, and indeed why such activities failed. It also provides an understanding of why the claimed primary role of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces cannot have been the singular cause of victory. Colonial experiences of counter-insurgency, mostly by the European powers, advocated primarily militarized responses to insurgent actions.<sup>60</sup> That body of work started with C E Callwell's 1886 essay

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<sup>56</sup> John McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1966). p 20.

<sup>57</sup> Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, (London: Brassey's, 1990).

<sup>58</sup> Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (1996), p.174 and Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter Insurgencies: Guerillas and their Opponents since 1750* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p.233.

<sup>59</sup> Professor Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> See for example, F. D. Lugard, *Instructions to Political and Other Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative* (London: Waterlow and Sons, 1906), p. 190 and private papers of Colonel R. J. Marker (1867-1914), National Army Museum, London [6505-62-4], "Lecture on the North West Frontier Province of India," pp. 6-7. S. B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and*

“Lessons to be learned from the campaigns in which British Forces have been employed since the year 1865,” which advocated the aggressive use of concentrated firepower.<sup>61</sup> Such thoughts became doctrine for the British, and introduced civil policing into counter-insurgency doctrine through publications such as the handbook for imperial officers of the 1930s entitled *Imperial Policing* that distinguished the policing role of occupying powers from conventional warfare and even from asymmetric “small wars” against irregulars, which he defines as “deliberate campaigns with a definite military objective, but undertaken with the ultimate object of establishing civil control” and in which “[no] limitations are placed on the amount of force which can be legitimately exercised, and the Army is free to employ all the weapons the nature of the terrain permits.”<sup>62</sup> Pitched closer to civil governance, policing occurred where the government expected to continue ruling a population after hostilities had ended and, as such, wished to avoid antagonizing the civilians from whom nascent rebel groups could recruit members and receive logistical and moral support. As will be demonstrated in chapter 1, this was the approach adopted by several of the earlier Sri Lankan governments in their actions against the insurgents.

Later governments in Colombo, as the reader will see in chapter 2, attempted a less aggressive approach in application of hard power and turned instead to other levers of influence (money, trade, education and healthcare provision) in an attempt to win over the Tamil people. These are hallmarks of post-colonial COIN theory. Greater calibration of lethal force than advocated in *Imperial Policing* is embraced as the primary tactic of contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine in the United States, as most clearly set out in the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2006),<sup>63</sup> whose free Army-published online version has been downloaded by over 2 million people.<sup>64</sup> Since the *Manual*'s publication, which roughly coincided with the 2007 “surge” in Iraq, counterinsurgency doctrine has become subject to

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*Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1977).

<sup>61</sup> C E Callwell, "Lessons to be learned from the campaigns in which British Forces have been employed since the year 1865". *Royal United Services Institution Journal* 31 (1887) (139): 357–412.

<sup>62</sup> Major General Charles Gwynn, *Imperial Policing: a handbook for British imperial officers* (London: Macmillan, 1939), pp.3-5.

<sup>63</sup> United States Army, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual: US Army Field Manual 3-24* and US Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>64</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, September 8, 2007.

significant debate with numerous admirers both in the popular media and academic institutions.<sup>65</sup> The central narrative within the new COIN doctrine has been to make activities cross-government in nature with a population-centric approach (an approach also known as ‘Hearts and minds’).<sup>66</sup> That in itself builds on considerable revisionist views of the colonial lessons of counter insurgency operations.<sup>67</sup> Yet contemporary examinations of those events, even five years on, disputes the focus on the population and instead advocates a return to enemy-centric models of military activity<sup>68</sup>, probably enabled by integrated actions by civil levers of power<sup>69</sup>. Such actions will be remarkably familiar to leaders and commanders of

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<sup>65</sup> See for example Rachel Kleinfeld, “Petraeus the Progressive,” *Democracy Journal* (Winter 2009), pp. 108-115. Charles Shrader, *The Withered Vine: Logistics and the Communist Insurgency in Greece, 1945-1949* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), pp. 225, 254. Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 12. Nathan Hodge, “Coalition of the Shilling,” *The Nation*, March 29, 2010. Karl Hack, “The Malayan Emergency as Counter-Insurgency Paradigm,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32/3 (June 2009), p. 386. Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya* (London: Frederick Muller, 1975), pp. 391-411. Kalev Sepp, “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review* (May-June 2005), p. 9. Jim Gant, *One Tribe at a Time: A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan* (Los Angeles: Nine Sisters Imports, 2009), pp. 8-14.

<sup>66</sup> David Kilcullen, “Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review* (May-June 2006), pp. 105-107. David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (London: Hurst, 2009), pp. 30-2, 35, 38. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), p. 53. T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York: Doubleday, 1935), p. 194. John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Lin Todd et al, *Iraq Tribal Study—Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, The Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2006), Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p. 266, Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008* (London, Allen Lane, 2009), p. 219, Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), p. 410.

<sup>67</sup> Excerpts from Santa Cruz de Marcenado’s *Relexiones Militares* (1684-1732), translated into English, in Beatrice Heuser, *The Strategy Makers: Thoughts on War and Society from Machiavelli to Clausewitz* (Santa Monica, CA: Greenwood/Praeger, 2010), B H Liddel Hart, *Strategy: The indirect approach* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p.26, David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 1964), p.95, David Kilcullen, *Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency*, remarks delivered at the U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Conference, Washington D.C., 28 September 2006, [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/uscoin/3pillars\\_of\\_counterinsurgency.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/uscoin/3pillars_of_counterinsurgency.pdf) retrieved 19 January 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: exposing the myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>69</sup> Anthony Cordesman, “Rethinking the Wars Against ISIS and the U.S. Strategy for Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency”, in Center for Strategic and International Studies online commentary dates 28 September 2015. [http://csis.org/files/publication/150928\\_Cordesman\\_Rethinking\\_Wars\\_Against\\_ISIS.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/150928_Cordesman_Rethinking_Wars_Against_ISIS.pdf) retrieved 16 January 2016.

the Eelam Wars, and are illustrated throughout the historical narrative of chapters 1, 2 and 3 within this work.

As will become clear from the evidence presented here neither the distinctly violent military approach of brute force, nor the more nuanced integrated approach adopted the successive Sri Lankan governments ended the conflict prior to 2009. To understand the outcome, the research therefore turned to other academic frameworks that could have been used to understand the conflict and the outcome that resulted. While experience and scholarly research theories already exist to analyse government actions, the research reference models for examining insurgent organisations are more limited. Fotini Christia's framework in *Understanding alliance formation in civil wars*<sup>70</sup> was used to understand how and why the various Tamil insurgent groups shattered and then coalesced during the early stages of the campaign. It had less utility in understanding how the LTTE worked as an organisation and whether such a model was simply transferable. Christina Demers work on *Organisational Change Theories*<sup>71</sup> was used to attempt to place a social sciences reference model around the LTTE as it changed and failed to adapt post 2005. None of the models in her work effectively fitted an insurgency group - not something that she attempted when collating her research, which was designed for more conventional, commercial bodies. Christia and Demers state how contextual terrorism, violence and insurgency are, a point made in 1990 by Richard Clutterbuck that remains as valid now as it was twenty-five years ago.<sup>72</sup> The Sri Lankan case studies research conducted by Clutterbuck and Christa make valuable contributions to this thesis by adding veracity and weight to the analysis conducted within the historical account provided in the subsequent chapters.

It is noteworthy that Clutterbuck had also addressed the issues associated with insurgency activities within pluralist societies in a previous work,<sup>73</sup> and his conclusions about remedies for insurgencies—that the answer lies in balancing demands from belligerents—would not be supported by the outcome in the Eelam Wars. Conversely, the view that a hard-line, militarised and cold-blooded strategy for defeating the LTTE was necessary is supported by

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<sup>70</sup> Fotini Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (MIT: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>71</sup> Christiane Demers, *Organizational Change Theories: A synthesis* (London: Sage, 2007).

<sup>72</sup> Richard Clutterbuck, *Terrorism and guerilla warfare: forecasts and remedies* (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>73</sup> Richard Clutterbuck, *Guerillas and terrorists* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980).

conclusions from American authors Douglas Porch<sup>74</sup>, Gil Merom,<sup>75</sup> and Christopher Kolenda.<sup>76</sup> Whilst none of these authors use Sri Lanka as a case study, their conclusions are transferable to the actions taken by Rajapaksa's government in Colombo in ignoring the international condemnation for their high levels of collateral damage during military action after 2005, specifically during 2009. Having examined the current literature, it was clear that there were limited scholarly frameworks that explained the Sri Lankan wars and their outcome against the evidence, certainly none that would support the orthodox position.

It was only after drawing together the final round of interviews with the latest frameworks that the full impact of the new evidence was clear, but a structure did not become clear until the analysis was seen together. Prior to the publication of Staniland's new framework, the thesis was targeted towards the interpreting the evidence as it related to grand strategy and the philosophy adopted by protagonist leaders. Staniland's framework has allowed the prism to be narrowed significantly, enabling the focus to be placed on rebalancing the historical narrative, the current analysis and to provide a useful illustration of Staniland's work, set in the context of new qualitative evidence.

### **Structure**

To answer the key research questions stated above and build the dissertation to a successful conclusion, this study lays out to the empirical chapters—using the source material already discussed—in a broadly chronological structure, and is it useful at this point to explain and justify the chapter structure for the reader. The first chapter will highlight the fighting characteristics of the belligerents before 2005. Chapter two will outline events from 2005 on, in order to demonstrate the contrast between belligerents in the two periods. By examining the before and after dynamic of behaviours and organisational agility, the thesis will draw out leadership and decision-making as the key variable in chapter 3. That analysis is set within a context of evidenced changes in variables, dependencies and behaviours that is subsequently modelled against Staniland's framework of insurgent organisations in chapter 4. This is a

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<sup>74</sup> Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: exposing the myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> Gil Merom, *How democracies lose small wars* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>76</sup> Christopher D Kolenda, *The Counterinsurgency Challenge: A parable of leadership and decision making in modern conflict* (USA: Stackpole Books, 2012).

different approach to the one that traditionally views the period as a linear timeline divided into four wars interspersed with ceasefires and peacekeeping missions. By covering the entirety of the period until 2005, chapter 1 will demonstrate that the LTTE were a highly flexible and agile organisation, capable of rapid change in their fighting style. By revealing changes of tactics and process by the insurgents, notably after defeats in Jaffna and encounters with the Indian Peace-Keeping force, the LTTE demonstrated a remarkable agility in their thinking, planning and conduct of attacks against government forces. The evidence in this chapter will highlight the LTTE's ability before 2005 to switch between terrorist, guerrilla and mobile-military operations as dictated by their central leadership against enemies differing in size and scale, fighting doctrine and tactics. The insurgents faced differing styles of leadership in Colombo as well during this period: each successive government having a leader that wanted to approach the LTTE problem in different ways. The militarised approach of President Jawardene found no more success in ending the insurgency to President Chandrika's one that focused on seeking dialogue and compromise. These are important facets when considering the variables between belligerents prior to, and after, 2005. Only by gaining an appreciation of the variables and dependencies is it possible to understand the key factors that caused such a distinct reversal of fortunes in the fighting after 2005.

Chapter 1 covers in detail the events between 1984 and 2004, when the LTTE rose from being just one of many Tamil insurgent groups, into a formidable force that had survived, perhaps even beaten, the deployment of mass peace-keeping troops from the Indian Army, combined attacks from the Sri Lankan government and a hostile international environment who had branded them as terrorists. From hardly being able to maintain control of even some small pieces of farmland, the LTTE of 2003 controlled more than one-third of the geographic space inside Sri Lanka. They had developed from a group of four people into an organisation of more than ten thousand fighting cadres, with military, civil, police and governance arms that extended their reach deep within the population, into Indian Tamil Nadu and across the globe through the Tamil diaspora.<sup>77</sup> The ideas of the Tamil New Tigers had blossomed, under Balasingham's guidance, into a mature ideology that provided the organisation an intellectual backbone and conceptual framework that placed it on stage with Marxism, Islam

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<sup>77</sup> US PACOM Report 2002, Signed by Peter Rodman, Assistant US Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

and Maoism. It was almost impossible at that stage to forecast the fall that was about to occur. Chapter 1 will show therefore that the LTTE was a centrally managed insurgent organisation whose success was based on its experience of terrorist and guerrilla operations against various military forces, and achieved a level of adaptability, innovation and orchestration that overcame internal and external challenges with relative ease.

The contrast in the achievements of the insurgent group before and after 2005 is made clear in chapter 2. Since the formation of the LTTE until 2003, their leader Prabhakaran was a force to be reckoned with and, by any standards,<sup>78</sup> an exceptionally gifted commander. The LTTE successes under his leadership, growing and developing from a simple small band of warriors into a sophisticated insurgent group whose fighting doctrine nearly achieved their secessionist political agenda from Sri Lanka as the start of a larger Tamil Eelam empire. The government approach until 2004 reflected their failure to take sufficient steps to prevent the growth in relative power of this small group. Yet chapter 2 will show that the Tiger's ability to fight and manoeuvre against an adaptive enemy, a skill ably demonstrated between 1993-2003, suddenly and surely failed thereafter. The current orthodoxy of the events following 2004 is that the changes made by the Sri Lankan government thereafter were the singular cause of their decisive victory some five years later. According to the popular narrative, by defining and highlighting their national interests, the government in Colombo was able to change the dynamic of fighting. Various authors claim that this was due entirely to either the genius of leaders,<sup>79</sup> the fighting power,<sup>80</sup> and vigour of the Sri Lankan armed forces or a combination of these two factors.<sup>81</sup> But little analysis has been made for the failures of the LTTE as the cause, or even a contributory factor, to the final outcome of the campaign.<sup>82</sup> It is unusual that after such a rise in relative power and the establishment of large geographic areas under political control of the insurgents, that the situation changes so rapidly and markedly thereafter without allowing political access. Changes in the Tamil community at this stage were extremely limited: there was no marked change in demographics, social

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<sup>78</sup> The grudging respect of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation is notable in their 2008 press release on the LTTE, *Taming the Tigers: from here in the US*.  
[https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/tamil\\_tigers011008](https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/tamil_tigers011008)

<sup>79</sup> C A Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012)

<sup>80</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010).

<sup>81</sup> Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2013), and Weiss, *The Cage* (2012).

<sup>82</sup> As noted in the introduction, the books written by Swamy and Murari provide an introduction to the Tamil perspectives, but no analysis, or they do not cover the entirety of the period of the conflict.

mobility or structure, spending or media penetration.<sup>83</sup> The primary variable within the LTTE between 2002 and 2004 was within the leadership structure and decision-making paradigm operated by the chief, Prabhakaran.<sup>84</sup> The chapter starts with a broad overview of the events after 2005, known as Eelam War IV, until its conclusion in 2009. The aim of this part is to provide an overarching view on the final elements of the campaign. The chapter then revisits the evidence for a second showing, examining activities over the period 1997-2009 in a thematic way, from the political, informational, military and civil defence aspects, to the economic and diplomatic activities of both sides. This second viewing of events allows new evidence to be exposed in a different way, one that demonstrates the adaptability of the forces within a deliberate and procedural force and campaign design. As such, it demonstrates that the government was following a predetermined military plan much as they had done before, albeit one that differed significantly in scale and intensity. That plan was highly predictable from a belligerent's point of view, and should have made reactions and counter activities clear. Yet the evidence will show that the LTTE did not adapt or change in the way it had done previously. The chapter will conclude that although the Rajapaksa administration had adopted a thoughtful and comprehensive plan, it was not anything that the LTTE had not seen before, albeit with differences in scale and mass. It is worth noting that not only had the Sri Lankan forces increased in size and sophistication, but the LTTE had as well. Relative force composition had not changed to such a degree that defeat of the insurgents was a pre-ordained turn of events based solely on capability. Increased access to new weapons, greater funding and more recruits could have made them an equally powerful force. The competitive advantage of the government forces was not that large. The chief variable between the two periods was not, therefore, the approach of the Sri Lankan government, or their forces. It was the decision-making paradigm that the LTTE leadership was operating under. So, chapter two will prove that there were significant changes in both protagonists of the Eelam Wars, but that these changes to fighting strength and tactics were not so large as to form a competitive edge, and therefore to be decisive. This unpicks the

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<sup>83</sup> Karthigesu Sivathamby, *Being a Tamil and Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Aivakam, 2005), figures 2-6, and LTTE Peace Secretariat, "Demographic Changes in the Tamil Homeland in the Island of Sri Lanka over the Last Century." (Peace Secretariat, April 2008).

<sup>84</sup> Interview T3: High level former LTTE leader defecting along with Colonel Karuna. Interviewed in September 2012 and June 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka by skype. AP12/KP A 12-11: Former senior LTTE logistics 'fixer' and later on the personal staff of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in June 2013 in Brussels, Belgium by skype. AK12: A former clerk of the LTTE. Interviewed in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in July 2010. PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013.

current orthodoxy of the campaign and also provides, for the first time, a comprehensive account of the conflict.

Building on chapter two, Chapter 3 picks up key themes of leadership and decision-making within the LTTE and starts by outlining that the insurgent organisation was centrally managed, with clear political guidelines, a clear ideological vision and careful adherence to core doctrine and strategy. Both Swamy and Murari agree that these facets were run by the group's leader, Prabhakaran.<sup>85</sup> This chapter will develop and analyse that factor and provide evidence to support the claim that the LTTE chief was solely responsible for these core facets. It will also demonstrate that the change to the Prabhakaran's decision-making framework in 2004 was instrumental in altering the way in which the LTTE operated. The evidence will expose how his views, after the departure of key advisors, meant that he was no longer able to execute the same skill of decision-making, policy planning and military activities after 2004. This change coincided with changes in government policy and military activity. The evidence will demonstrate that until 2004, Prabhakaran was displaying qualities of extremely sound military judgment, luck (and critically his own luck) and vision. These, accompanied by his charismatic attraction, drew Tamil fighters and money to him making the LTTE leader an exceptionally powerful and successful insurgent leader. His ability to orchestrate military operations in several parts of the country simultaneously, differing in objectives, violence and methodology was impressive. Prabhakaran was recognized internationally, as well as in Colombo and New Delhi, as the key to achieving a lasting settlement for the Tamil people in Sri Lanka<sup>86</sup> and perhaps more widely in Tamil Nadu and across the Tamil diaspora. In 2004-2005 he had the opportunity to achieve a Tamil two-state solution: admittedly not his secessionist ideal, but closer to it than anyone had thought possible for two decades.<sup>87</sup> Prabhakaran decided against it, and his troubles were just about to start. The analysis of subsequent behaviour draws on pre-2004 evidence as a normative behaviour baseline. As such it could be subject to the criticism of questionable "cause logical

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<sup>85</sup> M R Narayan Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind* (Colombo: Srilankabooks, 2003), pp.xiii-xix, and S Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga: The Rise and Fall of an Eelam Warrior* (New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2012), pp.xvii-xix.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Cedric Hilburn Grant, R. Mark Kirton (Eds), *Governance, Conflict Analysis and Conflict Resolution* (London: Ian Randle Publishers, 2007), pp.278-279, and Amaia Sánchez-Cacicedo, *Building States, Building Peace: Global and Regional Involvement in Sri Lanka* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), pp.99-100.

<sup>87</sup> "Tamil Tigers call off peace talks". *BBC News*. 21 April 2003. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/2964349.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/2964349.stm). Accessed 4 January 2010.

fallacy” (i.e. *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, literally - after this therefore because of this). To overcome this potential pitfall the author has used Bayesian methodology.<sup>88</sup> a process that mitigates potential issues related to causation and correlation by using evidence contrast analysis of behaviours in order to determine key variables. This methodology allows the evidence of the post 2004 era, more obvious in 2005 and later when events exposed the flaws of the new decision-making regime, to be viewed in a different light. To understand the centrality of the leader within the LTTE organisation, it is necessary to contextualise Prabhakaran’s evolution as a leader. This chapter achieves this by providing a biography from sources close to him,<sup>89</sup> as well as exploiting existing documentation. It then develops behaviours in an analysis of his behaviours after the loss of two key advisors, Anton Balasingham and Colonel Karuna in 2004. Karuna’s defection enabled the Sri Lankan Army to become more effective in their search and destroy missions over the coming years: it is almost certain that his defection allowed the campaign to be shortened but the information he took with him did not change the Sri Lankan government’s plan decisively. Neither did the absence of Balasingham change the nature of the campaign per se: rather it changed the agility and analysis with which Prabhakaran was able to make decisions. His previously impressive ability to change the direction and shape of LTTE military and political activity to suit the changing environment in which he was operating was no longer visible. The LTTE chief’s pre-2005 doctrine was no longer evident as a handrail, but had rather become a dogma to which he stuck and became his undoing.

Remaining with this discussion of chapter 3, the government had already put in place a strategy that would defeat Prabhakaran and the LTTE, but this plan would not have succeeded if Prabhakaran had still able to operate as he had prior to 2005. In fact it is somewhat counter-factual that if Prabhakaran had been able to fall back on Maoist doctrine, he would have had a plan that dealt with set-backs in a military sense: the LTTE would have simply retreated into the jungles and lived to fight with guerrilla tactics until he had regained sufficient strength to fight again another day. But without this doctrine, knowledge or advice

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<sup>88</sup> Simon Jackman, *Bayesian Analysis in Social Sciences* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 2009).

<sup>89</sup> Such as S12-3: Childhood acquaintance of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in October 2012 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, T12: Mail runner between Prabhakaran and senior Tamil-Indian politicians when in latter was in Tamil Nadu, India between 1974-1978. Interview conducted in January 2008 in Brussels, Belgium and TW33: First mate of a LTTE logistics vessel (fishing/smuggling boat). The numerous passages which Prabhakaran made in boats crewed by this man made him a strange, and only periodic confidant for Prabhakaran. Interviewed in October 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

from his stalwart supporters (Balasingham and Karuna), the LTTE chief was not even aware of that option. That he was no longer able to strategize effectively was just not due to the loss of commanders but rather his psychological ability to do so. The dynamic had changed starkly within the LTTE – it was the key variable that had altered between the combatants. The very nature of the insurgent organisation had altered, more so that the differing plans and constructs within the government in Colombo, or the changes to force levels in each of the belligerent groups. Therefore, such variables cannot account for the radical changes in fortune within the conflict, and as such this thesis has presented evidence that it was the changes within the LTTE decision-making structure that was the chief variable. However, these deductions are based on evidence gathered from potentially biased sources. A supporting conceptual, academic framework would certainly add weight to the theory put forward thus far. Chapter 3 thus achieves the thesis aim of providing a new way of examining the conflict, one that sees the failure of the LTTE to adapt to changes in the new government's approach as key.

Chapter 4 turns to an academic framework in order to prove that the argument has provenance and that the lessons have wider applicability. Different authors have explained how insurgent groups can be classified by a variety of metrics and allow for changes within their own typologies.<sup>90</sup> However, key facets within the LTTE (including the outcome of defeat without any accompanying political representation) marks it as different – a group that does not adhere to the distinction in methodological classification.<sup>91</sup> An exception is provided by analysing the LTTE through the conceptual framework provided in Paul Staniland's new work, *Networks of Rebellion*. Here the changes in behaviour and performance of the LTTE can be examined by fusing complex changes alongside differences in activity and overall structure, differentiated by looking at variables pre- and post-2005 in order to derive better understanding. In examining insurgent groups, Paul Staniland uses a

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<sup>90</sup> Just some of the scholars who have addressed typologies of insurgent groups include, Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter Insurgencies: Guerrillas and their Opponents since 1750* (New York: Routledge, 2001), Bard E O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), John McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), and Bruce Mazlish, *The Revolutionary Ascetic*. McGraw Hill, 1977.

<sup>91</sup> For example, within Bard O'Neill's typology, the LTTE could be classified within any of his seven types: anarchist, egalitarian, traditionalist, pluralist, secessionist, reformist and traditionalist.

social-institutional argument to frame a discussion of typologies in insurgent groups.<sup>92</sup> In his analysis of belligerents, Staniland outlines a different way of examining how changes within organisations plays a key role in their performance and, in turn, the probable outcome of campaigns against them. The basis of the framework is an appreciation that successful insurgent groups can be best comprehended by understanding the processes of control, and that such methodology remains valid even when there are changes to the state policies and activity being applied against them. This element is derived from research into networks and mobilisation of dissension.<sup>93</sup> Staniland is an interesting methodology by which to analyse and understand the LTTE. He does so himself within his book, yet there are key differences to the conclusions reached here and the ones he draws. By his own admission, Staniland did not have the research base from the LTTE from which to draw, but that does not undermine his framework, merely the conclusions from which one can draw.<sup>94</sup>

Chapter 4 therefore outlines Staniland's thesis, classifying the LTTE both before and after 2005 within that framework, and to outline why typologies offered here are different to those made by Staniland. It uses the new evidence exposed herein to support Staniland's theory of social-institutional change in the LTTE. The chapter seeks to use the social-institutional argument to provide academic rigour and a conceptual framework to support the evidence gained from the research, and to validate the conclusions drawn from it. This leads to a conclusion where the basis for such a change in understanding and comprehending the conflict could generate a new way of understanding the Sri Lankan-Eelam wars. However, this dissertation also differs in its analysis of the LTTE to that of Staniland's own analysis: he states, "The Tamil Tigers were clearly an *integrated* organization, even though they were ultimately annihilated because of a staggering imbalance of power."<sup>95</sup> The case for this differentiation is made in chapter 4. By outlining the leadership personalities and dynamics within the LTTE, and then evidencing the activities and downfall of the organisation, the examination of the group against Staniland's typology will draw together these facets against

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>93</sup> Karen Barkey and Ronan Van Rossem, "Networks and Contention: Villages and Regional Structure in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no.5 (1997): 1345-1382, and John Padgett and Christopher Ansell, "Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434," *American Journal of Sociology*, 98, no.6 (1993): 1259-1319.

<sup>94</sup> Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (2014), pp.141-177.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p.8. Staniland defines an integrated group as one that has leadership unity and high levels of discipline at high levels of local compliance.

his own framework to illustrate how it confirmed more to the vanguard/fragmented definitions within his model.

The conclusion draws together the analysis presented in the preceding chapters. It enables the reader to examine and understand the conflict through a different prism – the alternation in organisational control within the LTTE. Recognising this broad factor in insurgencies has precedent. Stathis Kalyvas published such research in 2006, concluding that cohesion affects the balance of power and control in insurgent groups, which in turn explains key dynamics of violence.<sup>96</sup> However, his research did not cover the Sri Lankan case study, nor does it reach beyond the analysis of dynamics of violence. Other authors have outlined the importance of how insurgent cohesion shapes the conduct of wars, how they end and the politics that result from them.<sup>97</sup> Research into these areas cover changes in material resources, mass popular support, ideology, and state structure and policies. But such methodologies for analysis do not adequately explain the outcome of the Eelam campaigns. As previously stated, other authors who have examined the conflict in Sri Lanka have found ways of nullifying the changes inside the LTTE by ignoring the evidence or not having it available to them, thus focusing on state-centric theories.<sup>98</sup> Others have examined the conflict through an ethnic prism, noting that pre-war social structures determine the dynamics of an insurgent group – linked specifically to class divides within the Tamil population.<sup>99</sup> Yet this is not evident from the research conducted by this author or from others familiar with this field.<sup>100</sup> Finally, broader insurgent typology studies rely on homogenising belligerent groups to find common

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<sup>96</sup> Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>97</sup> James Moody and Douglas White, “Structural Cohesion and Embeddedness.” *American Sociological Review* 68 (2003), pp.103-127.

<sup>98</sup> Gordon Weiss, *The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers* (London: Vintage Books, 2012), C A Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (Mumbai: Piyasiri Printing Systems, 2012), and Ahmed Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins: Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

<sup>99</sup> For example, see Asoka Bandarage, *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity and Political Economy* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2009), William Clarence, *Ethnic Warfare in Sri Lanka and the UN Crisis* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), Neil DeVotta, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (California: Stanford University Press, 2004), K N O Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Assertiveness in Sri Lanka* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1992), amongst others.

<sup>100</sup> S Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga: The Rise and Fall of an Eelam Warrior* (New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2012), and M R Narayan Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind* (Colombo: Srilankabooks, 2003).

themes within them and drawing patterns that fail to recognise the individuality of such groups, and the unique context in which they all operate.<sup>101</sup> In these frameworks, failures, metrics and performance standards all take central places and organisational change dynamics are subjugated to become insignificant factors. This thesis draws these factors out instead of hiding them.

Turning back to the argument to bring together the key points of this introduction, existing literature uses interviews from government sources argue that the LTTE was defeated by the reinvigorated and well-funded Sri Lankan armed forces, fighting an attritional campaign against the insurgents.<sup>102</sup> The argument presented here is that the swiftness and decisiveness of the victory by the government of Colombo in 2009 was as much due to failures in the LTTE leadership and their strategy for fighting, as it was to the fighting ability of the Sri Lankan armed forces. It does so by using a variety of new primary sources from the LTTE, the Tamil diaspora, regional politicians and decision-makers, supported by documentary evidence from Indian and Sri Lankan governments and their security agencies that have previously not been exposed. It complements the current analysis of the Eelam Wars by adding balance to those Sinhalese perspectives. This is the differentiation in the recounting of the history in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, and in drawing the subsequent conclusions by using an academic social-institutional framework to support the findings.

In conclusion, this exciting new analysis of the Eelam Wars provides not only the first comprehensive history of the conflict, but also a new methodology for assessing the failures in the LTTE. The sources and witnesses who provided the evidence bring a new lens through which to view the conflict, and to break the current orthodoxy of the conflict that—if not countered—might be relied on to provide false lessons about the conduct of counter-insurgency in the future.

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<sup>101</sup> See for example, Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (London: Brassey's, 1990), or John McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).

<sup>102</sup> Specifically, Weiss, Hashim, Mehta and Chandraprema.

## Chapter One: The Beginnings and The Rise

*Much if not most military history written by Generals, for example, is hopelessly narrow and ignorant of the wider social, political and diplomatic aspects of the subject.*

Richard J Evans<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

This chapter will highlight the fighting characteristics of the belligerents before 2005. Chapter two will outline events from 2005 on, in order to demonstrate the contrast between belligerents in the two periods. By examining the before and after dynamic of behaviours and organisational agility, the thesis will draw out leadership and decision-making as the key variable in chapter 3. That analysis is set within a context of evidenced changes in variables, dependencies and behaviours that is subsequently modelled against Staniland's framework of insurgent organisations in chapter 4. This is a different approach to the one that traditionally views the period as a linear timeline divided into four wars interspersed with ceasefires and peacekeeping missions. By covering the entirety of the period until 2005, this chapter will demonstrate that the LTTE were a highly flexible and agile organisation, capable of rapid changes in their fighting style. By revealing this fluidity in the tactics and process of the insurgents, notably after defeats in Jaffna and encounters with the Indian Peace-Keeping force, the following chapter will show that the LTTE demonstrated a remarkable agility in their thinking, planning and conduct of attacks against government forces. The evidence in this chapter will highlight the LTTE's ability before 2005 to switch between terrorist, guerrilla and mobile-military operations as dictated by their central leadership against enemies differing in fighting doctrine and tactics. The insurgents faced differing styles of leadership in Colombo as well during this period: each successive government having a leader that wanted to approach the LTTE problem in different ways. The militarised approach of President Jawardene found no more success in ending the insurgency to President Chandrika's one that focused on seeking dialogue and compromise. These are important facets when considering the variables between belligerents prior to, and after, 2005. Only by gaining an appreciation of the variables and dependencies is it possible to

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<sup>1</sup> Richard J Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997), p.214.

understand the key factors that caused such a distinct reversal of fortunes in the fighting after 2005.

Those authors who have previously written historical accounts of the conflict almost exclusively drew on sources from the Sri Lankan government, or interviews with those from the Sri Lankan leadership and commanders of their armed forces.<sup>2</sup> Not only is the bias from these sources self-evident but the subsequent analysis, where attempted, is also flawed because of the lack of wider appreciation and context.<sup>3</sup> Inclusion of these facets is key if one is to understand why the conflict ended so decisively but without any form of political recognition or settlement by the belligerents. As such, this chapter introduces balance into the history of the Sri Lankan conflict between 1956 and 2004, and this is important because the current historical accounts of conflicts depend on the sources of information and the perspective of those writing them, a point noted by Richard Evans in the quote above.

This chapter aims to rebalance that history by exploiting new oral and written sources. Research for this thesis allowed for interaction with LTTE insiders, external actors and participants in the conflict and government papers from Sri Lanka and India that shed new light on events and the conflict more broadly. These new sources and documents allow balance to be introduced into the history recorded thus far<sup>4</sup>. It does so by recounting events with a Tamil perspective rather than a Sinhalese one. For completeness to a reader that has not read previous works, the following account includes and describes both government and LTTE activity between 1920 and 2009, using secondary sources to provide an overview of the whole period under consideration.<sup>5</sup> As such, this represents the first comprehensive

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon Weiss, *The Cage* (London: Vintage Books, 2012), C A Chandraprema, *Gota's War*, (Colombo: Piyasiri Printing Systems, 2012), Ahmend Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins: Sri Lanka's defeat of the Tamil Tigers* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Major General Raj Mehta, *Lost Victory: The Rise and Fall LTTE Supremo V Prabhakaran* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> To date, the most authoritative account remains by Gordon Weiss, *The Cage* (London: Vintage Books, 2012), and yet none of the available publications provide a comprehensive view.

<sup>5</sup> Notably from M R Narayan Swamy, *The Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Men* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 1994), *Tigers of Lanka: from Boys to Guerillas* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2002), *The Tiger Vanquished* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2010), and *Inside an Elusive Mind* (Colombo: Srilankabooks, 2003), and S Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (New Delhi: Sage, 2012).

history of the conflict. The structure of the chapter follows the current orthodoxy<sup>6</sup> of describing the conflict, dividing it by chronology and between periods of fighting.<sup>7</sup> The conclusion will discuss whether there is an alternate methodology that is more representative of the conflict when viewed in its entirety.

Potential claims of perspective and bias of the author were addressed in the introduction. It should be noted however that the author started research from a Sinhalese perspective alone and had to alter his own paradigm for considering the conflict between 2010 and 2012. During these two years, the author exposed himself to Tamil dynamics and thinking in order to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of the motivations, causes and cognitive functioning of decision-making frameworks within the LTTE. Thus whilst the aim of this account is to introduce balance for subsequent analysis, the tendency for western perspective and bias has been mitigated against as much as possible.

The Eelam Wars ended with certainty and finality on 19 May 2009. Their start was not so similarly definable. As outlined below, some authors claim the origins date from the 1970s, others from 1956. This chapter will start by examining these claims, but will not seek to provide a definite causal event or social change. Rather it aims to place the causes of insurrection in a context that permits a wider appreciation of the Tamil-Sinhalese dynamic in order to discount ethnic rivalry as the core dynamic within the conflict. The chapter goes on to outline the wars as they occurred, using a chronological methodology for ease of reading, but introducing new evidence from Tamil sources along the way. The sources and their evidence are used to negate variables from that period that have previously been cited as reasons why the campaign ended to suddenly in 2009. The evidence also provides an understanding of how the LTTE operated and fought that can be contrasted with the evidence in chapter 2 that covers the period between 2005 and 2009. It includes coverage of the various peace talks and ends with the offer of a federalised settlement for the Tamil people by

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<sup>6</sup> Weiss, Chandraprema, Mehta and Hashim (op cit) all use the Eelam Wars I-IV nomenclature in their work. This is reflected in the Wikipedia account of the conflict ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eelam\\_War\\_I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eelam_War_I)), and as such is becoming the normative methodology of establishing the public narrative. Whilst academic and thematic examinations of the conflict do not use this framework exclusively, many were written before the conflict was finished and division of the history by these periods had yet to be established.

<sup>7</sup> The current methodology of recounting the conflict in Sri Lanka is to divide the conflict into periods of major fighting, known as Eelam War I (1983-1987), II (1990-1995), III (1995-2002) and IV (2006-2009).

the government in Colombo. The chapter provides evidence that the LTTE evolved into a complex and brutal organisation that was achieving its aims through a Manichean prism, and that the chief reason for this was in the central direction of the organisation.

### **The Causes of Insurrection**

As with many insurgencies and civil governance issues in former colonies, the conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka is often traced back to the British rule of what was then Ceylon.<sup>8</sup> The issue of local political representation between 1920 and 1944 was largely dealt under a policy of inclusion and broad acknowledgement of both factions.<sup>9</sup> Whilst frictions existed, the rule of the British appeared to serve as a uniting factor between local inhabitants and suppressed deeper held grievances. These started to appear more seriously, however, between 1944 and 1956, as Sinhalese became more dominant first as the official language of Sri Lanka and later the passing of the “Sinhala Only Act” which, eventually, led to ethnic riots.<sup>10</sup> Some authors state that the wider Tamil insurgency had its conceptual roots here and the confrontation of non-representational politics that followed.<sup>11</sup> Modern social historians such as John France<sup>12</sup> would point to the predictability of a bloody insurgency following such decisions, but whilst the warrior ethos of both Tamils and Sinhalese across history is clear, there is no evidence to suggest that the rise of anything beyond a civil movement was predictable.<sup>13</sup>

From 1965 onwards the idea of a separate state of Tamil Eelam began to emerge with leading Tamil intellectuals, indoctrinating the Tamil youth and undertaking separatist activities.<sup>14</sup> However, it was not until 1972 that the Tamil New Tigers was formed: a group that followed

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<sup>8</sup> C A Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.22-28.

<sup>9</sup> J N Dixit, *Assignment Colombo* (New Delhi: Sage, 1990), p. 12-63.

<sup>10</sup> M R Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: from Boys to Guerrillas* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2002), pp. 16-17 and 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> Bansal, Alok, Mayilvahanan and Podder, *Sri Lanka: Search for Peace* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2007), p.3-9.

<sup>12</sup> John France, *Perilous Glory* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), pp.1-15.

<sup>13</sup> Knox, Murray and Bernstein, *Making of Modern Strategy*, (New York: Cambridge University press, 1984), p.2.

<sup>14</sup> Adele Balasingham, *The Will to Freedom: An Insiders View of the Tamil Resistance* (Fairmax Publishing Ltd, 2003), pp.72-74.

the ideology that looked back to the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium Chola Empire.<sup>15</sup> The merging of the political aspirations with similar beliefs was not clear until the formation of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1976 when the political wing called for the creation of a secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam, based on the right of self determination.<sup>16</sup> In furtherance of these aims the TULF covertly supported the Tamil New Tigers with funds and letters of reference, indeed it provided the first introduction of Balasingham to Prabhakaran – the former as the chief political strategist-negotiator and confidant to the latter, the visionary leader of LTTE.<sup>17</sup> The linkage between these two organisations will become clearer as the history unfolds, but at this stage the linkage between the political movement of TULF and the hard-line social revolutionaries within the Tamil New Tigers appeared to make them natural bedfellows. However, the aims of both organisations became significantly different with the TULF limiting its aims within Sri Lanka whilst the Tamil New Tigers, and subsequently the LTTE, looked to a wider geography for the Eelam outcome they desired.<sup>18</sup> This mismatch between aims and objectives of the movements inevitably led to their separation in subsequent years: the divergence in their views, aims and methodologies was to become clearer as time progressed and led to their predictable opposition to each other as potential uniting forces. The role of political leaders and the strategic visionary of the LTTE played a crucial role in this – a factor examined in greater detail in chapter 3.<sup>19</sup> The separation of the political and militarized elements that followed was highly significant and differed from other Maoist-Leninist principles for Revolutionary War. For the Tamil revolutionaries, the political did not subsume the military elements but rather that the militarized elements

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, pp.32-35, and T D S A Dissanyaka, *War or Peace in Sri Lanka, Vol II* (Colombo: Swastika Pvt Ltd, 1998), p.7.

<sup>16</sup> The Vaddukkodei (Vattukottai) Resolution of 1976. <http://lteandsrilanka.blogspot.co.uk>. Retrieved 13 January 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Adele Balasingham, *The Will to Freedom* (2003), p.34, and Interview 1-3: A junior commander in the LTTE who was with Prabhakaran at the formation and early stages of the movement. Later a more senior infantry cadre formation commander before deserting in the final stages of Eelam War IV. Interviews conducted September 2007 in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, in July 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka and again in March 2013 in London.

<sup>18</sup> Interview 1-3, *Ibid*, and N R Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind*, (Colombo: Srilankabooks, 2003), pp.xv-xx.

<sup>19</sup> It is noteworthy that the unification of political and military arms can significantly enhance an insurgencies probability of success (IRA, Hezbollah, Chinese Red Army, Bolsheviks, French Revolution), but that linkage is by no means proven. Bruce Malzlish, *The Revolutionary Ascetic: Evolution of a Political Type* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976), pp.212-221.

became the dominating and populist force for change with the Tamil community.<sup>20</sup> This shift in relative power was not immediate and was reinforced by other aspects of the campaign: indeed the shift took significant time.

According to Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, the TULF did not gain widespread support, as they were not willing to compromise their objective of independence by convergence with other political Tamil parties who wanted lesser levels of political autonomy, starting with modest wishes for language rights.<sup>21</sup> The Sinhalese achieved a strong power base at the national assembly in 1976 under the United National Party and the TULF became the main opposition party but the concessions offered to Tamils after a year of negotiation were insignificant and failed to placate the Tamil youth who had wanted and hoped for so much more.<sup>22</sup> On that basis, the TULF started to lose control for the militant wings that descended into a spiral of violent protest and anti-government activity.<sup>23</sup> The most prominent of these groups was the Tamil New Tigers in which Prabhakaran was the de facto leader. In 1976 they changed their name to the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) and commenced a concerted campaign of violence against political and establishment figures, notably including Tamil policemen who were in dialogue or working for the Government as their targets.<sup>24</sup> Their first major terrorist activity was the assassination of the major of Jaffna, Alfred Duraiappah, followed by the assassination of the Tamil Member of Parliament M Canagaratnam in 1977: both personally conducted by Prabhakaran.<sup>25</sup> This rise of the Tamil New Tigers and the birth of the LTTE are charted in more detail during the study of Prabhakaran in chapter 3.

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<sup>20</sup> Analysis of LTTE evolution drawn from Interviews and M R Narayan Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), p.101.

<sup>21</sup> Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity* (Stuttgart: F.Steiner, 1994), p.1.

<sup>22</sup> William Clarence, *Ethnic Warfare in Sri Lanka and the UN Crisis* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p.41.

<sup>23</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, “*International and Regional Implications of the Sri Lankan Tamil Insurgency*” (December 1998), retrieved December 2010.  
<http://212.150.54.123/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleid=57>.

<sup>24</sup> K9-09: Another former member of TNT who did transfer to the LTTE but failed to pass the physical elements of LTTE jungle training. Emigrated. Interviewed in London in May 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2006), p 139, and Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), p.33.

## Eelam War I

The evolution of violence by the LTTE followed the model identified by Bard O'Neill.<sup>26</sup> First limited acts of terrorism, widening their targets and gradually morphing into guerrilla insurgent activity – a pattern also acknowledged by Thomas Marks<sup>27</sup>. But Prabhakaran and the LTTE were left with little choice in this development – it appears this was based on necessity of circumstances rather than evolution based on doctrine.<sup>28</sup> The causes of this feature of the LTTE are examined in greater detail in chapter 3. By 1983 the audacity of LTTE attacks had become impressive culminating in the ambush of a Sri Lankan Army checkpoint (Four Four Bravo), killing an officer and 12 soldiers.<sup>29</sup> The response from the Sinhalese people was unequivocal: riots and violence against Tamils in Colombo that left between 400-3,000 dead and instigated a mass exodus of Tamils from Sinhalese dominated areas.<sup>30</sup> It is these events which galvanized the Tamil mass sentiment both in Sri Lanka and abroad – the Tamil diaspora in Europe and India quickly became key in the fundraising and logistical support for the LTTE. The links with the Diaspora were to have very significant implications for the insurgency and the Government for Sri Lanka in subsequent wars as the LTTE gained significant financial and logistical support from abroad. Far from using their ethnic people abroad for recruiting and fighting, the LTTE leadership instead leveraged their support to increase international access, diplomatic support and finance.<sup>31</sup> The deliberate use of dispersed supporting groups in this way was an interesting development in the 1980s, but was not unique: the IRA fundraising used the Irish diaspora in the United States of America to fund terrorist activities against the British during a similar period<sup>32</sup>. That does not

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<sup>26</sup> Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, (London: Brassey's, 1990), p.9.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas A Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), pp.183-189.

<sup>28</sup> Interview 11-3, op cit, and Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), p.37.

<sup>29</sup> Contact Report, Sri Lankan Army Archives XX-XXXXX (Colombo: Office of the Joint Staff), and Frances Harrison, "Twenty years on - riots that led to war". *BBC News*, 23 July 2003. Retrieved 21 September 2009. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/3090111.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3090111.stm)

<sup>30</sup> Roland Buerk, (23 July 2008), "Sri Lankan families count cost of war," *BBC News*, 23 July 2008. Retrieved 14 January 2009. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/7521197.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7521197.stm)

<sup>31</sup> Interview A-3: An overseas LTTE operative central to the logistical support of the organisation. Interviewed in December 2011 in Halifax, Canada.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.250.

minimize the significance of the support, just that it was not a unique approach. The Tamil diaspora in Europe and Canada was key in the provision of financial support, but it was in India where the hub of Tamil support was centred.<sup>33</sup>

During the 1980s the Indian Government became involved in supporting both sets of protagonists. In an attempt to prevent insurgent groups coalescing, the Indian Government funded several factions of Tamil insurgents, utilizing their covert external intelligence agency known as the Research and Analysis Wing (the Indian equivalent to the American CIA or French DGSE).<sup>34</sup> Politically India was worried about the rise of a Tamil independence movement within their own Tamil Nadu province and government support for the Tamils in Sri Lanka movement secured politicians additional votes within their own country. The LTTE was not the only militant group of Tamils that were in receipt of Indian government support however. Other belligerent organisations were conducting violent activity and sought to co-operate with other similar groups, leading to an idea of a great coalescence of insurgent power that could effectively fight the Sri Lankan forces: such a theory was put forward by one former member of EROS fighter who also claimed membership of the LTTE command later in the conflict – there is no supporting evidence for this claim however.<sup>35</sup> The LTTE leadership (Prabhakaran not Anton Balasingham) squarely rejected a philosophy of co-operation however and the LTTE gradually absorbed others or exterminated them. The LTTE approach depended on whether they were willing to accept Prabhakaran's leadership and ideology.<sup>36</sup> The detail of these groups and their interaction with the LTTE leadership is the subject of further examination in chapter 3. Some chose an alternate path and began working with the Government as paramilitaries rather than fall under Prabhakaran's

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<sup>33</sup> Interviews A-4: A senior LTTE finance operator operating in the Netherlands and Canada. Interviewed in December 2011 in Halifax, Canada, and interview 4-2: A member of the LTTE central finance committee, supervisor of A-3 and A-4. Interviewed in December 2012 in Toronto, Canada.

<sup>34</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), p.73, and Raj Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), p.58.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with H3: Undoubtedly a member of EROS, and later claiming membership to LTTE senior leadership. Interviews conducted in March 2010 in Muscat, Oman by Skype.

<sup>36</sup> This is similar to a PLO type approach to convergence of factions through Machiavellian means: again the LTTE approach was not unique in their philosophy, but the significance is clear and is expanded upon in Chapter 3.

command.<sup>37</sup> In political terms some small Tamil parties remained within the mainstream opposing the LTTE's view of separation and independence.<sup>38</sup>

Despite these moves, between 1983 and 1985 the LTTE gained control over much of the Jaffna peninsula in the north of Sri Lanka, and after a series of peace talks between the Government and the LTTE failed in 1985, the Sri Lankan military launched an offensive to regain governance in that area. Operation Liberation was a conventional counter insurgency operation that was largely successful but missed the capture of both Prabhakaran and some of his key colonels.<sup>39</sup> In fact the success of the military operation and the rounding up of leadership elements was curtailed due to political pressure from India on President Jayawardene.<sup>40</sup> As some LTTE insiders later claimed, it is highly likely that the poorly equipped Sri Lankan army could have finished off the insurgency at this stage should it have been allowed to pursue its key targets for just a few more days.<sup>41</sup> Losses on the Government side had not been significant and the geographical area of the fighting meant it could be reasonably contained, but Jayawardene was not able however to resist the influence of Rajiv Gandhi and the military operation was halted. The resulting feeling from the insurgent movement was therefore not shock at decimation of their forces but rather a strengthening of the leadership who, according to more than one source, came to think of themselves as, "almost immortal"<sup>42</sup>. The reaction of the LTTE to the government action was to stage a spectacular suicide attack (vehicle borne Improvised Explosive Device) against a main Sri Lankan Army base killing 40 soldiers during 1987. The insurgents struck at a location deep behind Government lines with a ferocity that was not expected but was a clear indication of what was to follow. The LTTE was emboldened by having escaped annihilation at the hands of a regular Army force: the leadership determined it had the capacity and adopt a two

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<sup>37</sup> The National Liberation Front of Tamileelam is a good example of this. See Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (1996), p.190.

<sup>38</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), p.82.

<sup>39</sup> Notably Thillaiyampalam Sivansan (aka Soosai), the commander of the LTTE's maritime and naval wing known as the Sea Tigers – detailed in Op Completion Report by Sri Lankan Army, *Operation Liberation – Vadamarachchi Operation*, Signed by Lt Col C L Wijayarathna, 25 June 1987 (Colombo: Sri Lankan Army Archives).

<sup>40</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.144-150.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with T: LTTE Intelligence Analyst to Command Group. Interviewed in Jun 2013 in Mumbai, India.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with D: Low level LTTE cadre who progressed to Company Leadership position. Interviewed in October 2008 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

pronged approach - targeting Government forces deep within the Sinhalese homeland and protecting their ethnic heartland of Jaffna. Sources indicate that the strategy was chosen based on an assessment that it had a high probability of success.<sup>43</sup> Similar sources also admitted that this approach was almost defeated by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces siege of Jaffna itself. According to archive documents of the Sri Lankan Army, the political decision to continue operations in Jaffna was based on military advice from the then Chief of the Army General Tissa Indraka “Bull” Weeratunga, who was in the process of becoming Sri Lanka’s first Chief of Defence Staff, but there was an understanding from the President that this was not an open-ended engagement.<sup>44</sup> The archive material does not make it clear whether President Jayawardene placed caveats on time and resource for the operation, but he was certainly briefed on detail on what the army believed to be a highly successful campaign that was close to psychologically defeating the Tamil insurgent movement.<sup>45</sup> The siege however was not going to be allowed to proceed to its almost inevitable conclusion on military grounds, as the humanitarian impact was being reported in Tamil Nadu and the resulting popular Indian Tamil sentiment demanded action from the Federal Indian Government.<sup>46</sup> The options presented to Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi proposed simple interventionist measures but did not meet his requirement for more immediate action, and further options were developed and approved starting with the immediate commencement of an airdrop of supplies to Jaffna town.<sup>47</sup> The Indian Air Force inserted close to 25 tonnes of food and medical supplies to surrounded Tamil forces. In the face of Indian hegemonic dominance of the region, President Jayawardene had little alternative but to bow to Gandhi’s insistence to allow India to establish a military presence on the Sri Lankan homeland, thus bringing to a close the period known as the first Eelam War.<sup>48</sup>

This phase of the conflict may have been marked by the emergence of several Tamil insurgent groups, and specifically the LTTE, as a powerful body of fighters but the counter

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with T: LTTE Intelligence Analyst to Command Group. Interviewed in Jun 2013 in Mumbai, India.

<sup>44</sup> Sri Lankan Army Archives 1987 - Papers xxi (Colombo), accessed October 2011.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p.XXVI.

<sup>46</sup> Indian Secret Service Assessment dated xx May 1987 (New Delhi: Intelligence Service Archives).

<sup>47</sup> Indian Government Papers (New Delhi: Commonwealth Archive), accessed Feb 2012 supported by an assessment by Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), p.277.

<sup>48</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), p.154.

insurgency efforts by the Sri Lankan military came close to defeating those movements at an early stage. It is arguable that if the military had been allowed to continue their ground offensive and the siege of Jaffna, than the LTTE might never have developed in the way it subsequently did. This is a most significant factor as the hard-line counter insurgency approach had met with success but was limited by political appetite and restrictions. This feature, noted by Douglas Porch and Gill Merom, is a feature of many Western approaches to insurgencies and revolutionary wars in the post Second World War period.<sup>49</sup>

## **The Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka: Eelam War II**

Under extreme regional pressure, the Sri Lankan Government agreed to let the Indian Government establish a military presence in the Tamil heartland of Jaffna as a peacekeeping force and demilitarize the insurgent groups. The formal agreement to permit Indian military presence in Sri Lanka, known as the Indo-Lankan Accord, was signed less than seven weeks after the intervention of the Indian Air Force in Jaffna, and less than a month later Indian troops were on Sri Lankan soil.<sup>50</sup> The impact of this move was felt elsewhere in the country, indeed it came only shortly after the then President (Jayawardene) declared he would fight the Indian's to the last bullet.<sup>51</sup> The Sinhalese nationalist backlash against Indian presence quickly became violent in the south of Sri Lanka. In order to quell a second uprising, Colombo was forced to redeploy troops from Jaffna, where they had been fighting the Tamils, to the south, where they fought the Sinhalese in a bloody series of engagements that lasted almost two years.<sup>52</sup> After their neutering in Jaffna as part of Operation Liberation, the Sri Lankan Army in particular did not feel that it had the political mandate to make a more aggressive approach against Sinhalese. The Jaffna campaign against the Tamil insurgents

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<sup>49</sup> Gill Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.33-46, and Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.2-3.

<sup>50</sup> Maj Gen Jaswant Deva, *Sky is the limit – Signals in Operation Pawan* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2007). Deva's interviews with Col John Taylor, Indian Army Rtd, Maj Gen Harkirat Singh, GOC Jaffna Indian Army Rtd, have been further substantiated by the unearthing of the Jain Commission Interim Report, *Growth of Sri Lankan Tamil Militancy in Tamil Nadu*, Chapter I Phase II (1987-1988) (New Delhi: National Archives – unlisted entry). The documented record of the interviews and evidence is no longer published and was viewed by the author in the Indian National Archives in New Delhi.

<sup>51</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.194-196.

<sup>52</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), p.43-36, has already covered the civil emergency in the south of Sri Lanka in greater detail.

was viewed as a defeat and the force began to suffer recruitment issues, resulting in a morale issue across the government forces.<sup>53</sup> Counter insurgency and policing operations are recognized to be most complex challenges for armed forces particularly when taking place against their own ethnic people<sup>54</sup> and this was no different for the Sri Lankan Army. But not only did they have internal issues, the Army also lost political support for funding and command: their failure to deliver a decisive victory in Jaffna lost them much of their political support in Colombo, and allowed the LTTE under the leadership of Prabhakaran to exploit this opening.<sup>55</sup>

The Indian Peacekeeping Force was under similar levels of pressure in the northern province of Jaffna. Their mandate was to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate the Tamil militants into Sri Lankan mainstream politics and governance but some groups, the LTTE included, failed to hand over arms and almost inevitably a full-scale conflict developed between them.<sup>56</sup> The rhetoric from both government and insurgents at this time was united against the common foreign occupier and much like the British before them, the Indians less than restrained approach to counter-insurgency back fired. Despite mounting casualties, lack of indigenous support and mounting opposition both nationally and internationally, the Indian Peacekeeping Force was not withdrawn until March 1990 after the deposition of Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi by Prime Minister V P Singh. Accounts of the Indian Peace Keeping Force experiences in Jaffna and Sri Lanka more widely have been covered by many other authors,<sup>57</sup> but a key conclusion is worth noting: above all of the separatist paramilitary Tamil insurgent organisations that the Indians experienced both in Sri Lanka and whilst conducting Indian Government sponsored training in Tamil Nadu, the LTTE and Prabhakaran was rated the

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<sup>53</sup> Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2013), pp.96-98.

<sup>54</sup> Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* (2003), pp.78-79.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with H3: Undoubtedly a member of EROS, and later claiming membership to LTTE senior leadership.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with T: LTTE Intelligence Analyst to Command Group. Interviewed in Jun 2013 in Mumbai, India.

<sup>57</sup> L M H Mendis, *Assignment Peace in the Name of the Motherland: Eelam War I, IPKF Operations, Eelam War II, Eelam War III and the Undeclared Eelam War IV* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2009), Depinder Singh, *The IPKF in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Trishul, 1992), Harkirat Singh, *Intervention in Sri Lanka: The IPKF Experience Retold* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2006), P R Chari, "The IPKF Experience in Sri Lanka." *ACDIS Occasional Paper* (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, February 1994), N Manoharan, "National Security Decision Making Structures in India: Lessons from the IPKF Involvement in Sri Lanka." *Journal of Defence Studies* 3, 4 (October 2009): 49-6.

most highly by Indian troops and intelligence operators.<sup>58</sup> The significance of this becomes clear as the group continued to evolve: RAW was quick to make comparisons about the future of various Tamil movements at this stage and their recognition of the LTTE as the likely pre-eminent Tamil fighting organization of the future was based almost purely on the leadership of Prabhakaran.<sup>59</sup>

As the Indian Peacekeepers withdrew from the Jaffna area and with a tacit ceasefire still in place, the Tamils retook control and established a civil governance process, while the LTTE went about eliminating competing militant pro-Tamil organisation.<sup>60</sup> Simultaneously, the Sri Lankan Government continued to cut out the radical elements of the nationalist movement in the South, having moved from a purely military intervention in the south to operations led to a greater extent by the police.<sup>61</sup> Free from fighting each other, both groups achieved their aims quickly and by June 1990, hostilities between the Sinhalese regime in Colombo and the Tamils based in Jaffna once again commenced in earnest. After the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force, the Government disbanded the Tamil civil administration in Jaffna and launched an offensive to retake the peninsula.<sup>62</sup> The conflict quickly descended into a brutal and gritty fight – the LTTE massacred 600 policemen who had surrendered in order to gain safe passage out of LTTE held areas: the government embargoed food and medical supplies to Jaffna and then set about bombing the LTTE power base of Jaffna city: the LTTE responded by attacking Sinhalese and Muslim villages with hideous consequences for the local population. The backlash from newly formed Muslim Home Guard units against Tamils was hardly better and the downward spiral of violence continued unabated. In just four months the conflict had escalated to a level of ethnic cleaning that was very significant: by

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Indian Secret Service Officer (Research and Analysis Wing – RAW Operator) in September 2013 in Paris, France, and Indian RAW archive “Paper 12”, undated but discussing events between 1985-1990 (India: Mumbai Archives).

<sup>59</sup> Indian RAW archive “Paper 12”, undated but discussing events between 1985-1990 (India: Mumbai Archives).

<sup>60</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.172-177, Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), pp.72-78.

<sup>61</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis and National Security*, (Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict Research,1998), p.353.

<sup>62</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.185-187.

October 1990 72,000 Muslims were forcibly expelled from the Northern Province by the LTTE.<sup>63</sup>

LTTE acts of violence were not limited to the Sri Lankan mainland however. In an attack that broke with historical insurgent models of activity<sup>64</sup> and which would permanently undermine successive Indian government support for Tamil Insurgencies, the LTTE assassinated Rajiv Gandhi in India in 1991. Demonstrating the LTTE chief's comprehension of the wider threat to his insurgency and movement, Prabhakaran made the decision fully understanding the impact that it would have to funding, support and logistics supply to his movement. His actions were thus the result of carefully balanced decision of the relative gains that could be made: or rather in this case the relative losses that could be avoided.<sup>65</sup> This decision and its significance are examined further in chapter 3. The Indian investigation found Prabhakaran responsible and Anton Balasingham subsequently stated deep regret in a public interview, although stopped short of formally claiming responsibility.<sup>66</sup> This was a most significant event for the LTTE and for international relations: many international agents of the Tamil diaspora and other insurgent groups felt that the LTTE had now gone too far, but Prabhakaran showed little remorse.<sup>67</sup> As a clear indicator of his ability to see through the short-term issues, Prabhakaran's interpretation of the long-term impact of this action would be positive for the LTTE and indeed was necessary as he regarded Gandhi's potential resurgence as a leader to be an existential threat to the Tamil cause.<sup>68</sup> However, Prabhakaran was not managing the running of single operations, rather he was orchestrating a wide range

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<sup>63</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), p80. One of the worst atrocities was the massacre of 166 Muslim civilians at Palliyagodella.

<sup>64</sup> Meenakshi Ahluwalia, *Assassination of Rajiv Gandhi* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1991), pp.2-7.

<sup>65</sup> Interview T3: High level former LTTE leader defecting along with Colonel Karuna. Interviewed in September 2012 and June 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka by skype.

<sup>66</sup> "Rajiv assassination "Deeply regretted": LTTE", *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 28 June 2006. The interview between Anton Balasingham and Indian NDTV media outlet in July 2006 was undertaken at the Balasingham home in London shortly before Bala's death. At the time Balasingham called the assassination a, "monumental historic tragedy", but was disowned by the LTTE public outlets as the final sentences of a dying man. The coverage of the interview on the Tamilnet internet news site has been modified many times as the narrative shifts and sways.  
<http://tamilnation.co/intframe/india/060627anton.htm>

<sup>67</sup> Interview T3: High level former LTTE leader defecting along with Colonel Karuna. Interviewed in September 2012 and June 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka by skype.

<sup>68</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), p.166, and Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.222-231.

of activities simultaneously. Whilst planning the assassination of a foreign Head of State, he was also planning to shift the LTTE away from the more traditional insurgent tactics, techniques and procedures and into new ground: these moves were important not just for the LTTE but also signposting the future for other insurgencies into more militarized activities.<sup>69</sup>

The LTTE continued to gain in strength and audacity, shifting strategy from guerrilla activity to mobile-military operations.<sup>70</sup> This was a most important change and a signpost of how the organization was developing as an insurgent force. The rapidity of the LTTE evolution from guerrilla activity into fully fledged military operations is not something that has been replicated at this scale and tempo by most other insurgencies which tend to remain in the guerrilla space for a much longer period, although Mao Tse-Tung notably adopted a similar methodology around 1946.<sup>71</sup> It appears that the shift, examined further in chapter 3, was solely down to Prabhakaran's desire to beat the Sri Lankan Armed Forces in an equal competition. Whilst Indian journalist Narayan Swamy briefly mooted this theory<sup>72</sup>, he did not expand upon it or analyse its relevance, a former LTTE leader who defected along with Colonel Karuna was clear on this matter.<sup>73</sup> By July 1991 the LTTE had reached sufficient strength and access to conventional firepower that it could secure access to the Jaffna peninsula by capturing the strategic position of Elephant Pass from the Sri Lankan Army. Subsequently the base became one of the most contested military positions of the remainder of the conflict, taking more than 10,000 government troops to eventually recapture it. The LTTE continued to contest Colombo's access to the Jaffna peninsula across the battlefield and when the government made gains, the LTTE returned to terrorist and guerrilla warfare to attack the rear areas of Sinhalese lines.<sup>74</sup> In 1991, as the Sri Lankan Army and Navy made a

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<sup>69</sup> 11-3/TD11-3: A junior commander in the LTTE who was with Prabhakaran at the formation and early stages of the movement. Later a more senior infantry cadre formation commander before deserting in the final stages of Eelam War IV. Interviews conducted September 2007 in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, in July 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka and again in March 2013 in London.

<sup>70</sup> Both these types of operation are outlined by Mao Tse-Tung, in *On Protracted War: Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. II (Foreign Languages Press: Peking, 1967), pp. 113–194.

<sup>71</sup> Mao Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (Beijing: Beijing Press, 1937), describes a continuum of operations. Accessed on 21 March 2014.  
<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/ch02.htm>

<sup>72</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.255-256.

<sup>73</sup> Interview T3: High level former LTTE leader defecting along with Colonel Karuna. Interviewed in September 2012 and June 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka by skype.

<sup>74</sup> "Sri Lanka", Human Rights Watch, 1992. Retrieved 22 February 2014.  
[http://www.hrw.org/reports/1992/WR92/ASW-14.htm#P860\\_317153](http://www.hrw.org/reports/1992/WR92/ASW-14.htm#P860_317153)

number of in-roads into the Jaffna area the LTTE managed to kill senior commanders with a land mine: whilst the attack is recorded in the Sri Lankan Army archives<sup>75</sup>, the names of the dead are not: unmarked graves for those killed are in a military cemetery in Kandy.

In 1993 as a culmination of what has become known as Eelam War II, the LTTE secured a major victory in the Battle of Pooneryn leaving more than 600 Sri Lankan Army and Navy personnel dead.<sup>76</sup> It was not only guerrilla activity that was succeeding as a strategy for the LTTE. The suicide-bombing cadre known as the Black Tigers was being remarkably successful in identifying and killing targets. Perhaps the most notable suicide attack at the time resulted in the death of Sri Lankan President Premadasa in May 1993.<sup>77</sup>

The second Eelam War was instrumental in honing and refining the tactical approaches of both government and insurgent Tamil forces. An analysis for the Indian government in 2003 by their Research and Analysis Wing noted that this was identifiable because of the clear development of the LTTE as an insurgent movement with strong and uncompromising leadership at its core.<sup>78</sup> That 2003 report also noted that the evolution of the LTTE protocols and tactics were evident, but highlighted the change in organisational design of the leadership that allowed the LTTE chief to orchestrate military activities along with ‘maturing’ civil governance in areas occupied by the insurgents. RAW’s analysis also noted that the period between 1987-1993 saw an international effort that developed a robust logistics supply model to support a long term campaign, and a large scale recruiting campaign based on the personality of the leader.<sup>79</sup> The drawing together and working of these strands by a small, inexperienced team was orchestrated almost entirely by Prabhakaran.<sup>80</sup> His latent mental

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<sup>75</sup> Op Completion Report – Operation Balawegaya, 31 October 1991, Signed Brigadier Vijaya Wimalaratna. Notably this incident is not recorded the South Asian Terrorism Portal accounts ([http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/database/data\\_suicide\\_killings.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/database/data_suicide_killings.htm)).

<sup>76</sup> The numbers of fatalities and casualties at Pooneryn remain disputed by the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. The most accurate analysis of the battle, according to former LTTE sources, is found at *Jane’s Intelligence Review: Yearbook 1994* (London: Jane’s Information Group, 1994), pp. 122-123, and by Hashim, *When Counter-Insurgency Wins* (2012), p.147.

<sup>77</sup> Operation Completion Report by Sri Lankan Army - *Operation Thunder*, Signed Col H Hettiarachchi, 24 May 1995 (Colombo: Sri Lankan Army Archives).

<sup>78</sup> Indian Military Classified Assessment, produced by the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), dated xx xxx 2003.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Interview T3: High level former LTTE leader defecting along with Colonel Karuna. Interviewed in September 2012 and June 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka by skype.

ability and agility was realised during this period where he was approaching the height of his power – an important factor given the rate of his rise and his rapid descent from power which was to follow. This deduction and judgement is based on the author's own military experience and will be examined in more detail in chapter 3.

### **Eelam War III**

During the build up to the 1994 parliamentary elections, another LTTE suicide bomb killed all of the UNP leadership. This left the People's Alliance candidate, Chandrika Kumaratunga, as almost the sole runner for the presidency. Chandrika ran a campaign on a peace platform and adopting a strategy of appeasement toward the LTTE underpinned by the belief that economic resurgence was possible for the whole economy: the subsequent growth and prosperity would create a national environment in which the Tamils would wish to remain.<sup>81</sup> Having won the election with a 62% majority, she agreed a ceasefire with the LTTE in January 1995, but the detailed negotiations failed and violence broke out again when the LTTE attacked and sank two Sri Lankan Navy vessels in April of the same year.<sup>82</sup> The end of the ceasefire effectively began what became known as Eelam War III. In an ironic twist of policy, Chandrika's peace platform was underpinned by re-taking Jaffna: the city had been under insurgent control for nearly 10 years by this stage. Using conventional military forces and a combined arms approach to engagements with the LTTE, the Sri Lankan Government retook the city after seven weeks.<sup>83</sup> The remaining LTTE force as well as more than 350,000 civilian refugees, compelled by Prabhakaran to also leave Jaffna, fled to the Vanni region.<sup>84</sup> Again in retrospect the Sri Lankan Armed Forces had been successful with the use of brute force and overwhelming mass against an insurgent force, but their gains

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<sup>81</sup> For more detail on the Chandrika campaign, see Graeme Wilson, *CBK: The Biography of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga* (London: Media Prima, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> "SRI LANKA Human Rights Developments", Human Rights Watch, 1996. Accessed 16 Oct 13. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/WR96/Asia-08.htm>

<sup>83</sup> Op Completion Report – Operation Riviresa (51<sup>st</sup> Division), 13 October 1995, Signed Brigadier P A Karunatileke. Op Completion Report – Operation Riviresa (52<sup>nd</sup> Division), 26 December 1995, Signed Brigadier H N W Dias.

<sup>84</sup> "Sri Lanka Says It Has Sealed Rebel Stronghold", *The New York Times*, 24 November 1995. Retrieved January 2011. <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F60714F7385D0C778EDDA80994DD494D81>

were limited by a political mandate that strictly bounded their geographic movement.<sup>85</sup> This is significant as it reinforced the belief within the armed forces that an attritional approach could be a valid methodology for counter insurgency: an important departure from the dominant Western philosophy of the time which was focusing grand strategy on dominating the moral and intellectual ground rather than in military activity per se.<sup>86</sup> The alternative approaches seen by junior commanders on the ground (including a young Sareth Fonseka, later Chief of the Army, and Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, later the Defence Minister), shaped their views considerably on the potential solution to the LTTE insurgency through the use of military force as a primary Government lever provided that the national political leadership expanded the boundaries of their action sufficiently.<sup>87</sup>

Deliberate military operations commenced again in 1995 by both the LTTE and Government forces, with large scale casualties on both sides and more than 250,000 civilians becoming internally displaced due to the fighting and enforced moves under LTTE pressure. The Government efforts to open a land based resupply line to Jaffna through Vanni province failed, and the northern peninsula continued to rely on sea and air based lines of communication. This hardening of the geographic positions was important despite the attempts at both conventional military attacks at scale and the impact that previous attacks had had on LTTE force levels. The long term control of geographic locations entrenched positions and could be argued to undermine any future peace negotiations: the Government was never going to hand over Jaffna city to the LTTE, but that remained a significant piece of real estate for Prabhakaran who considered it the heartland of the Tamils, and the future centre of the Tamil Eelam empire.<sup>88</sup> It could be argued that such positions doomed future Scandinavian Peace Negotiations to fail, but there is little evidence that this was the single demand that cause negotiations to terminate.<sup>89</sup> The reliance on sea and air based supply routes to government forces in Jaffna started to see the emergence of naval and air tactics by both sides. This is an element of the Sri Lankan insurgency and counter insurgency campaign not replicated in other wars, which tend to remain within the land domain and

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<sup>85</sup> Op Completion Report – Operation Riviresa, Stages II, III and IV (53<sup>rd</sup> Division), 24 December 1995, Signed Brigadier K J C Perera.

<sup>86</sup> Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2014), pp.206-207.

<sup>87</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2010), pp.225-232.

<sup>88</sup> AK12: A former clerk of the LTTE. Interviewed in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in July 2010.

<sup>89</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), pp.307-309.

focus on control of land and people. The emergence of fighting at sea and in the air, along with the procurement and logistics strategies that followed, was largely controlled by the respective leadership on both sides of the campaign.<sup>90</sup> Historically, the Sri Lankan Army usually received the majority of state resources within the Armed Forces. But the political leadership in Colombo altered the investment plan in 1997 to provide new capabilities for the Sri Lankan Navy.<sup>91</sup> In addition around this time, third party nations began to use Sri Lanka as a test bed for novel technologies. The use of drones packed with high explosives began to be tested by the LTTE for well-protected targets deep within Government territory, whilst the Chinese also began supplying the counter to their own drones in the form of air-to-air missiles supplied to the Sri Lankan Air Force.<sup>92</sup> This is not unusual as a doctrine for testing novel munitions in a live environment, but it did mark a recognition of the Sri Lankan campaign as a significant opportunity for testing by Russian, Chinese, Israeli and South African governments.<sup>93</sup>

During 1996, the LTTE continued mobile-conventional military operations in Vanni, their guerrilla activity around Jaffna and a large-scale terrorist campaign in southern cities. The latter was highlighted in 1996-1998 with three ‘spectacular’ events: the bombing of Colombo’s Central bank, killing 90 and injuring 1,400 in October 1997; the bombing of the Sri Lankan World Trade Centre in October 1997; and an attack in Kandy in January 1998 which damaged one of the holiest Buddhist shrines.<sup>94</sup> The latter undermined much of the external support for the LTTE (although notably not from the diaspora) and the Sri Lankan Government outlawed the organization: a move followed by some other states across the world. The shift from the LTTE from military to civilian targets and thence to religious ones will be examined in chapter two dealing with the codifying the insurgency, but suffice to say at this stage that that activity did much to undermine what the LTTE had previously

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<sup>90</sup> KAP12/KP A 12-11: Former senior LTTE logistics ‘fixer’ and later on the personal staff of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in June 2013 in Brussels, Belgium by skype. And Sri Lankan Army 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Publication (1999).

<sup>91</sup> Indian Classified RAW report dated xx xxx 2003, unsigned.

<sup>92</sup> Briefing to the author from British Defence Attache in Colombo, 2007 and 2009.

<sup>93</sup> This judgement is made based on the experience of the author in observing insurgent campaigns across the world between 2005-2013.

<sup>94</sup> BGxx-12: Member of LTTE interrogation team between 1989-2000. Interviewed in Washington DC in January 2010.

achieved, and hit their financial and logistical support networks overseas very hard.<sup>95</sup> The significance of 1996-1997 was in how the LTTE leadership continued to evolve its approach to the insurgency, recognizing changes in Government tactics and performance and adapting effective counters to them, retaining the military initiative throughout. The orchestration and agility of the LTTE in constructing their plans and strategy was the role solely of Prabhakaran, although he did hold discussions with his senior commanders and political advisor, Anton Balasingham. It is important to recognize this moment in the LTTE leadership. Whilst continually under significant pressure from Government forces, the international community and developing governance protocols for LTTE occupied territory, Prabhakaran was achieving tasks that would, in Western military terms, normally take a Corps Staff of 2000 people to achieve.<sup>96</sup> His singularly important role at this stage signifies his capacity, skill, ideation and military genius, which continued to grow over the following five years. Chapter 3 covers this period with reference to Prabhakaran in greater detail.<sup>97</sup>

1997-1999 saw the focus of the military campaign remain for control of Vanni with annual offensives by both sides and long casualty lists.<sup>98</sup> The LTTE gradually began to exert greater control in the centre of the country and cut off government troops in some areas from resupply by land, sea or air.<sup>99</sup> The terrorist attack planned for the end of 1999 was supposed to be the assassination of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, but the attack failed taking her right eye but not killing her. Despite her injuries (or perhaps because of them), she was

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<sup>95</sup> Interview T3: High level former LTTE leader defecting along with Colonel Karuna. Interviewed in September 2012 and June 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka by skype.

<sup>96</sup> D K R Crosswell, *Beetle: The Life of General Walter Bedell Smith (American Warriors)* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 2012), pp.443-441.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Indian Secret Service Agent (Research and Analysis Wing – RAW Operator) in September 2013 in Paris, France, and Indian RAW archive “Paper 12”, undated but discussing events between 1985-1990 (India: Mumbai Archives).

<sup>98</sup> The LTTE did not issue figures for dead and injured personnel and Government figures need to be considered with a degree of skepticism – much like those released during WW1 and WW2 to the people of the Allied nations, the line between garnering outraged support and defeatism is fine. That said, and by way of indication to the level of violence, Government announcements after various battles articulate Killed in action figures for the Sri Lankan Armed Forces of 223 in 1997 (after fighting around Elephant Pass), 1206 soldiers in 1998 (after another battle for control of Kilinochichi), 516 soldiers in 1999 during attacks on the Paranthan Chemical Factory base.

<sup>99</sup> "Sixth anniversary of Unceasing Waves-III commemorated", Tamilnet, 3 November 2005. Retrieved 16 October 2013. <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=16249>

victorious in the 1999 elections and was elected for a second term.<sup>100</sup> Whilst this attack may have failed, the determination of the mobile-military operations based in Vanni continued apace and with increasing sophistication. On 22 April 2000, the besieged Elephant Pass military complex that had separated the Jaffna Peninsula from the mainland (through Vanni province) was finally taken by the LTTE leaving 1,008 Sri Lankan Army soldiers dead. The LTTE pressed on towards Jaffna but was continually repulsed by Government forces.<sup>101</sup> The initiative remained firmly with Prabhakaran and it was only the dogged defence of ground by the Sri Lankan Army, hardened by the support of the Navy and Air Force, that prevented the entire north of the country from becoming united under Tamil control. The fact that an insurgency makes clear geographic gains is not unusual after a period of force hardening, provided the resources in terms of finance, manpower, logistics and weapons are available.<sup>102</sup>

### **Peace Process**

By mid-2000 international organizations and human rights groups estimated more than one million refugees had been displaced from their homes in Sri Lanka and argued for greater peace efforts from the protagonists.<sup>103</sup> In February 2000, Norway, then viewed as the most successful peace broker based on its Nordquist doctrine, was asked to mediate and international diplomatic moves attempted to find a settlement.<sup>104</sup> The international community placed significant pressure on the government in Sri Lanka to participate in negotiations to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. The LTTE felt this pressure too, but apparently Prabhakaran was only in favour of such arrangements where they furthered the aims of achieving Tamil Eelam.<sup>105</sup> In order to place the government under additional pressure, the LTTE cadres were ordered to carry out an attack against Bandaranaike

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<sup>100</sup> "Chandrikare-elected President", *The Tribune* (India), 23 December 1999. Retrieved 14 September 2013. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/1999/99dec23/head1.htm>

<sup>101</sup> PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013.

<sup>102</sup> Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter Insurgencies* (2005), p.17-21.

<sup>103</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, *Sri Lanka: Mounting violence highlights protection needs* (Geneva, ICRC: 2001).

<sup>104</sup> Susannah Price, "Norway role in Sri Lanka peace plan", *BBC News*, 1 February 2000. Retrieved 9 January 2010. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/627281.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/627281.stm)

<sup>105</sup> D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

International Airport in Colombo in July 2001. The attack destroyed a significant proportion of the Sri Lankan Air Force and four Sri Lankan Airlines planes<sup>106</sup>, but the intended impact was economic<sup>107</sup>. By threatening international travel, the LTTE threatened to undermine a Sri Lankan economy that relied heavily on tourism. The attack had its intended result. 2001 saw the first negative GDP change recorded by Sri Lanka that year since coming to Independence.<sup>108</sup>

It is ironic that the Government ceded to pressure for peace talks by the west, when it had adopted counter insurgency tactics proposed by the same states. Blocking military operations at sea and on land accompanied by small and carefully targeted penetration and leadership strikes deep behind enemy lines were, according to military commanders, achieving a high degree of success overall.<sup>109</sup> The Army's Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRPs) and the sea-based Special Forces of the Sri Lankan Navy were having a profound impact on the LTTE command structure.<sup>110</sup> In addition, the response by western nations to the attacks on New York's World Trade Centre in September 2001 stimulated the provision of aid and equipment to the government in Colombo. Sources indicate that Prabhakaran saw the future support of the Sri Lankan government by the United States of America (as part of the war on terror), as a critical new feature of the conflict<sup>111</sup> and subsequently led the LTTE to the peace table.

For the Sinhalese government, however, it was domestic politics that was a more dominant force. The government's "war for peace" strategy was openly criticized and the economy was failing: a heady mix which saw Chandrika Kumaratunga lose a no-confidence motion,

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<sup>106</sup> Thirteen aircraft including two Kfir jet fighters, one Mi24 helicopter gunship and one Mig-27 jet fighter were destroyed. Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), p.131.

<sup>107</sup> TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK.

<sup>108</sup> "Sri Lanka Economy". LLOexpat.lk, retrieved 19 January 2012.  
[http://www.srilanka.alloexpat.com/sri\\_lanka\\_information/economy\\_sri\\_lanka.php](http://www.srilanka.alloexpat.com/sri_lanka_information/economy_sri_lanka.php).

<sup>109</sup> Op Completion Report – Operation Agnikheela I, 7 May 2001, Signed Major General A E D Wijendra.

<sup>110</sup> TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK.

<sup>111</sup> TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK, and D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

dissolve Parliament and lose the subsequent Parliamentary election in 5 December 2001.<sup>112</sup> Over the next three weeks both the LTTE and the government announced ceasefires and then lifted the economic embargoes and sanctions against insurgent held areas.

A Memorandum of Understanding between the government and the LTTE, nominating Norway as mediator and establishing a Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission mainly from Scandinavian countries to oversee arrangements, formalized the ceasefire on 22 February 2002.<sup>113</sup> Progress appeared to be fast and led to widespread optimism for resolution of the conflict.<sup>114</sup> The government recognized the LTTE by lifting the ban on their activities and opened commercial air flights to Jaffna. The insurgents reciprocated by opening key infrastructure (roads and rail) to civilians, albeit with a heavy tax imposed for using it. At the peace-talks in September 2002 both parties agreed to a Federal solution to the dispute with the LTTE dropping their demands for a separate state<sup>115</sup> – a key compromise by the LTTE that had been subject to much discussion between Anton Balasingham and Prabhakaran<sup>116</sup>. Despite some elements of progress the overt ceasefire masked an underlying positioning by both parties in both political and military terms. The LTTE used the time until 2003 to regain military strength in numbers, logistics, weapons and skills culminating in securing key ground around the main Sri Lankan Naval Base in Trincomalee in the east of the country.<sup>117</sup> The government was torn between competing strategies as its Prime Minister and President were from ideologically opposed parties with a different approach to the peace accord. This effectively restricted the actions of military forces as the political parties fought to gain control.

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<sup>112</sup> Graeme Wilson, *CBK: The Biography of Chandrika Bandarunaike Kumaratunga* (London: Media Prima, 2005).

<sup>113</sup> The full text of the ceasefire was published in The Guardian newspaper in the UK on 22 February 2002. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/feb/22/srilanka>

<sup>114</sup> The positive international media response is recorded on Tamilnet (<http://tamilnation.co/conflictresolution/tamileelam/norway/contents/05.htm>).

<sup>115</sup> Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age. A history of Contested Identities: A Modern History* (London: Hurst, 2006).

<sup>116</sup> TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK, and D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

<sup>117</sup> "Timeline Sri Lanka" *BBC News*, retrieved 20 January 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12004081>

However, according to another RAW report for the Indian government, the Sri Lankan intelligence community was playing a most active role behind the scenes.<sup>118</sup> In a classic piece of subterfuge, agents managed to persuade a sizable portion of the LTTE that the main leader Prabhakaran was not sharing the proceeds of the peace dividend equally between parties. As a result in March 2003 a brigade size element from the LTTE, led by Prabhakaran's deputy General Kuruna, split from the LTTE and formed a separate group, and turned against Prabhakaran both politically and militarily.<sup>119</sup> Prabhakaran's immediate reaction during the following eight weeks was to put down the competing group with ferocity and viciousness, decimating their leaders and fighters alike and regaining control of the Eastern part of Sri Lanka.<sup>120</sup> Prabhakaran had once again regained control of the LTTE centrally, but now faced a new adversary in the government, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, who was appointed in April 2004 with a mandate to take a harder line with over the insurgency.

### Conclusion

Between 1984 and 2003, the LTTE had risen from being just one of many Tamil insurgent groups, into a formidable force that had survived, perhaps even beaten, the deployment of mass peace-keeping troops from the Indian Army, combined attacks from the Sri Lankan government and a hostile international environment who had branded them as terrorists. From hardly being able to maintain control of even some small pieces of farmland, the LTTE of 2003 controlled more than one-third of the geographic space inside Sri Lanka. They had developed from a group of four people into an organisation of more than ten thousand fighting cadres, with military, civil, police and governance arms that extended their reach deep within the population, into Indian Tamil Nadu and across the globe through the Tamil diaspora.<sup>121</sup> The ideas of the Tamil New Tigers had blossomed, under Balasingham's

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<sup>118</sup> Indian Classified RAW report dated xx xxx 2003, unsigned.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Interviews 11-3/TD11-3: A junior commander in the LTTE who was with Prabhakaran at the formation and early stages of the movement. Later a more senior infantry cadre formation commander before deserting in the final stages of Eelam War IV. Interviews conducted September 2007 in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, in July 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka and again in March 2013 in London. The claims are corroborated by Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), p52, and Hashim, *When Counterinsurgency Wins* (2014), p.83.

<sup>121</sup> US PACOM Report 2002, Signed by Peter Rodman, Assistant US Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

guidance, into a mature ideology that provided the organisation an intellectual backbone and conceptual framework that placed it on stage with Marxism, Islam and Maoism. It was almost impossible at that stage to forecast the fall that was about to occur.

## Chapter 2: Decline and Fall

“When an enemy knows what he is doing, trial and error is a most dangerous way to fight a war.” John McCuen<sup>1</sup>

“A national power can only survive if it is willing to fight for its interpretation of justice and its conception of vital interests.” Henry Kissinger<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Since the formation of the LTTE until 2003, their leader Prabhakaran was a force to be reckoned with and, by any standards<sup>3</sup>, an exceptionally gifted commander. The evidence presented in chapter 1 outlined the LTTE successes under his leadership, growing and developing from a simple small band of warriors into a sophisticated insurgent group whose fighting doctrine nearly achieved their secessionist political agenda from Sri Lanka as the start of a larger Tamil Eelam empire. As noted by John McCuen in the first quotation above, the government approach until this 2004 reflected their failure to take sufficient steps to prevent the growth in relative power of this small group. Yet this chapter will show that the Tiger’s ability to fight and manoeuvre against an adaptive enemy, a skill ably demonstrated between 1993-2003, suddenly and surely failed thereafter.

The current orthodoxy of the events following 2004 is that the changes made by the Sri Lankan government thereafter were the singular cause of their decisive victory some five years later. According to the popular narrative, by defining and highlighting their national interests, the government in Colombo was able to change the dynamic of fighting. Such a point has precedent, as highlighted by Kissinger in the second quote above. Various authors claim that this was due entirely to either the genius of leaders<sup>4</sup>, the fighting power<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> John McCuen, *The Art of Counter Revolutionary War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p.20.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> The grudging respect of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation is notable in their 2008 press release on the LTTE, *Taming the Tigers: from here in the US*.  
[https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/tamil\\_tigers011008](https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/tamil_tigers011008)

<sup>4</sup> C A Chandraprema, *Gota’s War*, (Colombo: Piyasiri Printing Systems, 2012)

<sup>5</sup> Major General Raj Mehta, *Lost Victory: The Rise and Fall LTTE Supremo V Prabhakaran* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2010).

vigour of the Sri Lankan armed forces or a combination of these two factors.<sup>6</sup> But little analysis has been made for the failures of the LTTE as the cause, or even a contributory factor, to the final outcome of the campaign.<sup>7</sup> It is unusual that after such a rise in relative power and the establishment of large geographic areas under political control of the insurgents, that the situation changes so rapidly and markedly thereafter without allowing political access. Changes in the Tamil community at this stage were extremely limited: there was no marked change in demographics, social mobility or structure, spending or media penetration.<sup>8</sup> The primary variable within the LTTE between 2002 and 2004 was within the leadership structure and decision-making paradigm operated by the chief, Prabhakaran.<sup>9</sup> The role of his leadership is a unique and fundamental factor within the Sri Lankan campaign and is examined further in chapter 3, with an analysis against Staniland's framework of social behaviours and structures in chapter 4.<sup>10</sup> As with the previous chapter, secondary sources have been used to provide the fullest possible picture of the conflict. Balance can only be achieved within this version of history by acknowledging the previous events and analysis exposed by others, alongside the new accounts of from participants who worked within or alongside the LTTE. Those insights provide a new prism through which to view the conflict as a whole, and highlight the differences in how events and activities were perceived by the other party. By introducing balance into this account of the conflict, it is possible to reinterpret the conclusions drawn by others based on their failure to gain insight into the motivations and workings of the insurgents.

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<sup>6</sup> Ahmed Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins: Sri Lanka's defeat of the Tamil Tigers* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013), and Gordon Weiss, *The Cage* (London: Vintage Books, 2012),

<sup>7</sup> As noted in the introduction, the books written by Swamy and Murari provide an introduction to the Tamil perspectives, but no analysis, or they do not cover the entirety of the period of the conflict.

<sup>8</sup> Karthigesu Sivathamby, *Being a Tamil and Sri Lankan* (Colombo: Aivakam, 2005), figures 2-6, and LTTE Peace Secretariat, "Demographic Changes in the Tamil Homeland in the Island of Sri Lanka over the Last Century." (Peace Secretariat, April 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Interview T3: High level former LTTE leader defecting along with Colonel Karuna. Interviewed in September 2012 and June 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka by skype. AP12/KP A 12-11: Former senior LTTE logistics 'fixer' and later on the personal staff of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in June 2013 in Brussels, Belgium by skype. AK12: A former clerk of the LTTE. Interviewed in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in July 2010. PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (London: Cornell University Press, 2014).

The chapter starts with a broad overview of the events after 2005, known as Eelam War IV, until its conclusion in 2009. The aim of this part is to provide an overarching view on the final elements of the campaign. The chapter then revisits the evidence for a second showing, examining activities over the period 1997-2009 in a thematic way, from the political, informational, military and civil defence aspects, to the economic and diplomatic activities of both sides. This second viewing of events allows new evidence to be exposed in a different way, one that demonstrates the adaptability of the forces within a deliberate and procedural force and campaign design. As such, it demonstrates that the government was following a predetermined military plan much as they had done before, albeit one that differed significantly in scale and intensity. That plan was highly predictable from a belligerent's point of view, and should have made reactions and counter activities clear. Yet the evidence will show that the LTTE did not adapt or change in the way it had done previously.

Whilst the chapter draws on existing accounts of the conflict, it blends new sources from military records, commanders and the perspectives from external actors (notably the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission, the United States government and agencies with India), as well as Tamil sources previously acting within the LTTE. The chapter will conclude that although the Rajapaksa administration adopted a thoughtful and comprehensive plan, it was not anything that the LTTE had not seen before. Whilst the scale and intensity of operations was perhaps new, it was not a sufficient significant variable to have been the only factor that determined the outcome of the conflict. The chapter notes that the failures of LTTE leadership and decision-making were the additional variables that need explaining more thoroughly, which is addressed in chapter 3.

### **Eelam War IV**

Between 2002 and 2004 the ceasefire had largely held, with the monitoring mission reporting 3,000 infractions by the LTTE and 300 by government forces.<sup>11</sup> According to a member of Karuna's personal staff, both sides continued both overt political posturing and covert

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<sup>11</sup> S Nadarajah, "The LTTE and the 2002-2006 Peace Process in Sri Lanka." *Berhoff Conflict Research Foundation* (2008). Retrieved 14 November 2013. [http://www.berghof-conflictresearch.org/documents/publications/transitions\\_ltte.pdf](http://www.berghof-conflictresearch.org/documents/publications/transitions_ltte.pdf).

military and intelligence operations against each other.<sup>12</sup> The subsequent election in April 2004 saw an alliance formed between Chandrika's PA and the leftist JVP forming a United People's Freedom Alliance which took the mandate and installed Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister. The President by this stage knew that continuing Wickranasinghe's containment and appeasement approach of the LTTE would not result in a politically acceptable solution.<sup>13</sup> Her appointment of Mahinda Rajapaksa as her Prime Minister in 2004 was thus a clear indication of the revised philosophy she was considering adopting, although she did not back him as her successor in the subsequent election. Indeed it appears that she greatly feared that Rajapaksa's approach would, "undo everything [she] tried to achieve in the last 11 years."<sup>14</sup>

The tsunami that hit the island on 26 December 2004 prolonged and extended the peace, and whilst there was some dispute over who had responsibility for control of distribution of aid in LTTE held areas, there appeared to be an air of co-operation between parties.<sup>15</sup> According to several sources, despite the overt peaceful approach of both adversaries, each was making preparations for a further decisive round of conflict, and awaited a trigger event which would enable hostilities to be renewed without undermining international support on which both were dependent: the government relied economically on exports, whilst the LTTE required the logistical and financial support of the Tamil diaspora to maintain pace of operations and control.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Graeme Wilson, *CBK: The Biography of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga* (London: Media Prima, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> US Diplomatic Telegram 05COLOMBO1969\_a dated 17 November 2005, available at [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1969\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1969_a.html), accessed on 29 April 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission Final Report 2002-2008, available at [http://www.slmm-history.info/filestore/slmm\\_report\\_101029\\_final.pdf](http://www.slmm-history.info/filestore/slmm_report_101029_final.pdf), accessed on 29 April 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Military analysis supported by interviews with 4-2: A member of the LTTE central finance committee, supervisor of A-3 and A-4. Interviewed in December 2012 in Toronto, Canada. Corroborated by Mehta, *Lost Victory*, op cit, p.247-250, and "LTTE Intimidation and Extortion of the Tamil Diaspora. The Tamil Diaspora and Support for the LTTE", *Human Rights Watch*, No1C (Canada/United Kingdom). Retrieved 23 March 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/ltte0306webwcover.pdf>.

In August 2005, Lakshman Kadirgamar, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister was assassinated at his home by an LTTE sniper.<sup>17</sup> The diplomat was widely respected by the international community and his death, seemingly at the hands of terrorists, undermined much of the support for the LTTE – though diaspora finances continued to flow in.<sup>18</sup> This event was to have profound consequences not just for international support for the LTTE, but politically for the government. The Sri Lankan Supreme Court used the event to dissolve the government of two-term President Kumaratunga. Prime Minister Rajapakse won the presidential election by a narrow margin, primarily as the LTTE boycotted the election and thus gave a margin to the harder line of Rajapakse<sup>19</sup>. His call for renewed discussion with the LTTE in Geneva was undermined by the attack on Sri Lankan Army Chief, Sareth Fonseka. This proved to be a vital moment in the Rajapaksa administration's decision to return to confrontation.<sup>20</sup> The end of the peace process, and thus the start of Eelam War III, was signalled in Prabhakaran's Annual Hero's Day Speech in 2005 during which he called for the government to renew their efforts at the peace talks, or the LTTE would renew their struggle.<sup>21</sup> Prabhakaran used his speech as a marker in the year to explain his strategy and philosophy for the coming year. These were often the only contact or external view the world would achieve of Prabhakaran: interviews were rarely granted and his movements were a closely guarded secret. There would have been little reason to discount Prabhakaran's promise to reinitiate the conflict in the event his demands were not met. The peace negotiations had failed, and in military terms, had amounted to little more than an operational pause to the campaign – usefully enabling a period of rearmament, reorganisation and renewed focus for the LTTE.

The LTTE commenced a new wave violence in December 2005 starting with mobile-military operations against Sri Lankan armed forces – guerrilla attacks in Vanna province killed 150 government soldiers with claymore mine ambushes, whilst force-on-force clashes at sea

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<sup>17</sup> "Senior Sri Lanka minister killed", *BBC News*, 13 August 2005. Retrieved 13 September 2013. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4147196.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4147196.stm)

<sup>18</sup> A-4: A senior LTTE finance operator operating in the Netherlands and Canada. Interviewed in December 2011 in Halifax, Canada.

<sup>19</sup> Hashim, *When Counterinsurgency Wins* (2014), p.130.

<sup>20</sup> "How President decided on retaliation". *The Sunday Times* (Colombo), 30 April 2006. Retrieved 21 February 2014. <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/060430/index.html>

<sup>21</sup> "Heroes Day Speech by LTTE Chief Velupillai Prabhakaran, November 27, 2007." <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/srilanka/document/papers/07nov24ltte.htm>.

between the Sea Tigers and the Sri Lankan Navy, during which neither side gave ground. The LTTE turned to a reinvigorated strategy of attacking political and civilian targets around Colombo during 2005 in a heady mixture of innovative terrorist attacks and guerrilla style engagements around the capital.<sup>22</sup> Rajapaksa, however, did not react as Prabhakaran predicted.<sup>23</sup> The LTTE chief believed that the new President would lose heart quickly and cede to LTTE demands.<sup>24</sup> Rajapaksa had other ideas.

Another effort to conduct ceasefire talks was initiated by a Norwegian Special envoy in 2006, but it was short-lived and violence returned to the country later that year with a series of highly controversial attacks by the LTTE on civilians in rural areas as well as another assassination attempt on Army General Sareth Fonseka by a pregnant suicide bomber of the Black Tigers.<sup>25</sup> To the international audience, the LTTE had crossed the line between 'freedom fighter' and 'terrorist'. The European Union proscribed them as a Terrorist Organisation in May 2006, which resulted in the imposition of a series of financial penalties on LTTE trading funds from the substantial European diaspora centred around London-Liverpool and Rotterdam.<sup>26</sup> Logistical and financial support for the LTTE just became much more complex and, for the first time, illegal. The impact of these moves was fully understood by elements of the LTTE and drove them back to peace-talks scheduled for Oslo in June 2006, but on arrival they refused to meet with Sri Lankan government officials directly. The head Norwegian mediator, Erik Solheim, stated that the LTTE should take "direct responsibility for failure of the talks".<sup>27</sup>

Back in Sri Lanka, the break down of talks coincided with a new outbreak of attacks from the LTTE and response from government forces, including more aerial bombings. It was after

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<sup>22</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.275-277.

<sup>23</sup> T: LTTE Intelligence Analyst to Command Group. Interviewed in Jun 2013 in Mumbai, India.

<sup>24</sup> TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK.

<sup>25</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), p.362.

<sup>26</sup> Amit Baruah, "European Union bans LTTE", *The Hindu* (Chennai, India), May 2006. Retrieved 11 September 2013. <http://www.hindu.com/2006/05/31/stories/2006053117200100.htm>

<sup>27</sup> Saroj Pathirana, "Collapse of talks", *BBC News*, 6 June 2006. Retrieved 12 September 2013. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/sinhala/news/story/2006/06/060609\\_saroj-oslo.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sinhala/news/story/2006/06/060609_saroj-oslo.shtml).

the events and violence of 2006 that the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission began to acknowledge for the first time that a ceasefire might in fact be impossible to achieve.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Sluice Gates**

The access to water for the Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim people in the Eastern Province of Mavil Aru in Sri Lanka is provided through a set of sluice gates. These were controlled by the LTTE after the initial ceasefire of 2002, but distribution of water from them was closely controlled. By 2006, 15,000 civilians from government-controlled areas of the province were without water and there was increasing pressure for action. The Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission claimed that they would be able to persuade the LTTE to open the gates but talks failed to progress.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the government resorted to military action and in a combined arms attack on the waterway, the gates opened. The event was not without cost, creating an additional 50,000 internally displaced people from the area. It was however the first large scale conflict between the insurgents and the government where the government achieved complete victory without any form of compromise<sup>30</sup>. The propaganda that followed the end of the battle saw both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission claiming responsibility for opening the gates, but coincidentally the water started flowing only after the Sri Lankan Air Force bombed the sluice gates themselves<sup>31</sup>. The Sri Lankan army occupied the sluice gates facility on 11 August.

The opening of the gates was the most strategically significant element of this time, but was not the single front on which either the LTTE or the Sri Lankan forces were operating. The Sri Lankan Navy, Army and police were all heavily engaged in localized activity around Trincomalee against an aggressive operational offensive by the LTTE Brigade stationed in the area, utilizing artillery to attack both naval installations and the civil (Muslim)

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<sup>28</sup> "Press Releases 2006", Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission Annual Report 2006. Retrieved 12 September 2013. [http://www.slmm.lk/intros/press\\_releases.htm](http://www.slmm.lk/intros/press_releases.htm)

<sup>29</sup> "Operation Liberation", *The Nation* (Colombo) 19 May 2009. Retrieved 29 April 2012. <http://www.nation.lk/2009/05/19/news19.html>.

<sup>30</sup> 'D': Senior Indian Civil Servant within the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews conducted in New Delhi in August 2010 and in April 2013 by Skype.

<sup>31</sup> PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013.

community.<sup>32</sup> The Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission continued to watch the infractions but were powerless to do anything but observe the “weapons-practice” that both belligerents continued to undertake. The current orthodox view has been that it was the Mavil Aru water dispute that triggered the final phase of the conflict.<sup>33</sup>

Whilst attacks against civilian targets and geographically significant towns in the East of Sri Lanka by the LTTE, Eelam War IV was characterized by a shift from mainstream LTTE forces to military and political targets – recognition of the mistakes in taking on civilian targets on the Jaffna peninsula.<sup>34</sup> The embargoes placed on the LTTE by EU and other international actors started to have a real impact on the LTTE’s ability to conduct operations however. A large scale attack against Jaffna by LTTE cadres and amphibious forces was repulsed, largely because the attack could not be logistically sustained in the methodology of previous operations: i.e. utilizing mass and firepower.<sup>35</sup> Simultaneously the government’s revised strategy was beginning to pay dividends with fresh brigades becoming available along with revised rules of engagement and greater political support. The Pakistani Ambassador to Sri Lanka was attacked in Colombo by an armed rickshaw. Fortuitously, the Pakistani government believed this was an attempt by the Indian government to force them to withdraw their support for Colombo: it had the opposite effect, with a promise of significantly increased arms shipments being provided thereafter.<sup>36</sup>

Without pause, the LTTE moved into mobile military activity in Mavil Aru province attacking government controlled areas and gaining control of large areas, eventually attacking both the main naval base at Trincomalie and the town of Muttur. The Battle for Muttur lasted for three days, but government forces started to demonstrate the use of new tactics and

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<sup>32</sup> Operation Completion Report by Sri Lankan Army - *Op Completion Report – Mulivaru*, signed by Brigadier M P Peiris, 3 April 2007 (Colombo: Sri Lankan Army Archives).

<sup>33</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota’s War* (2012), p.321, Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), pp.123-146, and Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2014), pp.133-134.

<sup>34</sup> Interview 11-3/TD11-3: A junior commander in the LTTE who was with Prabhakaran at the formation and early stages of the movement. Later a more senior infantry cadre formation commander before deserting in the final stages of Eelam War IV. Interviews conducted September 2007 in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, in July 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka and again in March 2013 in London.

<sup>35</sup> Interview 11-3, *Ibid*.

<sup>36</sup> Sudha Ramachandran, "The Pakistani muscle behind Colombo". *Asia Times*, 22 September 2006. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/HI22Df01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/HI22Df01.html).

procedures that allowed them to significantly shorten what would previously have been a much longer battle. In a coincident operation, the LTTE conducted a large-scale set piece attack on Sri Lankan Army lines in Jaffna province. The LTTE used a Regimental sized force, again supported by artillery, to attack the Sri Lankan Air Force base at Palaly, and amphibious flanking attacks against government forces. Both missions saw simultaneous propaganda attacks against the government with claims of atrocities committed against civilians. Indeed the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission provided further evidence in some cases, specifically after the death of between 19-61 young girls after an Air Force attack on a suicide training camp in rural Mulliativu.<sup>37</sup>

Coincidentally with this last attack, the government began an operation to retake the town of Sampur which overlooked the Naval base at Trincomolie and compromised not only government military activity in the East, but also the single resupply route to the Jaffna peninsula. Government forces began to retake the town after heavy fighting and gained full control on 04 September. The Battle of Sampur saw the first significant gains by government forces since 2002 and was a significant boost for President Rajapaksa's new strategy.<sup>38</sup> The response from the LTTE to these losses was unequivocal – attacking government lines in the north of the country killing nearly an entire company of Infantry; conducting a suicide attack against a Sri Lankan Naval bus carrying 100 sailors returning home after a period of leave; and using the Sea Tigers to conduct a large scale suicide boat attack on the southern port of Galle.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), pp.269-273. It is certainly possible that the girls were being trained for duties within the specialist wing of the Black Tigers, which used camouflage and unusual weapons to achieve precision in suicide attacks. The cadre of girls was trained to act as pregnant women, with a prosthetic across their stomach carrying plastique explosives.

<sup>38</sup> Operation Completion Report by Sri Lankan Army: *Op Completion Report – Sampur, 24 August to 4 September 2006*, Signed by Brigadier M P Peiris, GOC (Colombo: Sri Lankan Army Archives).

<sup>39</sup> "Sri Lankan military captures key rebel territory, Tigers vow to keep fighting". *International Herald Tribune*, 3 September 2006. Retrieved 19 February 2014. [http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/09/04/asia/AS\\_GEN\\_Sri\\_Lanka.php](http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/09/04/asia/AS_GEN_Sri_Lanka.php). Notably this was the furthest distance the LTTE had attacked using organic resources. The development of the water borne suicide boats was a significant development for the LTTE. Commentators often state this as mimicking AQ attacks on the USS Cole in 2002, but there is some Secret evidence that links LTTE Sea Tigers to Hezbollah attacks on the Israeli Navy in the 1990s, and the use of the maritime flank was a well-known methodology of the LTTE from the 1980s onwards. Their leader Prabhakaran was a keen advocate of manoeuvre regardless over which the medium used.

Both parties agreed to a further round of peace talks in Geneva in October 2006, the third that year. Whilst both parties arrived the talks broke down during the opening session with dispute over the reopening of the J9 highway that linked the south of the country to Jaffna. There is significance in this. It is likely that the Sri Lankan government wanted an excuse to launch military attacks, whilst the LTTE needed money (gained through taxed movement along the highway) and J9 also gave opportunity for improve internal lines for resupply of those areas around which government was massing forces.<sup>40</sup>

### **Operation Definite Victory**

In December 2006, the Sri Lankan government announced plans to regain control of the Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka from the LTTE. Ostensibly to protect the civilians being shelled by the LTTE from behind a ‘human shield’, the government offensive was the first part of a deliberate strategy by the Rajapaksa and his Army Chief of Staff, General Sareth Fonseka, to end the insurgency once and for all. Independent journalists backed this government claim of LTTE actions, but the selection of the East was no accident in terms of strategy.<sup>41</sup> The government had to make a choice between an offensive in the North where entrenched LTTE positions would be more challenging, or in the slightly easier East, where government forces could use their military advantages of logistics, internal lines, the proximity of rear areas to forward edge of the battle area, and more favourable geographic and physical environment to experiment and battle harden their new troops, tactics and strategy.

Logistical resupply to eastern districts of Sri Lanka under LTTE control passed through the town of Vakarai in Batticaloa district. The town fell to government forces on 19 January 2007, after government forces were initially delayed by heavy rains (it was the Monsoon season after all). Attacks against LTTE naval bases in the north by both Sri Lankan Air

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<sup>40</sup> Military Analysis based on Interviews with PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013, and Indian Secret Service Agent (Research and Analysis Wing – RAW Operator) in September 2013 in Paris, France.

<sup>41</sup> D B S Jeyaraj, “Relying on Stealth.” *Frontline* 12, 1 (14-27 January 2006). "How President decided on retaliation." *The Sunday Times* (Colombo), 30 April 2006. <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/060430/index.html>, and Shamindra Ferdinando, “Army Prepares to Open New Front.” *The Island*, 15 April 2008. <http://www.island.lk/2008/04/15/features1.html>. Amantha Perera, “Troops Enter Kili in Multi-Pronged Attack.” *Sunday Leader*, 4 January 2008.

Force and Navy personnel further reduced the fighting capacity and capability of the remaining insurgents in the East. February and March saw continued successes for government forces in opening supply routes and recapturing large tracts of land from the LTTE. Using Special Forces, a much larger version of the LRRF and specialist Commando units the government continued to unpick the LTTE structure which, by the summer of 2007, was reduced to a small pocket of jungle in the North West of Batticaloa. A three-month battle in this difficult terrain saw government forces capture the key locations and finally the Thoppigala peak on 11 July 2007.<sup>42</sup> It was the first time in more than fifteen years that the government could claim control of this area validating the strategy and tactics of both government and military, and represented a major political boost for Rajapaksa and emboldening Sri Lankan military commanders headed by General Fonseka.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Campaign for the North**

Fonseka took three months to reposition forces from the East to the confrontation line in the North of Sri Lanka although he maintained a strong paramilitary presence in the Trincomalee and Batticaloa Districts to prevent a resurgence of LTTE activity. There was significant political pressure to hasten military activity, but Fonseka held to his military planning schedule in order to provide sufficient time to move the requisite personnel and equipment into place before commencing an attack over a broader front.<sup>44</sup> Over the summer months of 2007 Rajapaksa had authorized attacks on merchant shipping carrying logistics resupply to the Tigers. The attacks occurred on the high seas up to 2,500 miles away from Sri Lanka and in contravention of many interpretations of International Law: despite this fact, there was not a single complaint about the action from anywhere outside the LTTE.<sup>45</sup> The loss of more than 14,000 tonnes of supplies to the LTTE including medicine, fuel and weapons had a

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<sup>42</sup> Op Completion Report – Operation to liberate Batticaloa West, 20 February – 11 April 2007, Signed Brigadier W P D B Fernando, and Op Completion Report – Batticaloa District (Commando Bde), 30 September 2007, Signed Brigadier C P Gallage (Colombo: Sri Lankan Army Archives). Op Completion Report – Silavathurei (Special Forces Bde), 23 September 2007, Signed Colonel N A Dharmaratne covers specific aspects of Special Forces operations during this period (Colombo: Sri Lankan Army Archives).

<sup>43</sup> This attitude is evident from the Contact Reports records between Fonseka and his commanders within the Sri Lankan Army Archives: Contact Reports (various) 1976-2009.

<sup>44</sup> Sri Lankan Army Archives: Contact Reports (various) 1976-2009.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Murphy, *Small States, Weak States, Dirty Money* (Columbia University Press, 2009), pp.318-319.

devastating impact on the fighting power of the LTTE, and the newly reinvigorated Sri Lankan Army, emboldened by their successes in the East, gained victories in Uyilankulama, Parappakandal and Thampanai.<sup>46</sup> The military was executing a coherent and consistent campaign against the LTTE. Supplies and support was being choked by the Navy, as well as stifling movement in the maritime flank and preventing safe refuge in Tamil Nadu, India. The Air Force was conducting precision strikes against key LTTE bases and headquarters, while the Army was conducting both conventional military operations against the insurgents and guerrilla type activity against LTTE leadership. The head of the LTTE political wing was killed in November by an air strike, the Head of LTTE Military Intelligence was injured by an Army Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, and even Prabhakaran was injured in late November by an air strike on a bunker complex.<sup>47</sup> The new, politically-enabled campaign was starting to have an impact throughout the LTTE, but also led to moments of hubris by Sri Lankan Commanders.<sup>48</sup>

Government forces attempted to out flank the LTTE in the Northern provinces by attacking from a new direction at Muhamalai. After meeting strong resistance initially, the Army broke through and made quick gains eventually capturing the town of Adampan and moving in on the key agricultural areas around “Rice Bowl.” The entire area was eventually brought under government control on 20 July 2008.<sup>49</sup> Whilst both parties had dismissed the previous ceasefire at this stage, the LTTE attempted to gain more time reorganize its forces for fresh fighting by offering an unconditional ceasefire whilst a Heads of State meeting was held in Colombo.<sup>50</sup> Despondency fell on the both the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission and the LTTE when the government refused the approaches of the SLMM, stating that it was not

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<sup>46</sup> Private discussions with Flag Officer East and Flag Officer West during October 2007 revealed the extent of these raids. Their significance was further examined during an interview with the successors in these posts in September 2008. Interviews conducted by author during official UK GOVERNMENT visit during 2007 and 2008 and cannot be disclosed under Official Secrets Act.

<sup>47</sup> Classified Sri Lankan Joint Chiefs Memorandum, dated February 2008 (Colombo: Sri Lankan Joint Forces Archive).

<sup>48</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), p.439. Most notably, General Sareth Fonseka stated after the initial attacks in the North in 2007 that he could envisage wiping out the LTTE and restoring peace within 6 months (comment made in December 2007). This was later revised by his colleagues in the Air Force and Navy as... victory was possible by the end of 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Op Completion Report – Special Forces Bde, 15 March 2009, Signed Brigadier N A Dharmaratne and Colonel A A Kodippily.

<sup>50</sup> "Tamil Tigers in ceasefire appeal". *BBC News*, 10 January 2008. Retrieved 12 September 2013. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7180761.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7180761.stm)

necessary.<sup>51</sup> Rajapaksa's strategy was indeed working and by August 2008 the Army completed an 8-month campaign to regain control of the Mannar District, and by early September the town of Mallavi also fell.<sup>52</sup>

The LTTE continued to put up fierce resistance despite the loss of key areas, strong holds and Commanders. The Sea Tigers faced new concerted attacks from the Sri Lankan Navy who had built more than 200 fast small boats, much like those used by the LTTE themselves, to allow the Navy to attack in the shallow littoral areas on the North East coast.<sup>53</sup> The Navy took fearful losses but continued unabated with sufficient success that allowed Sri Lankan Army Task Force One to commence conventional operations against coastal areas – a task previously thought impossible due to the vulnerabilities of the Sri Lankan Army from sea based attacks by the Sea Tigers.<sup>54</sup>

The Black Tigers suicide wing of the LTTE also increased the pace of its operations, initially focusing on military and political targets but soon widening the target list to include areas of key infrastructure and economic value, and whilst government victories continued, the toll on the civilian population continued to mount. During November and December 2007 more than 250,000 people were displaced from their homes by the fighting. The Red Cross and the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission warned that the situation could quickly turn into a humanitarian disaster, but the international community did nothing to call for a ceasefire.<sup>55</sup>

By January 2009 the Sri Lankan Army had sacked the Sea Tigers main operating bases, removed pockets of resistance in the Jaffna Peninsula and isolated the key town of

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<sup>51</sup> "LTTE's ceasefire: Public relations or more?". *Rediff News*, 25 July 2008. Retrieved 05 January 2014. <http://web.archive.org/web/20080730064925/http://in.rediff.com/news/2008/jul/25guest2.htm>

<sup>52</sup> Classified Sri Lankan Joint Chiefs Memorandum, dated 9 November 2008.

<sup>53</sup> The Rapids Action Boat Squadron (RABS) was an indigenous programme sponsored personally by President Rajapaksa to enable the Sri Lankan Navy to take the military initiative against the Sea Tigers. This decision caused several factories throughout GOVERNMENT areas to be nationalised and turned from production of civilian wares to high rate production of craft for the Navy.

<sup>54</sup> Classified Sri Lankan Joint Chiefs Memorandum, dated 9 November 2008 (Colombo: Joint Chiefs Library).

<sup>55</sup> Ethirajan Anbarasan, "West urged not to ignore Sri Lanka". *BBC News*, 17 October 2008. Retrieved 21 December 2013. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7676839.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7676839.stm). BBC reports this was due to concerns over the sincerity of the LTTE to abide by the terms of any agreement, but there was also a concerned effort from the GOVERNMENT to world leaders to prevent interference in the culmination of the campaign.

Kilinochichi, which the LTTE used as its administrative headquarters, and gave access to Elephant Pass: a strategic and politically significant fortification still in the hands of the LTTE.<sup>56</sup> The final Sea Tiger base was destroyed by the Sri Lankan Navy in February 2009, finally allowing the Sri Lankan Navy freedom of manoeuvre at sea and enabling the maritime flank of the LTTE to be closed.<sup>57</sup> This was the first time in the history of the LTTE that it had lost the ability to deny its maritime flank.

International Aid Organisations reported atrocities by both sides during February 2009, specifically against civilians<sup>58</sup>, but the military momentum continued unabated. On 20 February 2009, the LTTE used two suicide planes to attack the Sri Lankan capital narrowly missing the presidential residence and instead hitting a hotel.<sup>59</sup> By March, government forces had encircled the remaining elements of the LTTE along a small piece of jungle on the coast. The position was well chosen by Prabhakaran, surrounded by lagoons and with complex and differing terrain for advancing forces. The LTTE had a wealth of supplies and weaponry inside the enclave, including artillery and also had somewhere between 30,000-200,000 civilians trapped inside with them.<sup>60</sup>

### **Final Throes**

In retrospect the next three months were in fact a foregone conclusion but that did not stop the massive loss of life on both sides. Neither leader was willing to cede control, nor stop the

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<sup>56</sup> "The fall of rebel headquarters: what does it hold for Sri Lanka?". *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing), 5 February 2009. Retrieved 14 November 2013. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/03/content\\_10596928.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/03/content_10596928.htm)

<sup>57</sup> "Army captures last sea tiger base & clears entire Visuamadu area". *Ministry of Defence* (Colombo), 5 February 2009. Retrieved 14 November 2013. [http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20090205\\_08](http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20090205_08)

<sup>58</sup> "War on the Displaced: Sri Lankan Army and LTTE Abuses against Civilians in the Vanni", *Human Rights Watch*, 19 February 2009. [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/srilanka0209webwcover\\_0.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/srilanka0209webwcover_0.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> The author was in the hotel, and can verify the figures of 2 dead and 45 wounded. His next visit to Colombo was highlighted by a suicide bomber attacking the checkpoint down the street from where he was staying.

<sup>60</sup> DY-1: LTTE cadre between 2002 and 2009 (claimed). Interviewed in October 2012 at Welfare/Internment Camp, Sri Lanka. There was a dispute at the time over whether these civilians were in fact willing participants or hostages. There is no doubt however that many were the families of dead Black Tigers which Prabhakaran had promised to look after in exchange for the lives of their children.

confrontation and so the five divisions of the Sri Lankan Army, supported by the Air Force and Navy continued to encircle and pressure the LTTE. The resulting Battle of Aanandapuram was fought on 5 April 2009 and resulted in the death of around 620 LTTE fighters, but importantly these figures included key leaders and battle hardened commanders.<sup>61</sup> In the future the LTTE would have to rely on more junior and inexperienced people to lead their defence and counter attacks.

During the next month government forces cleared much the captured areas whilst the LTTE chose to concentrate their remaining strength in a small pocket at Nandikadal Lagoon around the leader, Prabhakaran. Fighting was fierce and bloody with close quarters combat fought in terms of conventional means alongside suicide bombers, interspersed with the surrender of small pockets of LTTE soldiers. Unlike other periods of fighting, the final throes of the conflict were widely (if somewhat inaccurately) reported<sup>62</sup> and brought outrage on the belligerents by nations and non-government organisations alike.<sup>63</sup> Despite this, the Sri Lankan government continued to support a militarised, attritional campaign. The Sri Lankan Army reported to President Rajapaksa that the LTTE had been wiped out on 16 May 2009, with the LTTE admitting defeat a day later via their internet website.<sup>64</sup> Insurgent leader Prabhakaran was confirmed as dead, along with some of his closest commanders on 19 May 2009.<sup>65</sup> Rajapaksa made a victory address to his Parliament at about the same time that morning. Small pockets continued to resist in the north and east of Sri Lanka but the remainder of 2009 saw only 31 deaths from military means in Sri Lanka and military action

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<sup>61</sup> D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Anatomy of the LTTE military debacle at Aanandapuram", 10 April 2009. Retrieved 14 November 2013. <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/315>.

<sup>62</sup> Restrictions on the presence of reporters, both from Sri Lanka and the international media, remained in place until well into 2010. Press releases from both government agencies and on Tamilnet stimulated interest and wider circulation, but the lack of access simply triggered uninformed opinions and coverage, rather than reporting on facts with context and perspective.

<sup>63</sup> "UN chief 'appalled' by weekend death toll in Sri Lankan conflict", United Nations, 11 May 2009. Retrieved 11 November 2013. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30759&Cr=sri+lanka&Cr1=>.

<sup>64</sup> "Sri Lanka's coast free of terror: Army 58 Div links up with the 59 Div". Ministry of Defence (Colombo), 16 May 2009. Retrieved 11 November 2013. [http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20090516\\_02](http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20090516_02).

<sup>65</sup> Gethin Chamberlain and David Batthy, "Tamil Tigers announce plan to surrender". *The Observer* (London), 17 May 2009. Retrieved 09 November 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/17/tamil-tigers-surrender>.

was gradually replaced by a police strategy with key LTTE personnel being arrested rather than killed.

## Revisiting events – a thematic approach

The account above, drawing on open source media and interviews with government ministers, outlines a progressive military advance by the armed forces of the Sri Lankan government. It appears to be a clear-cut, almost linear, approach to a conflict that resulted in the complete defeat and annihilation of the LTTE. However, such accounts--covered impressively by Mehta, Chandraprema, Hashim and Weiss--seem to indicate that the LTTE was simply overwhelmed by mass and intensity of fighting, and was incapable of conducting any kind of coherent defence.<sup>66</sup> This is simply not the case. Between 1986 and 2002 the LTTE had demonstrated an ability to match conventional force behaviours, even a concerted whole-of-government approach, and develop effective counters to such actions. It had experienced and triumphed against conventional military operations previously. As outlined in the previous chapter, during previous battles at Elephant Pass (1991), at Pooneryn (1993), and at Kilinochichi (1991) the LTTE had been overmatched in terms of numbers and firepower, yet had succeeded in preventing long-term gains by government forces, and in some cases prevailed, securing additional geographic gains for the Tamil movement. To think that the organisation was suddenly incapable of meeting this type of operation does not stand against the evidence.

The thought that the actions by the Sri Lankan Army alone delivered victory is not a new thought within Sri Lanka. Some Sri Lankan military commanders<sup>67</sup> claim that it was the actions by the Sri Lankan Navy in 2007 that were the key government success, not the focus on intensity, mass and scale noted by others.<sup>68</sup> The US State Department thought that by cutting off supplies to the insurgents, the government naval forces neutered the LTTE fighting cadres.<sup>69</sup> However, according to finance and logistics officers<sup>70</sup> of the LTTE, these

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<sup>66</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), pp.355-371, Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2014), pp.88-132, Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.314-483, Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), pp.249-266.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Sri Lankan Navy Eastern Area Commander, November 2007, Trincomalee.

<sup>68</sup> The contrast between Chandraprema's narrative (*Gota's War*, 2012) and that of senior naval commanders is noteworthy. US PACOM Report 2002, Signed by Peter Rodman, Assistant US Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

<sup>69</sup> US DipTel 07COLOMBO1489\_a dated 1 November 2007.

[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO1489\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO1489_a.html). Accessed 10 January 2011.

factors never stopped the availability of fighting equipment--rather the focus of the LTTE leadership changed, away from strategic campaign design towards something more recognisable as a desire for a decisive battle with government forces.<sup>71</sup>

It therefore is worth re-examining the evidence thematically to understand actions in individual areas and how the LTTE responded. By understanding the shifts in government policy, the analysis can move beyond a simple analysis of sequential events and behaviours. To achieve this, it is necessary to return to 1997 and President Chandrika.

Despite campaigning to find a peaceful settlement with the LTTE, Sri Lankan President Chandrika had managed, in 1997, to have the LTTE outlawed as a terrorist organisation. Her experience as a liberal academic who sought peaceful ways to end conflicts had not been altered by the assassination in 1988 of her husband, Vijaya Kurmaratunga (at their home and in front of Chandrika and their two young children). Her policy towards the LTTE was a stark contrast to her more aggressive presidential predecessor, Dingiri Banda Wijetunga, who was in office for just a year after the assassination of his predecessor at the hands of the LTTE. Chandrika attempted, during her first term, to undermine the wider international support for the LTTE through the use of diplomacy, but even her best efforts had a lesser impact on the insurgent's finances than had been thought.<sup>72</sup> Her approach to the LTTE during her second term of office appeared destined to become militarised, especially after she was the subject of an assassination attempt in 1999 during a final election rally in Colombo (she lost her right eye but was sworn in nonetheless four days later after winning another landslide victory). However, a military-centric policy towards the insurgents was not permitted by her Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremasinghe, or her Cabinet. The strained relationships demonstrated the shortcomings of her constitutional reforms, which sought a

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US DipTel 07COLOMBO1444\_a dated 22 October 2007.

[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO1444\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO1444_a.html). Accessed 10 January 2011.

<sup>70</sup> KAP12/KP A 12-11: Former senior LTTE logistics 'fixer' and later on the personal staff of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in June 2013 in Brussels, Belgium by skype. 4-2: A member of the LTTE central finance committee, supervisor of A-3 and A-4. Interviewed in December 2012 in Toronto, Canada.

<sup>71</sup> TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK. TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013.

<sup>72</sup> 4-2: A member of the LTTE central finance committee, supervisor of A-3 and A-4. Interviewed in December 2012 in Toronto, Canada.

pluralist style of decision-making and strategy formation. The type of government in Colombo did not matter to the LTTE leadership. Their chief concerns during this period were in developing an international Tamil uprising pursuant of the wider Tamil empire, growing the fighting capabilities of the LTTE cadres and ensuring that India did not re-engage with the Sri Lankan cause.<sup>73</sup> According to sources that saw the inner working of the LTTE chief, Prabhakaran saw the ceasefire and subsequent SLMM as merely facilitating a pause in which to rearm and retrain.<sup>74</sup>

When Wickremasinghe signed the permanent ceasefire agreement in February 2002, Chandrika was not in direct agreement but felt obliged to comply with the wishes of the elected representatives. By December however, Chandrika felt that her Prime Minister was too lenient towards the LTTE and was being cornered into an unfavourable agreement by the Norwegian negotiators.<sup>75</sup> Events and relationships continued in a downward spiral with the negotiating team demanding that the Sri Lankan government accept terms that were distinctly unfavourable. Chandrika felt that the red line had been crossed and indicated her willingness to remove the Prime Minister and dissolve parliament if any more concessions were made to the LTTE.<sup>76</sup> On 4<sup>th</sup> November 2003 while her Prime Minister was a foreign visit to the USA, Chandrika fulfilled her promise and dissolved parliament.

There are two competing narratives regarding when Mahinda Rajapaksa determined that the only solution to the on-going conflict with the LTTE was military focused, one advocated by the Rajapaksa brothers in post war interviews, the second by Sareth Fonseka, the once-disgraced army commander, and more recently a Field Marshal of the Sri Lankan Armed

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<sup>73</sup> BGxx-12: Member of LTTE interrogation team between 1989-2000. Interviewed in Washington DC in January 2010. DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009. 'D': Senior Indian Civil Servant within the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews conducted in New Delhi in August 2010 and in April 2013 by Skype. Indian Secret Service Agent (Research and Analysis Wing – RAW Operator) in September 2013 in Paris, France.

<sup>74</sup> TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013. D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Graeme Wilson, *CBK: The Biography of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga* (London: Media Prima, 2005).

<sup>76</sup> "Kumaratunga Interview". Time Asia. 22 March 2004.  
[http://www.time.com/time/asia/2004/sri\\_lanka/sri\\_lanka\\_intvu.html](http://www.time.com/time/asia/2004/sri_lanka/sri_lanka_intvu.html)

Forces.<sup>77</sup> Whilst the latter publically announced his story during the 2010 election campaign, the President and his Defence Minister have authored their own interpretation through third-party writers such as Chandraprema and Ahmed Hashim. That narrative, articulated both in books and a series of interviews given by Gota, was that the decision to commence militarisation of the counter insurgency was not reached until well into 2005, and the early part of 2006 when Rajapaksa had been in power for several months.<sup>78</sup> Within this narrative, the President spent almost a year in power demonstrating considerable restraint against a backdrop of continued LTTE violence and activity in both terrorist attacks and guerrilla activity. From October 2005, numerous attacks were made by the LTTE against NGOs, Sri Lankan Armed Forces outposts, soldiers travelling between stations, Tamil civilians (believed to be acting against the LTTE wishes), as well as a Sea Tiger attack on a Sri Lankan Navy Super Dvora Class patrol boat which was sunk near Trincomalee harbour. Throughout this period, according to Chandraprema, the new President demonstrated restraint in his military reactions all the while pursuing international options for a renewed ceasefire agreement.<sup>79</sup> Such claims are backed by assessments by the British and US Embassies and during visits by visiting diplomats, the latter narrative being released on the Wikileaks website.<sup>80</sup>

Despite this assessment from states outside the conflict, there are elements that do not ring true, specifically the re-arming of the Sri Lankan military by the Rajapaksa administration which ordered new weaponry and sensor packages almost as soon as it came to power (China's increased provision of weaponry for the Sri Lankan army began at the start of 2006, as did improved ammunition for the Navy's 30mm cannons from the UK, and the Air Force's

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<sup>77</sup> Hashim, *When Counterinsurgency Wins* (2014), p.46, D B S Jeyaraj, "Rajapaksa Regime and the Fonseka Phenomenon: Genesis of Current Crisis." dbsjeyaraj.com, 14 November 2009. <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/1462> and Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.288-302,

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. Interviews with Gota Rajapaksa by Chandraprema, Simon Gardner (BBC), Chris Morris (BBC), and Stephen Sackur (BBC). All available from the Hardtalk programme at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hnzj7--hXXw>, accessed on 2 May 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.292-331.

<sup>80</sup> US DipDel 06COLOMBO134\_a dated 23 January 2006, which covers the visit to Colombo of US Under Secretary of State) Burns and his meeting with President Rajapaksa. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO134\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO134_a.html)

UAV programme from Israel).<sup>81</sup> Military procurement does not occur instantaneously; the process to procure military equipment is time consuming, even when a purpose-built, fast-track organisation is started to conduct these transactions. Rajapaksa authorized such an organisation in 2005, called the Lanka Logistics and Technologies Ltd, which supervised an 11% increase in expenditure for the overall Armed Forces budget in final quarter of 2005 and a further 25% increase in 2006.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, there is evidence that military commanders in 2005 were preparing for offensive as well as defensive operations, while morale of the armed forces rebounded as the Rajapaksa administration's plans became less closely guarded.<sup>83</sup>

Chandraprema's basis for the first narrative could therefore be accused of being a revisionist account, stating that Mahinda ran on a campaign to further the peace process. What was evident at the time, and by subsequent investigation into documents not subsequently deleted from public record, was that Rajapaksa chose to run on a unitary Sri Lanka policy to make a distinction between himself and his chief opponent, his predecessor as Prime Minister, Wickremesinghe.<sup>84</sup> The latter had been engaged in Peace negotiations with the LTTE as Prime Minister as 2002 and was a staunch advocate of Chandrika's peace initiative as a postscript to the P-TOMS (Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure) co-operation with the LTTE.<sup>85</sup> It is likely that had he won the Presidency, Sri Lanka would have a very

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<sup>81</sup> Discussions between the author and Military Commanders in Trincomalee and Jaffna in November 2006. This is corroborated by Raj Mehta, *Lost Victory*, op cit, p.97, and Chandraprema, *Gota's War*, op cit, p.380, regarding Chinese purchases for the Army and Indian Air Defence Radars respectively.

<sup>82</sup> SIPRI Arms Transfer database (accessed on 19 November 2013). Spending in 2004, 2005 and 2006 noted as Rs583Bn, Rs647Bn and Rs729Bn respectively.  
<http://portal.sipri.org/publications/pages/transfer/splash> accessed 14 February 2013.

<sup>83</sup> US DipTel 06COLOMBO4\_a dated 3 January 2006 and 05COLOMBO2167\_a dated 28 December 2005. This corroborates interviews by the author with the Commanders of Jaffna Garrison, China By Air Force Base and Navy Area Commander East in November 2006, as a retrospective on events in 2005-2006. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO4\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO4_a.html) and [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO2167\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO2167_a.html).

<sup>84</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), p.289, US Diplomatic Telegram 05COLOMBO1779\_a dated 11 October 2005 (subsequently released on Wikileaks at [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1779\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1779_a.html)). A number of press articles in the Sinhalese State Owned news print media have subsequently been deleted from the on line archive.

<sup>85</sup> US DipTel 05COLOMBO1867\_a dated 28 October 2005.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1867\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1867_a.html) accessed on 13 April 2013.

different subsequent five years but with an LTTE boycott of the elections in the Northern Provinces, Wickremesinghe lost by a slim margin to Rajapaksa.<sup>86</sup>

The second narrative is based purely on linked evidence inferred in comments by Sareth Fonseka but hotly refuted by the Rajapaksa government in Colombo<sup>87</sup>; that the strategy had been written by a retired Indian Army General in 2003. General Satish Nambiar made a series of recommendations to the Sri Lankan government about restructuring the Army specifically to fight the LTTE based on the military experiences of both the Indian Peace Keeping force in the 1990s and an assessment of the LTTE's strengths and weaknesses as identified by the Indian foreign intelligence organisation, RAW.<sup>88</sup> The report was never debated in detail by the government of the time, although Fonseka claims he had both access to it and had shaped its contents considerably.<sup>89</sup> This would be a logical conclusion given that he was Chief of Staff in the Sri Lankan Army at the same time. It was this report that, Fonseka claims, lay him at the heart of the victory over the LTTE; indeed it is certainly possible to see some of those recommendations (in terms of restructuring of the Sri Lankan Army), bring implemented between 2005-2006. Fonseka is not absolute in his claim for prominence in the military success. During his ill-fated 2010 Presidential bid, he distanced himself from the attritional strategy advocated by Nambiar.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> US DipTel 05COLOMBO1975\_a dated 19 November 2005.

[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1975\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1975_a.html) accessed on 15 April 2013. US DipTel 05COLOMBO1779\_a, op cit. The US Embassy assessment was that Wickremesinghe would have continued the peace talks at nauseum and quietly undermined the LTTE military capability using international sanctions. There are few indications that this policy would have amounted to any more success than the previous attempts to pacify the LTTE through the policy of Appeasement. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1779\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1779_a.html) accessed on 01 April 2013.

<sup>87</sup> Much of Fonseka's comments and interviews made during the 2010 election campaign were deleted from records during his trial and imprisonment (February 2010- May 2012). Some European records remain however. See "General intentions", *The Economist*. 19 November 2009. Retrieved 15 December 2009, and "Sri Lankan warrior has president in his sights", *Telegraph* (UK), Retrieved on 17 January 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/srilanka/7005269/Sri-Lankan-warrior-has-president-in-his-sights.html> accessed 14 April 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Classified Indian Army Assessment titled, "Sri Lanka: Counter Insurgency Options", signed by General Satish Nambiar, dated xx xxx 2003.

<sup>89</sup> Sir Adam Roberts, *Democracy, Sovereignty and Terror: Laksham Kadirgamar on the Foundations of International Order* (London: I B Taurus, 2012), p.202.

<sup>90</sup> Nick Meo, "Sri Lankan warrior has president in his sights". *Telegraph* (UK), 17 January 2010.

Fonseka is not alone in having knowledge of this Nambiar's campaign plan; Mahinda Rajapaksa also has a link, albeit somewhat tenuous. Shortly after Mahinda was installed as President he requested that Palitha Kohona, a dual citizen Australian Civil Servant, returned to Colombo to act as his Special Advisor on the Peace Process and Secretary General of the government Peace Secretariat.<sup>91</sup> Kohona was well known to Rajapaksa as a Supreme Court Attorney-At-Law, and also as a member of the UN Secretary General's Peace Process team. The lead of that team was and remains the UN Secretary General's Chief of Staff, Vijay Nambiar. The latter was previously the Deputy Indian National Security Advisor and it was his brother, Satish, who completed the report for the Sri Lankan government. According to a senior Indian diplomat, Rajapaksa certainly had knowledge of the advice provided in 2003 and no doubt used this network to develop and implement a counter insurgency strategy that was freed from political constraints.<sup>92</sup> Kohona served with the Peace Secretariat until 2007 when he became Rajapaksa's Foreign Minister.

The timing of the decision by the Rajapaksa administration to go to war is not a decisive element per se, but it is important in deriving lessons from the campaign that may have wider utility for other states and governments. If one follows Champradrema's proposition, then a state would only need three years to determine the course of an insurgency; ie that within that timeframe, and given the right personalities, one could decide upon a course of attrition and garner sufficient international support, restructure and re-equip both the armed forces, national finance processes and the orientation of the diplomatic, political, informational and economic elements of an entire nation and achieve a complete victory. The alternative is that Rajapaksa had considerably longer; if he chose to adopt some version of Nambiar's plan in 2003, and by making it a central tenet to his thinking, Mahinda Rajapaksa brought his administration another three years to complete those processes. Given that the restructuring of the Sri Lankan Army began in 2005, based on the experiences of Brigadier Jagath Dias<sup>93</sup> (Commander of the 58<sup>th</sup> Division), it could be inferred that Mahinda Rajapaksa did indeed intend a more hard line approach to the insurgency, as he specified in his election manifesto. His subsequent pause in his first 100 days in office are more likely to be as a result of an assessment by his Defence Secretary, Gota, that the Armed Forces were not equipped for

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<sup>91</sup> Trevor Grant, *Sri Lanka's Secrets* (London: Gazelle, 2014), p.193.

<sup>92</sup> 'D': Senior Indian Civil Servant within the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews conducted in New Delhi in August 2010 and in April 2013 by Skype.

<sup>93</sup> Op Completion Report – 57<sup>th</sup> Division, 25 June 2009, Signed N A J C Dias.

such action immediately.<sup>94</sup> Nonetheless when Eelam War VI commenced, precipitated by events at the Mavilaru (or Mavil Aru) sluice gates in July and August 2006, a new strategy was clearly evident. Sri Lanka's lack of budgetary transparency does not provide sufficient detail to understand when the additional expenditure was raised to produce the radical change in the forces, but if the procurement model and timelines in Sri Lanka would align with an earlier decision to rearm than is currently believed.

### *Nambiar's plan*

Both Nambiar's plan, and from (un-recorded) discussions at the National Security Council in Colombo early on in Rajapaksa's administration<sup>95</sup> indicate that the deliberate strategy for counter insurgency was indeed multi-faceted, spanning diplomatic, informational, economic as well as military lines of operation. This follows the standard campaign planning methodology used by the United States military, as well as those within popular doctrine in India, Pakistan and the United Kingdom (all locations in which Sri Lankan government and military staff had received formal professional education and training).<sup>96</sup> To these, later were added political and civil defence lines of activity; the former being an informal line of operation caused by events (identified later in this chapter), the latter a deliberate expansion of the military line of operation. Intelligence was an underpinning effort to all these lines, albeit one which became supervised by a separate Chief of National Intelligence in 2006.<sup>97</sup> The attritional military approach was heavily refined by Colombo's Defence Secretary who also undertook some of the co-ordinating aspects of activity synchronization across the government. Gota used the commentary from a 2002 US Pacific Command Report to refine the plan, as well as relying heavily on the Navy Commander's views as to how to implement some of the key recommendations.<sup>98</sup> Whilst Gota was, apparently, increasingly frustrated by his Army Commander, Fonseka, the nature of his relationships with other Cabinet Members,

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<sup>94</sup> This view is corroborated to a degree by Chandraprema, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2014), pp.289-294.

<sup>95</sup> 'D': Senior Indian Civil Servant within the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews conducted in New Delhi in August 2010 and in April 2013 by Skype.

<sup>96</sup> US Joint Publication Guide 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* (US Joint Chief of Staff, 2011), and British Defence Doctrine, JDP 3.24 Counter Insurgency.

<sup>97</sup> Chandraprema, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2014), p.357.

<sup>98</sup> US PACOM Report 2002, Signed by Peter Rodman, Assistant US Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

notably his brother Basil as the President's Special Advisor (for political affairs), made the National Security Council a productive forum for strategy formulation.<sup>99</sup> Selection of talent was a key enabler within this paradigm, and Mahinda Rajapaksa's judgment of personalities and characters within his Cabinet, Special Advisors and Senior Civil Servant nominees no doubt served to enable the strategy more fluidly than in other dynamics. This is examined in greater detail later in the chapter, specifically the decision-making paradigm and the interaction between key players. Many external reports on the culmination of the Sri Lankan Eelam Wars focus on the military aspects<sup>100</sup>, and there is merit in doing so, but that myopic vision only detracts from the significance of the other levers of power within the overall strategy, which was to decimate the LTTE as an organisation.<sup>101</sup> The authorization of that philosophy was entirely down to President Rajapaksa who played a key role not just in strategy formulation, but also within its execution.

### *Politics*

Basil Rajapaksa was the key interlocutor within the President's strategy in gaining and retaining internal political support across the elected government and within Parliament to achieve the requisite support for important legislation and budgetary approvals.<sup>102</sup> On taking office, it was not clear that Rajapaksa could deliver this, indeed his predecessor in that office commented to the US Ambassador at her departure dinner that she had no confidence in his ability to retain that support.<sup>103</sup> However, prior to his election Rajapaksa was known for his ability to walk the tightrope in maintaining a political dialogue with all Sinhalese political parties; indeed it was probably this factor that enabled his election victory.<sup>104</sup> His initial selection of Cabinet colleagues was a tribute to the cross party consensus that the new

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<sup>99</sup> RCDS Overseas Tour Records, Belgravia Square, London, accessed 10 October 2013.

<sup>100</sup> US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Sri Lanka: Recharting US Strategy After the War*, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, First Session, dated 7 December 2009.

<sup>101</sup> UK Classified Reporting January 2010 – Paper to Joint Intelligence Committee regarding Sri Lanka.

<sup>102</sup> US DipTel 05COLOMBO1858\_a dated 27 October 2005.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1858\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1858_a.html) accessed 10 April 2013.

<sup>103</sup> US DipTel 05COLOMBO1969\_a dated 17 November 2005.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1969\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1969_a.html) accessed 13 April 2013.

<sup>104</sup> US DipTel 05COLOMBO1981\_a dated 21 November 2005.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1981\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1981_a.html) accessed 14 April 2013.

President hoped to maintain; this was not to last however. Mahinda's long time ally, Mangala Samaraweera, had expected to become Prime Minister although there is some dispute in evidence whether he was promised the post prior to the election.<sup>105</sup> Instead Samaraweera was given the wide ranging portfolio of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and Ports and Aviation, the latter being central to the economic development plans articulated in Rajapaksa's election manifesto. Thus whilst not Prime Minister in name, he was widely regarded by the both local politicians and the diplomatic community to wield significant power within the Rajapaksa administration.<sup>106</sup> Early within his presidency however, Mangala began an opposition movement within the Cabinet developing a clearly pacific approach to the campaign and calling on others who believed that a military solution would not be a practical outcome to the conflict. Largely, as predicted by Chandrika before her departure and as recorded by her biographer, Mangala enlisted the assistance of the media and reinvigorated his old anti-war group, the *Sudu Nelum Movement*, even going so far as to commission anti-military TV adverts against the President in 2006.<sup>107</sup> Rajapaksa was unable to take action against Mangala however due to the precarious nature of the coalition, although he did rescind permission for Mangala to attend the National Security Council meetings.<sup>108</sup> It was not until a group of dissident UNP (opposition) MPs crossed the floor in 2007 that Mangala could be dismissed from official duties.<sup>109</sup> During the period when Mangala was still Foreign Secretary but excluded from the decision-making circle, Rajapaksa came to rely increasingly on his brother, Basil, as the key interlocutor with other political groups inside Parliament, ensuing the President's legislation was passed with a majority<sup>110</sup>. Basil delivered the requisite votes on each piece of legislation that Mahinda required, a quality that certainly would have endeared him to the President. Basil was well connected inside the Colombo political circles, and an astute judge of movements and party power. Having been a campaigner for various political parties in Colombo since 1982 when he was a supporter of

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<sup>105</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), p.402 versus Interviews in Colombo by the author in 2009.

<sup>106</sup> M R N Swamy, *The Tiger Vanquished* (New Delhi: SAGE, 2010). Swamy makes reference to Mangala Samaraweera's position and influence throughout the book.

<sup>107</sup> Wilson, *CBK* (2003), pp.12-64, corroborates the author's interviews with various diplomats and politicians in Colombo between 2006-2009, and Weiss, *The Cage*, op cit, p.168.

<sup>108</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.402-405.

<sup>109</sup> US DipTel 07COLOMBO451\_a dated 20 March 2007.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO451\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO451_a.html) accessed 13 April 2013.

<sup>110</sup> "Can Basil rescue Mahinda's sinking ship?", *The Nation* (Colombo, Sri Lanka), 23 September 2007. <http://www.nation.lk/2007/09/23/mynation.htm>

both the UNP and SLFP campaigns, his corporate history with key party players within the government, civil service and parliament was important in allowing Mahinda to focus on the wider picture of strategy interaction and integration.<sup>111</sup> The reliance on his brother Basil, occasionally portrayed as the ‘brains’ of the operation, was based on the requirement to balance political reality with the desires of Mahinda’s other brother, Gota, who had promised a military victory given the resources, and whenever he took that decision, the philosophy and strategy of the President had undoubtedly become militarily focused.<sup>112</sup>

### *Military*

The military’s role within Mahinda Rajapaksa’s wider strategy was spearheaded by another of his brothers, Gota, as Secretary for Defence. He in turn refined Mahinda’s plan, and with broad approval gained a freedom of manoeuvre and decision making within his sphere of activities.<sup>113</sup> That purview became wider as the campaign expanded covering not only activities of the Armed Forces, but also of the civil defence Force and intelligence communities within Sri Lanka. The original plan was based largely on the army structure, tactics, operational design and methodology that coincided with his own experiences as a serving officer in the Sri Lankan Army prior to his American adventure.<sup>114</sup> It would appear that the chief influence upon him was the tactical successes he experienced as a field commander in 1991 in Operation Vanni Vickrama I.<sup>115</sup> It was here that initial successes by troops were undermined by an operational level failure to fill the vacuum left when formations moved on to subsequent activities, and there were insufficient troops to hold the areas that had been taken from insurgent control. That lack of foresight and capacity was

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<sup>111</sup> Udeshi Amarasinghe, “Basil Rajapaksa The Force Unseen”, in *Business Today*, cover story March 2010.

<sup>112</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), throughout but specifically pp.171-173, and pp.246-248.

<sup>113</sup> Dr Telli C Rajaratam, “A Legend in our times – opinion”, *Ministry of Defence* (Colombo, Sri Lanka), 20 June 2012. [http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=a\\_legend\\_of\\_our\\_times\\_20120620\\_04](http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=a_legend_of_our_times_20120620_04)

<sup>114</sup> Gotabaya Rajapaksha -Talk at "Tech Colloquium" organized by Microsoft (USA) 11 January 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxKu8A1uGBg&noredirect=1>

<sup>115</sup> Shamindra Ferdinando, “A ding dong battle: War on Terror revisited”, *The Island* (Colombo, Sri Lanka), 24 March 2013. [http://www.island.lk/index.php?page\\_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code\\_title=75444](http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=75444)

addressed initially by reinforcing the latent capabilities of the Civil Defence Force and placing it under the control of the Secretary of Defence (Gota).<sup>116</sup>

### *Civil Defence Force*

Until 2005, personnel within the Armed Forces also had responsibility for protecting local residents from LTTE activity well behind the Forward Edge of the Battle Area; this placed a significant burden on scarce army manpower. At a National Security Council meeting in early 2006 the President authorized Gota to reinvigorate the Home Guard Force which had been established by the Mobilization of Supplementary Force Act No.40 of 1985.<sup>117</sup> The Home Guard had a poor reputation that was the subject of a popular Sinhalese film in 2000 that portrayed members as an undisciplined group of vigilantes who beat, extorted, raped and killed at will across the population.<sup>118</sup> It was a problematic institution, but Rajapaksa did not want to disband it and establish a new agency, instead he instructed Gota (under considerable protest at a National Security Council) to utilize the organisation that was already in place. In selecting personalities to command under him, Gota had a sharp eye for talent. Chandraprema notes that he first spotted Rear Admiral Weerasehera, future commander of the Civil Defence Force, during a newspaper exchange with the several newspaper editors over reviews of anti-military films, notably *Sudu Kalu Saha Alu* (2004), and *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (2005).<sup>119</sup> Gota persuaded the Naval Commander, Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda, to release Weerasehera from his duties as Chief of Staff of the Sri Lankan Navy for duties to command the re-named Civil Defence Force. After conducting an assessment of the current state of the Home Guard, Weerasehera made several recommendations to the Defence Secretary: to move control and administration from the Police to a separate agency under the Ministry of Defence; to shift command from local district commanders (usually subservient to the local district politicians) to a central command structure; and to double the size of the force from 19,200 to around 41,500 over a three year period. Gota approved all of these recommendations without recourse to the President. Weerasehera immediately set about providing better training for the Civil Defence Force personnel by army and navy instructors.

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<sup>116</sup> Gazette notification No. 1462/20 dated 13th September 2006.

<sup>117</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), p.391.

<sup>118</sup> Asoka Handagama (Producer) and Vimukthi Jayasundera (Director), *Me Mage Sandai* (Colombo: Sinhala Movies, 2000).

<sup>119</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.310-311.

After completing their new four-week course, the old Home Guard personnel were issued new uniforms, effectively completing their re-branding. By the end of 2006, the old Home Guard had all but disappeared, and with it their previous reputation. The organisation may have been designed for defensive and guarding duties, but within that force an elite group received commando training and was employed on limited offensive operations. Whilst within the MOD, they remained authorized by the enacting legislation as police officers and thus were not bound by some of the restrictive legislation of the Armed Forces. Army Commanders, and specifically Sarath Fonseka, resented what they saw as an encroachment of their military realm, but Gota saw the advantages in the use of an additional paramilitary force. In any event, by 2009 some 3,000 Civil Defence Force personnel had been absorbed into the Army overnight conducting a relief of troops guarding areas recently captured in Vanni, and enabling their redeployment.<sup>120</sup> Gota's selection of Weerashera was well made, and he had similar success in appointing an intelligence chief.

### *Intelligence*

Gota, as Defence Minister, has been notable for many things but one characteristic that has not been previously noted was his ability to identify and understand talent, and subsequently to allow military commanders the freedom to act within their own spheres when sufficient trust has been established. His empowerment and delegation to the Director General of the Civil Defence Force are a clear example of this. After a year in office as Defence Minister, it became obvious to Gota that the individual intelligence arms of each of the Armed Forces as well as that of the Terrorism Investigation Department, Criminal Investigation Department, Colombo Crimes Division, State Intelligence Service, Police Special Branch, and the Western Province Intelligence Division neither shared information and intelligence nor de-conflicted activities.<sup>121</sup> Gota brought all these arms under a single coordinated command, that of Chief of National Intelligence to which he appointed Major General Kapila Hendavitharana. The latter was not only empowered to make each intelligence group break their compartmented access, but also had a direct line to the National Security Council. Gota and Hendavitharana met every Tuesday for discussions with the

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<sup>120</sup> General Deepak Kapoor, *South Asia Defence and Strategy Yearbook 2009* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2009), pp 286-288.

<sup>121</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012). pp.356-358.

heads of the other services in committee which saw both the intelligence Chief and the Defence Minister examine the detail of agency activity and de-confliction, and on occasion, of individual events. As the group grew to trust each other, less combative methodologies were needed to ensure intelligence sharing generated results and proactive operations which the Armed Forces and Police could take action on.<sup>122</sup> Hendavitharana was selected by Rajapaksa because of his previous work as Head of Military intelligence during Chandrika's administration but was removed then due to complaints from the international community over his activities in covert assassinations against LTTE leaders.<sup>123</sup> Actually it appears that Chandrika had removed him as a concession to the LTTE.<sup>124</sup> Gota recalled him from his post as Defence Attache in Thailand when Mahinda gave him permission to appoint him as National intelligence Chief, a position in which he still serves as a keen advocate of multi agency intelligence fusion.<sup>125</sup>

### *Maritime interactions*

Whilst Gota understood the need for intelligence from his own experiences, he was much less comfortable in other warfare environments. The US PACOM report of 2002 had identified the LTTE 'Centre of Gravity' as their sea lines of communication that enabled the insurgents with a secure line of supplies of weaponry, ammunition, money, logistics, food and medicine.<sup>126</sup> It was in countering this factor that the Commander of the Sri Lankan Navy, Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda, played a key role. Whilst Gota had no prior knowledge of Karannagoda, they developed an immediate rapport and the Defence Secretary came to trust

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<sup>122</sup> Maj Gen (Rtd) Kapila Hendawitharana VSV USP, "The Evolution of the LTTE and International Networking", in *Lanka Today* Dated July 11 (<http://www.businesstoday.lk/article.php?article=3481> accessed on 13 November 2013).

<sup>123</sup> Graeme Wilson, *CBK: The Biography of Chandrika Bandarunaike* Kumaratunga (London: Media Prima, 2005).

<sup>124</sup> TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013. D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013. These sources are corroborated by open source media reporting. See *The Island* (Colombo, Sri Lanka) 23 July 2005, on line edition. <http://www.island.lk/2005/07/23/news23.html>

<sup>125</sup> US DipTel 05COLOMBO1510\_a dated 13 September 2004. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04COLOMBO1510\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04COLOMBO1510_a.html) accessed 13 April 2013.

<sup>126</sup> Definitions Centre(s) of Gravity, Critical Requirements and Critical Vulnerabilities. US PACOM Report (2002)..

the latter's judgment implicitly.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, the Sri Lankan Navy achieved a good deal more freedom in operational planning and design than the other two services purely because of this relationship.<sup>128</sup> Much of the freedom that the Navy won was due to an incident in May 2006 when a mass attack was attempted against the Jaffna resupply vessel, *MV Pearl Cruiser*. The Navy Commander clearly understood that the sea based supply route to Jaffna represented the single lifeline to the garrison, as well as the political impact of the loss of such a ship carrying more than 300 soldiers to relieve those on duty in the Northern Province. The Eastern Area Commander of the Navy was under direct instructions from Karannagoda that the protection of this vessel was their Main Effort. In a determined, but ultimately failed, attacks against *Pearl Cruise* and her sister ship *MV Green Ocean* by the LTTE, the Sri Lankan Navy placed the Army's requirements above their own, and lost six (of 45) of their main fighting combatants. In addition to this, the Digampathana truck bomb killed over 100 naval personnel in 2006. Karannagoda presented these as facts to Gota in succinct briefings over the Defence Secretary's first 100 days in office. The sacrifices of the Navy, and the approach that they adopted forged an immediate bond of trust between the Navy Chief and the Rajapaksa brothers. That situation allowed Karannagoda to moot his audacious plan for wider action against the critical vulnerability of the LTTE; their resupply methodology, thus unpicking their very fighting ability.

The LTTE leadership, like Gota, was far more at home with military operations ashore than those at sea.<sup>129</sup> Prabhakaran was as content as his Sinhalese rivals to delegate operations and tactics to a specialist officer. For the LTTE, the naval commander was self-styled 'Admiral' Soosai (real name Thillaiyampalam Sivenesan), who had joined the LTTE in 1981 along with insurgent intelligence chief Pottu Amman. According to a 2006 report by the Indian think-tank, Observer Research Foundation, Soosai had developed the Sea Tigers into a formidable fighting force after their foundation in 1984, and allowed his own commanders a wide degree of freedom during missions.<sup>130</sup> Prabhakaran thought highly of his sea borne forces and was

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<sup>127</sup> Malinda Senerviratne, "The Man behind the naval strategy – Vice Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda", in *Business Today* (Colombo, Sri Lanka), February 2009. [http://www.businesstoday.lk/cover\\_page.php?article=330](http://www.businesstoday.lk/cover_page.php?article=330)

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Sri Lankan Navy Eastern Area Commander, November 2007, Trincomalee.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK.

<sup>130</sup> *The Way Ahead in Sri Lanka*, Observer Research Foundation, 02 September 2006.

would use them within his wider plans, provided they continued to deliver success. He started to use them for independent operations between 1999 and 2004, but it is reported that he lost interest in their achievements thereafter. Indeed, after 2005, he showed little interest in their activities and his comments after the remarkable successes of this force after 2006 were unusual.<sup>131</sup> The alteration of tactics and procedures, and the arrival of new Sri Lankan Navy vessels, were not factors that appeared to feature in his considerations between 2007-2009.<sup>132</sup>

Until 2005 the Sri Lankan Navy had conducted very localized counter insurgency operations against a more numerous and sea-minded foe.<sup>133</sup> The Navy's procurement of their sea-going flotilla and supporting aviation assets was focused almost entirely on the littoral zone around three miles from land in an effort to both counter localized LTTE movement and to protect the supply route to Jaffna. It was not until 2005 that the Sri Lankan Navy would understand that none of these short-range capabilities would counter the continued success of the Sea Tigers against them, and that focus needed to return to the fighting capability of front line sea-going units, specifically the Fast Attack Craft which could conduct operations at greater range from land in more demanding environmental conditions.<sup>134</sup> In that year, and seven years after the assassination of Naval Chief W W E Clancy Fernando, Vice Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda was appointed to be Commander of the Navy. Karannagoda had spent his entire career fighting at sea, as had all the subordinate commanders that he appointed thereafter, and this, along with his astute understanding of the international and national political design, made him a clear ally of the Defence Minister. His actions in re-arming and up-weaponing his core fighting fleet allowed the nascent fighting prowess of the Sri Lankan Navy to come to the fore. He advocated tactics of mutual support, overwhelming firepower and audacity.<sup>135</sup> The results were astounding and in effect brought about the

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<sup>131</sup> D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

<sup>132</sup> PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013.

<sup>133</sup> Raj Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), pp.124-125, and Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2014), pp.166-167.

<sup>134</sup> Kristine Høglund, "Violence and the Peace Process in Sri Lanka", in *Civil Wars*, 7:2 (2005), pp.156-170.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Sri Lankan Navy Eastern Area Commander, November 2007, Trincomalee.

destruction of the Sea Tigers, and weakened the overall LTTE structure, over the course of four successive years.<sup>136</sup>

Whilst the navy had a fearsome reputation in terms of personnel, it lacked the focus in equipment and tactics; Karannogoda provided much of this under previous governments, advocating for small increases in fighting power to counter threats on the basis of operational experience. Success brought political support and funding, but not in large quantities until he was able to demonstrate to the Rajapaksa brothers the significance of naval strike as a strategy. In an operation deeply opposed by Army General Fonseka, Karannogoda proposed a series of unsupported naval strike operations to sever the LTTE from its logistics network. Whilst Fonseka could not see the value in taking on such a risky operation, President Rajapaksa and his brother understood entirely and the Naval Chief got his political mandate in 2006. Thus in 2007 and into 2008 operations began against the LTTE commercial shipping fleet using intelligence from the Secret Intelligence Service overseas arm and exploited information from the defector General Karuna.<sup>137</sup> When sufficient target information had been derived, the navy launched between two and three offshore patrol vessels (usually equipped with Army mortars in addition to their standard armament) to intercept the targets deep on the high seas, at ranges anywhere from 800 to 2,500 nautical miles away from the mainland. The Sri Lankan boats were not designed for this kind of strike mission, nor were they designed to deal with the mountainous seas of the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal. They required additional provision of fuel for which there was no allowance within the SLAF order of battle.<sup>138</sup> The navy thus loaded fuel bladders, water and food onto government-leased fishing vessels and set to a search and destroy mission. The intelligence provided to them indicated a departure time and location, the name of the vessel and cargo details along with crew list. Thereafter the Navy was largely reliant on historical routing information; there are some statements that identify US intelligence support through the provision of satellite imagery.<sup>139</sup> The provision of such information was usually in excess

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<sup>136</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), pp.124-132.

<sup>137</sup> Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2014), pp.165-172.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Eastern Area Naval Commander, Trincomolee (August 2007).

<sup>139</sup> US DipTel 07COLOMBO88\_a dated 16 January 2007, later rescinded due to security classification (see 07COLOMBO69\_a). Further requests are noted with US DipTel 08COLOMBO691\_a dated 20 June 2008.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO88\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO88_a.html),

of a week late and as such had little tactical value in locating the LTTE's vessels. Against such challenges it is somewhat surprising that such a mission could be achieved. Yet the Sri Lankan Navy was successful, largely due to the good seamanship, tenacity and fighting spirit of Karannagoda and his commanding officers, and sank more than forty thousand tonnes of merchant shipping; the stores and supplies required by the LTTE to maintain any semblance of an effective fight. One cannot over-emphasise the significance of such a feat to even a modern, blue-water capable navy, let alone one that did not operate significant surveillance capabilities or larger vessels. The result, as stated by Karannagoda at his initial briefs to the Rajapaksas, was a situation where the LTTE could not conduct major military operations on a broad front due to lack of supplies, providing a much more lightly armed opposition for the Sri Lankan Army.<sup>140</sup>

According to sources inside the LTTE command structure at the time, there was some truth to this assessment.<sup>141</sup> The halting of a major resupply shipment certainly should have seen the LTTE shift their operations back to guerrilla and terrorist methodologies, as had been the previous modus operandi when restricted in supplies. However, Prabhakaran was apparently adamant that cadres could do without heavy weapons and could behave, "like Russians at Moscow."<sup>142</sup>

With international arms and logistics support severed, Karannagoda proposed doing the same to access routes from Tami Nadu, but the nature of the sea was such that it would require a different type of vessel and tactic. Rajapaksa understood that the timing of the campaign was reaching a crucial juncture and approved a massive procurement programme that involved changing the production of private and public owned factories into boat production yards and engine manufacturers. It took just four months after the decision until the fielding of the first two hundred Rapid Inshore Boats for operations; an astounding achievement even with the

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[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO69\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO69_a.html) and  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08COLOMBO601\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08COLOMBO601_a.html) accessed 14 April 2013.

<sup>140</sup> US DipTel 07COLOMBO1259\_a dated 12 September 2007.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO1259\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO1259_a.html) accessed 11 April 2013.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

weight of the mobilized political forces behind him.<sup>143</sup> Karannagoda's new squadrons quickly severed the supply lines and smuggling activity from India, and then using swarm tactics, decimated the LTTE's sea fighting ability. By May 2009, the Sea Tigers were no longer a viable force and external support for the LTTE from either Indian or from the Diaspora was effectively ended.

Karannogoda was not only interested in strategic or maritime missions. He understood the leverage that naval forces could provide in the land environment as well, in either a flank protection role or using an amphibious doctrine.<sup>144</sup> Having established and trained both a Special Boat Service (largely modelled on a similarly named British group albeit with training from the Israelis), and a Commando group, Karannogoda set to work assisting the 58<sup>th</sup> Division Commander in the 'Rice Bowl' by protecting Dias's maritime flank and opening a second front which required the LTTE commanders to divert troops from their only other fighting area. The Navy employed similar methodology in the Jaffna peninsula as well, only to become frustrated in larger scale plans by Army Commander, Sareth Fonseka.<sup>145</sup>

Until 2005, amphibious operations by the Sri Lankan forces had always worried Prabhakaran and mitigating such threats to his land forces was a usual discussion point in LTTE command group meetings. After 2005 however, little such discussion took place. The noticeable change in pace and length of meetings—they were less frequent and not as long—was mentioned by two sources in particular.<sup>146</sup> It appeared to them that Prabhakaran was no longer willing to alter plans, nor was he able to demonstrate a mastery of the campaign as he had previously.

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<sup>143</sup> Development witnessed by the author between visits to Trincomalee and Colombo between 2007 and 2009.

<sup>144</sup> Author's own notes during visits to the Sri Lankan Navy. Outline force capabilities noted by Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), p.123.

<sup>145</sup> Colonel Harharan's blog from 2009 (<http://col.hariharan.info/2009/07/president-rajapaksas-military.html>) adds colour to the bland remarks within Chandraprema's description of events. Chandraprema, *Gota's war* (2012), pp.366.

<sup>146</sup> TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013. D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

It was the opening of these second fronts, and the results they achieved in diverting LTTE fighting effort from the front line, that became Gota's primary strategy through 2008 and 2009. These activities took place first in the air and later in the land fight as well.

### *Air operations*

In comparison to its sister services the Sri Lankan Air Force was relatively well funded and equipped since the early 1980s, and continued to be modernized throughout the Eelam Wars with better aircraft and capabilities. The focus shifted from air policing roles in the 1980s to air-ground operations which remained the primary role of the air force thereafter.<sup>147</sup> Whether in direct support to the Sri Lankan army, limited provision of support to the navy, or independent strike operations, the air force maintained a fiercely professional reputation in the face of technical challenges caused by international embargoes on supplies.<sup>148</sup> Almost every aircraft in the air force inventory was re-equipped to drop weapons or provide close-air support for land actions. From Bell 212 and 412 helicopters fitted with free fall iron bombs, to Y-12 Cub aircraft fitted with rockets, the transport fleet often executed mixed roles of MEDIVAC and Strike. Even the procurement of Blue Horizon UAVs from Israel in 2007 was conducted in order to improve targeting rather than for broader intelligence, surveillance, targeting and reconnaissance duties.<sup>149</sup> The singular focus of the Air Force saw greatly improved results in terms of strike accuracy, but that specialization also meant that other areas, specifically in Maritime Surveillance, fell into abeyance.<sup>150</sup>

Tactically the Sri Lankan technical development in air operations led the way for many other more sophisticated nations. Whilst being used as a proxy test bed by the Chinese, Air Force air-to-air weapons were re-engineered in China to shoot down LTTE unmanned aerial

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<sup>147</sup> E V Tennekoon and M De Silva, *The History of the Sri Lanka Air Force* (Colombo: Commander, Sri Lanka Air Force, 2004).

<sup>148</sup> Interview: Air Commander, Sri Lankan Air Station China Bay, 2007.

<sup>149</sup> Shamindra Ferdinando, "US hand in Sri Lanka's triumph over terrorism", *The Island* (Colombo, Sri Lanka), 12 September 2014. [http://www.island.lk/index.php?page\\_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code\\_title=110787](http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=110787)

<sup>150</sup> Interview: Air Commander, Sri Lankan Air Station China Bay, 2007.

vehicles after failing several times over Colombo in 2007.<sup>151</sup> The use of air power in support of land forces was also honed to an art form without the technological tools available to other nations. But wider strike operations had met with limited success until 2006 when they were given more diverse missions by Rajapaksa. The bombing of strategic targets deep inside LTTE territory was undertaken with the aim of both diverting commanders attention (and resources) from the land battle, and demonstrating to the LTTE that there was no longer a safe haven in Sri Lanka for their activities.<sup>152</sup> The airstrikes also served to provide evidence to the population that whilst the land forces may have been stuck in prolonged fighting in the jungles surrounding the 'Rice Bowl', the Sri Lankan Armed Forces were continuing to make progress against the LTTE more widely.<sup>153</sup> Nationally this provided crucial public support to the government during mid-term elections.

Whilst experimentation and tactical development were strengths of the air force, and indeed the army and navy, some analysts have argued that the Sri Lankan Air Force was more humane than their military brethren from the other services.<sup>154</sup> The evidence does not support this<sup>155</sup>; the singular focus of combat support was only ever restricted where the tactical gains were out-weighed by a disadvantageous position for the land or maritime commander. Perhaps the best example of this was the use of attacks on LTTE swarming suicide vessels at sea. Operational experience indicated that in fact air attacks, far from reducing the enemy threat and deterring action, only served to break up a targetable formation and make response by maritime forces more complex and challenging.<sup>156</sup> The resulting risk was unacceptable and it was rare that gunships or CAS missions were flown in support naval forces. The sole exception was when naval escort was unavailable to protect resupply vessels. Where this was the case, Air Force support was largely provided by Kfirs,

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<sup>151</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.382-286. Chandraprema provides an authoritative account of the air threat to Colombo during 2006-2009, albeit slightly 'revisionist' against the author's own experiences in that city over the same period.

<sup>152</sup> US DipTel 07COLOMBO13\_a dated 4 January 2007.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO13\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO13_a.html) accessed 14 April 2013.

<sup>153</sup> US DipTel 06COLOMBO1889\_a dated 10 November 2006.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO1889\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO1889_a.html) accessed 14 April 2014.

<sup>154</sup> Jivanta Schottli, Subrata K. Mitra, Siegfried Wolf, *A Political and Economic Dictionary of South Asia* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), pp.366-368.

<sup>155</sup> Interview: Air Commander, Sri Lankan Air Station China Bay, 2007.

<sup>156</sup> Including the author's own experience on board a Sri Lankan Navy Fast Attack craft with and without air support during patrols in 2007.

MiG 27s and Mi24 gunship helicopters; the success of such missions is still an issue of some debate.<sup>157</sup>

The Air Force position was always on a knife-edge, however. The use of surface-to-air missiles against them, the lack of defensive aids for aircraft, a lack of spare parts to maintain aircraft serviceability, and ground attacks against their own bases, were all factors that were kept them teetering on the edge of political and tactical collapse.<sup>158</sup> But it would be wrong to conclude that the Sri Lankan force was the only actor in the air. The LTTE attack on the Anuradhapura Air Base on 22 October 2007 was a catastrophe for both the Sri Lankan Air Force and the President. The LTTE used both aircraft, suicide cadres and ground troops to gain entry to the base and destroyed several helicopters and surveillance aircraft.<sup>159</sup> The LTTE contested the air environment throughout the conflict. Their acquisition of surface-to-air missiles, the development of UAVs, and a fledging ground attack capability was all masterminded by Prabhakaran, with equipment procured by his logistics network.<sup>160</sup>

Whilst the post-2007 retaliatory strike was devastating in terms of damage against the LTTE command infrastructure, in Colombo the timing could not have been worse coming as it did in the midst the budget vote. Again the combined efforts of Mahinda, Basil and Gota were required in order to gain the requisite support in Parliament and prevent a government defeat.<sup>161</sup> It was not just the Air Force who provided challenges to the political positioning of the President and the government; the Army Commander, Sareth Fonseka, was the cause of regular diversion for the political triumvirate in pacifying those he had angered unnecessarily.

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<sup>157</sup> Interview: Eastern Area Naval Commander (Trincomalee Bay Naval Base), November 2007.

<sup>158</sup> Interview: Air Commander, Sri Lankan Air Station China Bay, 2007.

<sup>159</sup> Raj Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), pp.127-138, and US DipTel 07COLOMBO1444\_a dated 22 October 2007. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO1444\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO1444_a.html) accessed 14 April 2014.

<sup>160</sup> KAP12/KP A 12-11: Former senior LTTE logistics 'fixer' and later on the personal staff of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in June 2013 in Brussels, Belgium by skype.

<sup>161</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.383-386.

## *Land warfare*

Mahinda Rajapaksa had brought Gota back from America to assist with his electioneering in 2005. During a political rally in the Kurunegala district, Gota spotted Fonseka sitting under a tree trying to attract his attention. The latter was present to lobby Rajapaksa for the position of Chief of the Army if he gained office. Quickly understanding that Gota would be Defence Secretary under his brother if he gained office, Fonseka pressed home his fortuitous meeting. Whilst a revised Land Force strategy was not discussed at the meeting, Gota knew Fonseka from his previous career in the Army, and the two had subsequently met during a tour of the US by the Royal College of Defence Studies to Los Angeles.<sup>162</sup> Sarath Fonseka had a reputation as a ruthless and audacious commander in the field and he had a series of tactical successes to his name. In addition to being well known to the public, Fonseka had also demonstrated his eye for detail in command and staff positions, latterly as Chief of the Staff for the Army. Whilst Gota recommended him to the President as successor to the serving Army commander, General Hambantota, when the President entered office, others had warned him that Fonseka was not trustworthy and needed close supervision. Gota must have balanced the weight of evidence and in the absence of another candidate Fonseka assumed the role of commander in 2005.<sup>163</sup>

Fonseka was not however the driving force behind many of the changes that drove the future success of the army. A key finding of operations in the 1990s were developed by two middle ranking officers, Chagi Gallage and Ralph Nugera, at the Army training centre into a new methodology for fighting as an army.<sup>164</sup> Instead of fighting in traditional section sized groups or higher (normally Platoon level formations), Nugera examined the use of smaller groups

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<sup>162</sup> RCDS Overseas Tour Records, Belgravia Square, London, accessed 10 October 2013. Gota Rajapaksa served under the then Colonel Fonseka during Operation Midnight Train (also known as Suicide Train by those who undertook it), an operation to rescue the Sri Lankan Army garrison in the Dutch fort in Jaffna town in 1991. Both served in this action with distinction; Fonseka was the commander of the relief operation.

<sup>163</sup> Interviews (various sources in Jaffna, Trincomalee, and Colombo, Sri Lanka) 2007-2013 to a large extent corroborated by Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.289-293.

<sup>164</sup> Brigadier Ralph Nugera, "Evolution of Training," transcript from video of presentation given at the "Defeating Terrorism - Sri Lankan Experience" seminar held 31 May – 2 June 2011 at Fort Benning Infantry School, USA. Subsequently reported by Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Welch US Army (retired), "Infantry Innovations in Insurgencies: the Sri Lankan Experience", *Infantry Magazine* (USA: Fort Benning,), May-June 2013, pp.28-31.

based on four man teams, as pioneered by *Selous Scouts* in Rhodesia in the 1970s.<sup>165</sup> At first the small groups, members of the Sri Lankan Infantry rather than the Special Forces, were employed within regular formations as Special Infantry Operational Teams (SIOT), but later their use became the de facto methodology for gaining ground against guerrilla activity. Training of SIOT groups had begun in 2005 with each of the 50 Battalions in the Army being required to send 60 men for special training; by 2006 every fighting formation had between six and eight of these teams who operated just ahead of the Forward Edge of Battle Area, rather than deep inside enemy territory. The latter remained the purview of both Special Forces, Naval Commandos and the Long Range Patrol Groups. By 2007, regular troops were adapting to the new methodology and battle hardened troops required less, or in some cases, no training.<sup>166</sup> By 2008, the entire Sri Lankan Army was adopting the revised tactics and skills required to survive against the LTTE, and troop losses in action reduced considerably against a marked increase in fighting.<sup>167</sup>

The basis for tactical fighting in the Sri Lankan Army had thus changed, as had much of the equipment available to troops. The inability to fight at night due to lack of Night Vision Devices prior to 2006 was recorded by both the author and the US Defence Attaché during visits to Jaffna.<sup>168</sup> This was overcome in 2007 with the purchase of night vision devices from Chinese arms suppliers in increasing numbers, but as it was not just technical action that changed the way the Army was fighting. Rajapaksa was adamant that fighting should continue during the Monsoon season, a usual stalemate and operational pause in fighting. Thus from 2006, the Army fought a war of attrition with the LTTE throughout the year.<sup>169</sup> To

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<sup>165</sup> Peter Stiff and Ron Reid Daly, *Selous Scouts: Top Secret Scouts* (South Africa: Galago, 1982), and Ron Reid-Daly, *Pamwe Shete – The Legend of the Selous Scouts* (South Africa: Covos Day Books, 2001). The Selous Scouts were a special forces group drawn from 22 (Rhodesian) SAS Regiment and Rhodesian Special Branch Officers whose charter directed them to the clandestine elimination of terrorists/terrorism both within and without the country.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Jaffna Area Commander November 2007, corroborated by Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2014), pp.294-296.

<sup>167</sup> Gota Rajapaksa in an interview with Sri Lankan ITN recounted the following figures as battle losses in January 2009: 1995 – 1,221; 1996 – 2,120; 1997 – 1,662; 1998 – 1,063; 1999 – 700; 2000 – 2,248; and between 2005-2009 (January) – 3,703. The author recorded these figures when broadcast. The interview is no longer available in print or media, having been deleted sometime after January 2010.

<sup>168</sup> US DipTel 06COLOMBO\_a dated 25 January 2006.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO142\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO142_a.html) accessed 14 April 2013.

<sup>169</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.443-444.

combat potential issues with morale during this period, the President, Defence Secretary and Chief of the Army made visits to the front at every opportunity to see troops and ensure that commanders were addressing their concerns as best they could. Supplies were quickly procured where these could make a palpable difference.<sup>170</sup>

The final difference that the strategy called for was in mass. Gota's experiences of the loss of ground after Operation Vikki Vickrama I due to lack of manpower to secure captured ground led to an immediate increase in the size of the available ground forces. In 2006 the Army consisted of around 60 Infantry Battalions; by 2009 another 100 fighting Battalions had been added to the Army Order of Battle, an increase of 121,141 fighting men (equivalent to some ten divisions, three Armies or a just over a single Army Group).<sup>171</sup> These men were not used for staff roles but for infantry fighting. The Sri Lankan Army bore no passengers; the walking wounded and recovering veterans were trained and employed as clerks and logisticians until they could return to their units at the front.<sup>172</sup> Utilising these additional troops, Gota and Fonseka were able to implement a strategy of occupying the ground behind the front line, providing civil policing and administration functions as well as security to the rear areas of the army, and area which the Army Chief was highly likely to be subject to further insurgent attacks once the leading edge of the army had passed by. Once the Army had all these factors in place, Gota initiated the revised attritional strategy, opening multiple fronts against the LTTE areas, and retaining control of them once taken. The increase in fighting capability, fighting ethos, revised tactics and sheer volume of troops available was only made effective by the political acceptance that the fighting must be conducted in whatever means possible, accepting losses in people and equipment in pursuit of the final conclusion. It was here that Mahinda Rajapaksa demonstrated much greater stamina and resolve than his predecessors. By contrast, when Jayawardene was having similar success, albeit on a limited scale, with an attritional, hard-line approach to military activity, he caved quickly to Indian diplomatic pressure and called a halt to military activity after only

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<sup>170</sup> Troops recounted to the author the immediate impact of comments made about the lack of boots, uniforms and body armour to Gota Rajapaksa during a visit in 2007. The entire division was re-equipped on their next break from fighting some 4 months later. Notes from the authors visits to Sri Lanka in 2007.

<sup>171</sup> Figures drawn from the Armed Conflict Database, Military developments, Years: 1972 to 2009. <https://acd.iiss.org/en/conflicts/sri-lanka--lte---archived-2011-d92b> accessed 12 June 2011.

<sup>172</sup> Gota Rajapaksa (26 April 2010), *Nine Decisions that helped Sri Lanka Beat the LTTE*. Retrieved from <http://defence.lk> on 06 June 2013.

achieving small territorial gains. Rajapaksa by contrast did not flinch when confronted by international pressure from the US, EU, India, China or the United Nations under the auspices of the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission.<sup>173</sup>

The significance of army re-armament is not in dispute: a straight acceptance that the LTTE was able to do nothing in response is. During 2007, at almost the height of military fighting capability of government forces, the LTTE was still managing to occasionally demonstrate fighting prowess. Even Chandraprema admits that, “Sri Lanka began 2008 with stalemate in Western Vanni.”<sup>174</sup> The LTTE continued to conduct forceful actions, and the Sri Lankan army did not have matters all their own way. But the insurgents campaign design featured less focus on guerrilla activity and fewer terrorist strikes. The command group was unwilling to give ground as it had previously done, with an “obsession” over beating the government in a decisive engagement.<sup>175</sup>

Meanwhile in Colombo, it seemed that not only was the President capable of resisting increasing international pressure for a ceasefire or to reduce the intensity of military action,<sup>176</sup> but he was also orchestrating the wider Sri Lankan nation in activities both against the LTTE, while continuing a national economic growth agenda.

### *Economics*

A key element of Mahinda Rajapaksa’s election manifesto was the continued growth of the Sri Lankan economy. Gross Domestic Product recorded a growth of 6% in 2005 and Rajapaksa saw this as a key element of the country’s continued growth and stability. He had

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<sup>173</sup> SLMM Final Report, op cit, pp.3-5. US DipTel 06COLOMBO1366\_a dated 22 August 2006. There are numerous other US DipTels which cover the pressure exerted on President Rajapaksa and the GOVERNMENT of Sri Lanka at increasing high levels; this first one was engagement with Mahinda Rajapaksa by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Stephen Mann. Later US Secretary of State and Hilary Clinton became closely involved with negotiations. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO1366\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO1366_a.html) accessed 22 April 2011.

<sup>174</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota’s War* (2012), p.420.

<sup>175</sup> TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013. D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran’s protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

<sup>176</sup> US DipTel 08COLOMBO231\_a dated 6 March 2008. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08COLOMBO231\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08COLOMBO231_a.html)

vowed not to return to the state of the economy in 2001 when the nation faced bankruptcy, with debt approaching 101% of GDP.<sup>177</sup> Whilst the US predicted a significant fall in GDP as hostilities in Eelam IV commenced, Rajapaksa's careful handling of the economy, as well as support from China and India, managed to sustain GDP growth averaging 6.5% despite the impacts of the global economic crisis.<sup>178</sup> That is not to say that perilous moments occurred in the financial sector that Rajapaksa was closely involved with. The best example occurred in February 2009 when the Foreign Exchange Reserves became seriously depleted and the flight of capital from Sri Lanka was at its height. The President sought assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) but that institution delayed a response for five months.<sup>179</sup> Initially, Rajapaksa used the Governor of the Central Bank, Ajith Cabraal, along with his brother Basil Rajapaksa to meet with the IMF Managing Director in Washington DC. The IMF Secretariat agreed at that meeting that the money had been approved and would be transferred by April 2009 at the latest. When this failed, Basil approached his brother to find an alternative route. It became apparent that the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had pressurized the IMF to delay the transfer.<sup>180</sup> She is quoted as saying, "We have raised questions with the IMF loan at this time. We think it is not an appropriate time to consider that until there is a resolution to the conflict".<sup>181</sup> Seeing the potential for a balance of payments failure, Mahinda Rajapaksa called the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and arranged an immediate bilateral loan of \$500 million. Cabraal flew direct from Washington to Tripoli to sign the requisite documents, making simultaneous announcements on news media, stabilizing the markets before opening in Colombo. Rajapaksa also engaged with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who agreed to provide the financial backing if the IMF was not prepared to. In leaking this to Indian's representative on the IMF Board, the US

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<sup>177</sup> CIA World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ce.html> retrieved 19 November 2013.

<sup>178</sup> US DipTel 06COLOMBO1571\_a dated 26 September 2006. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO1571\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO1571_a.html) accessed 15 April 2013, and Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, *State of the Sri Lankan Economy 2010* (Colombo: IPS, 2011). The summary provided within the 2010 Report by IPS uses baseline figures reported in their reports for 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009.

<sup>179</sup> 'D': Senior Indian Civil Servant within the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews conducted in New Delhi in August 2010 and in April 2013 by Skype.

<sup>180</sup> Indian Secret Service Agent (Research and Analysis Wing – RAW Operator) in September 2013 in Paris, France.

<sup>181</sup> Recorded on youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhCUCrXnKOY>) and reported in The Diplomat (<http://thediplomat.com/2009/10/sri-lanka-the-new-great-game/>), 28 October 2009.

(and UK), backed down and released the agreed funding even though this was not finally transferred until after the war had concluded.<sup>182</sup>

The LTTE, by contrast, did not engage with the leadership of other states after the departure of Anton Balasingham<sup>183</sup>, but were deeply embedded in trying to influence policy making in countries of interest. The Tamil diaspora proved to be a great source of insight and allowed the LTTE to gain an equal footing in debates over policies towards the conflict, and in dealing with non-government organisations<sup>184</sup>. The insurgents had a well-found network of contacts within the global terrorist communities and was not short of money<sup>185</sup>. Balasingham had been instrumental in exploiting the “soft liberal underbelly”<sup>186</sup> of Europe, Canada and the United States until his departure from the LTTE command group. However, after 2005, little attention was paid to countering the narrative from Colombo and the LTTE found themselves increasingly isolated in debate, reliant on diaspora finances and social media.<sup>187</sup> Whilst Tamil membership abroad continued to rise, these parties were unable to interest the insurgent leaders to engage more with the international media, who they thought could have held more sway in western politicians minds.<sup>188</sup> Once again, it appears that Prabhakaran – never one to engage in idle chat with foreign leaders – was not convinced on the need to rely on outsiders.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.463-464.

<sup>183</sup> See BBC World, *Obituary of Anton Balasingham*, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/6180653.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6180653.stm) accessed on 21 November 2013.

<sup>184</sup> Claire Magine, Michael Neuman and Fabrice Weissman (Ed), *Humanitarian Negotiations Revealed: The MSF Experience* (London: Hurst, 2011), pp.15-35, and Reporters Without Borders Editorial, *An Open Letter to President Rajapaksa*, 16 July 2009. <http://en.rsf.org/sri-lanka-open-letter-to-his-excellency-16-07-2009,33847.html> accessed 21 November 2013.

<sup>185</sup> A-4: A senior LTTE finance operator operating in the Netherlands and Canada. Interviewed in December 2011 in Halifax, Canada.

<sup>186</sup> 4-2: A member of the LTTE central finance committee, supervisor of A-3 and A-4. Interviewed in December 2012 in Toronto, Canada.

<sup>187</sup> T: LTTE Intelligence Analyst to Command Group. Interviewed in Jun 2013 in Mumbai, India.

<sup>188</sup> Balasingham, *The Will to Freedom* (2003), p.356 and 362. Notably Balasingham does not mention the SLMM at all by name, rather the ‘Norwegian Government’. Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.436-438. US Diplomatic Telegrams from Colombo to the US State Department in Washington DC, various, 2002-2007.

<sup>189</sup> Francis Tozzi, *How to Kill a Tiger: Measuring Mainwaring's Paradigm Against Sri Lanka's Counterinsurgency Strategy* (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 2010). pp. 49-50.

President Rajapaksa was proving a deft diplomat and negotiator, leveraging his relationship with non-core state leaders, as well as India. Perhaps the most notable example is in how he staunchly resisted a visit of UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon in 2009.<sup>190</sup> He maintained a careful balance between the non-western allies (Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Libya, China and Israel), and those aligned to core Counter Terrorist operators (France, UK, EU and the US). Rajapaksa would only engage at the final moments however, having laid the foundations of those personal relationships in the early years of his presidency. The remainder of the time, he delegated powers of negotiation to his foreign secretary, Palitha Kohona who had succeeded Mangala Samaraweera in 2007, and if necessary his brother Basil who acted as a deal-closer and trouble-shooter for the President.<sup>191</sup> Together this group determined the diplomatic line of operation.

### *Diplomacy*

The US Ambassador in Colombo characterized Mahinda Rajapaksa as “folksy” during his assessment of the presidential candidate in 2005, and intimated the Sri Lankans’ naivety over foreign policy matters.<sup>192</sup> Empirical evidence demonstrates this to be an incorrect judgment. One of his acts undertaken by Rajapaksa on election was a visit to India accompanied by his brother Gota, delivering a comprehensive document entitled, “Military Assistance Required from the government of India.”<sup>193</sup> Whilst the visit was indeed centred upon the desire for increased of military aid, the primary discussion was a face-to-face discussion between Rajapaksa and Indian Prime Minister Singh. It was during this discussion that the President expressed a desire for closer co-operation with the government of India in several other areas outside of military assistance. Financial guarantees, intelligence co-operation and diplomatic support were all discussed and outline commitments made.<sup>194</sup> As part of that agreement the

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<sup>190</sup> See Secretary General’s Report to 68<sup>th</sup> UN Assembly. <http://www.firstpost.com/world/un-failed-during-final-days-of-lankan-ethnic-war-ban-ki-moon-1133061.html> accessed 20 November 2013.

<sup>191</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), p.131, 144, 161, 163. Weiss’ dealings with Kohona as UN Spokesman in Sri Lanka are good examples of both Kohona’s delegated authority, his central position inside the National Security Council and his access to the Presidential decision making paradigm.

<sup>192</sup> US Diplomatic Telegram 05COLOMBO1779\_a dated 11 October 2005. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1779\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05COLOMBO1779_a.html) accessed 21 April 2013.

<sup>193</sup> The author gained access to this document in 2009 but has been unable to secure a full copy. The document is also mentioned by Chandraprema, *Gota’s War* (2012), p.295.

<sup>194</sup> Interview with ‘D’ New Delhi (August 2010). No formal minutes of this meeting were recorded but the author’s source has proved reliable in other matters regarding financial, diplomatic and

two leaders agreed that Defence Secretaries of both governments should be able to interact freely without the need for the usual formalities regarding such interaction. Having achieved partial success in the meeting in December 2005 in gaining military support, Gota travelled to India again later that month to discuss Naval support in the Palk Straits.<sup>195</sup> Both leaders expanded this group by January 2006 to include Basil Rajapaksa and Lalith Weeratunga from Sri Lanka, and Shrivshankar (External Affairs secretary), Vijay Singh (Defence Secretary), and M K Narayanan (National Security Advisor) from India. The Indian High Commissioner in Colombo, Alok Prasad, co-ordinated the process. Whilst Chandraprema claims the idea was Gota's, interviews in New Delhi (unrecorded) indicate that Gota was acting under instructions from the President. In any event the meeting had to be authorized by both national Leaders.<sup>196</sup> The significance of this grouping should not be underestimated. Whilst similar groupings may have been in existence in Europe and America for some years, this level of interaction on a bi-lateral basis within South East Asia is most unusual. What is clear is that after the meetings between the two leaders in India, Rajapaksa returned to Colombo wishing to reinvigorate the peace process whilst simultaneously strengthening the state control and military apparatus. His well-recorded activities in early 2006 serve as evidence of his engagement with the LTTE, although this became limited to politicians, as he ended the military-to-insurgent talks that had been running for more than three years between local security force commanders.<sup>197</sup> There had been a realization at this stage that an immediate reaction to LTTE activity was not going to meet with adequate preparation or scale by resources available to the government and as such delaying tactics were required both with the international community and the LTTE.<sup>198</sup> Whether India Prime Minister Singh had played a part in placing this idea in Rajapaksa's mind is not clear from the evidence available

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intelligence matters between India and Sri Lanka corroborated both by open source reporting and secondary sources.

<sup>195</sup> India was to supply a Radar Warning System, Anti-Aircraft guns, two Mi-17 Helicopters and two Off shore Patrol Vessels as a result of this meeting. This was significantly less than Rajapaksa's request, but it was a start in what became a wider supply route for the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Military Data Base, available at [milexdata.sipri.org](http://milexdata.sipri.org) accessed 12 January 2013.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with 'D', New Delhi (April 2013). Corroborated by Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012) pp.295-297 and 427-429.

<sup>197</sup> SLMM Final Report, pp.5-7.

<sup>198</sup> US DipTel 06COLOMBO1363\_a dated 21 August 2006. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO1363\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06COLOMBO1363_a.html) accessed 12 April 2013.

to date, but certainly the increased dialogue between the two statesmen continued into the future as the situation in contested areas deteriorated.

The arrangements for bi-lateral discussions made in New Delhi may have been ground breaking but, as indicated earlier in this chapter, there was significant impetus at the time due to resurgence in LTTE activity and attacks across Sri Lanka. As a start to the Rajapaksa Presidency, this challenge only served to undermine the new leader's perilous pole lead; he had only won by a 0.3% margin in the election. In recognition of the continued battle to hold his coalition together, Rajapaksa understood that the pressure from his MPs, and from the leaders of the JVP and SLFP political parties stemmed from the public anger at lack of a coherent government reaction to LTTE attacks.<sup>199</sup> In an effort to bolster both internal political support and to explain to the wider international community the government perspective to the insurgency, Rajapaksa initiated an information line of activity within his strategy.<sup>200</sup>

### *Information*

Like the BBC in the UK, much of the media in Sri Lanka is government owned. The perception within the international community is that it acted primarily as a source of government propaganda throughout the Eelam Wars. Internal dealings within the Sri Lankan government did not view it in this light, and as with many governments, the Rajapaksa became increasingly frustrated with its ability to disseminate key messages to both the international community and the national audience without an often-unhelpful commentary editorial regarding detail. The balance was most difficult to achieve. The international community discounted the Colombo media as state controlled, and yet its constant attacks against Military Commanders, his own administration and the Presidency was in keeping with the country's liberal journalistic ethos. Relations with newspaper owners were soured due to political stances and overt support to opposition leader Ranil Wickremeinghe. Rajapaksa made approaches to several newspaper editors including the editor of the Sunday Leader, Lasantha Wickremetunga, establishing weekly meetings in order to explain his

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<sup>199</sup> US DipTel 07COLOMBO152\_a dated 25 January 2007.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO152\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO152_a.html) accessed 12 April 2013.

<sup>200</sup> US DipTel 08COLOMBO231\_a dated 6 March 2008.  
[http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08COLOMBO231\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08COLOMBO231_a.html) accessed 12 April 2013.

position in an effort to counter the papers well known opposition to both the President and the war; this directly led to the editor's death on 09 January 2009 when he was assassinated, bludgeoned to death by motorcycle pillion riders in downtown Colombo.<sup>201</sup>

Whilst serving as a clear illustration of the frustrations felt inside the National Security Council, the President regarded the provision of a government explanation for their actions a priority much earlier in his first term, and as such as a direct counter his frustrations, Rajapaksa authorized the Defence Secretary to initiate a direct state feed into the international media, and to drive the government narrative.<sup>202</sup> Gota determined that the best methodology for achieving this was through the MOD website ([www.defence.lk](http://www.defence.lk)) and thus established a news media team inside the Joint Headquarters in Colombo, over which he retained personal control.<sup>203</sup> The importance of the informational campaign was that it was not directly targeted at the Sinhala majority but rather at international audiences in an effort to counter more liberal and perceived one-sided reporting from the LTTE channel TamilNet.

The insurgents' information strategy was extremely mature. Raj Mehta claims that, "this capability was driven by Prabhakaran, assisted by KP and Anton Balasingham amongst others. Prabhakaran gave [this] art form status and visibility to the Internet, using it with extraordinary success right through the rise and fall of the organisation."<sup>204</sup> But the LTTE did not just use the Internet, they pushed their information on satellite TV as well, managing to hijack and rebroadcast through a IntelSat/Eurostar satellite that was in a geosynchronous orbit over the Indian Ocean.<sup>205</sup> As with many insurgent organisations, information and

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<sup>201</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.438-441. The Opposition leader, in a grand conspiracy-theory explanation, blamed Army Commander Sarath Fonseka for the incident.

<sup>202</sup> US DipTel 07COLOMBO1489\_a dated 1 November 2007. [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO1489\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07COLOMBO1489_a.html) accessed 21 April 2013.

<sup>203</sup> Raj Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), pp.227-246. Whilst others, notably Weiss, *The Cage* (2012) and the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) provide additional assessments of the government's information campaign, Mehta provides the greatest and best sourced detail.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, p.379.

<sup>205</sup> John C K Daly, "LTTE: Technologically Innovative Rebels", *International Relations and Security Network* (Zurich), on line, 5 June 2007. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?lang=en&id=53217>

psychological operations were weaved into LTTE considerations from the inception of plans at the highest level.<sup>206</sup> But for the LTTE, the majority of the effort was focused internally.

It is noteworthy that, like Prabhakaran, Mahinda Rajapaksa's external engagement with the media was not wide prior to 2009. He gave few interviews, preferring rather to conduct business with Ambassadors face-to-face instead, or personally with other national leaders.<sup>207</sup> He delegated much of the key decision-making and execution to his trusted cabinet, but retained control through the National Security Council meetings.

### Conclusion

Time Magazine reported the end of the conflict as one of its Top 10 moments of 2009.<sup>208</sup> The significance of the end of the conflict has thus been noted but the important element has not: the decimation of an ethno-centric insurgency without allowing the LTTE any political access through an attritional approach running counter to current doctrinal appreciation of counter insurgency operations. Indeed, the lack of revivalism by the LTTE as an insurgent group since 2009 is unique in modern experience. But readers should be wary of drawing conclusions about the government approach to the campaign as a wider lesson from which lessons can be drawn.<sup>209</sup>

Rajapaksa and his government obviously had a comprehensive and coherent strategy for defeating the LTTE after 2005. But the activities within the plan were no different than the LTTE had seen before, notably between 1956 and 2004, albeit with differences in scale and mass. It is worth noting that not only had the Sri Lankan forces increased in size and sophistication, but the LTTE had as well. Relative force composition had not changed to such a degree that defeat of the insurgents was a pre-ordained turn of events based solely on capability. Increased access to new weapons, greater funding and more recruits could have

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<sup>206</sup> Thomas A Marks and Louise Richardson, *Democracy and Counterterrorism: lessons from the past* (US Institute of Peace Press), pp.516-519.

<sup>207</sup> Al Jazeera Interview dated 27 May 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGQqwcxA6cg> accessed 21 April 2013.

<sup>208</sup> "The End of Sri Lanka's Cataclysmic Civil War". *Time*, 8 December 2009. Retrieved 22 November 2013. [http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1945379\\_1944421\\_1944388,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1945379_1944421_1944388,00.html).

<sup>209</sup> Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins* (2014), pp. 212-214.

made them an equally powerful force. The competitive advantage of the government forces was not that large. The chief variable between the two periods was not, therefore, the approach of the Sri Lankan government, or their forces. It was the decision-making paradigm that the LTTE leadership was operating under. That factor is the one that we now turn to.

## Chapter 3: Prabhakaran: leader and chief, influences and modus operandi

### Introduction

The rebalanced history of chapters 1 and 2 has demonstrated how the LTTE approached the conflict before 2004 and thereafter. It highlighted the changes that occurred to both parties during the war, and the lack of compelling evidence that comparative and competitive advantage had changed sufficiently to warrant the reversal in fortunes as explained by others. It concluded by finding that the chief variable before and after 2004 was in the leadership and decision-making dynamic within the LTTE command group.

As noted and recorded by others, the insurgent organisation was centrally managed, with clear political guidelines, a clear ideological vision and careful adherence to core doctrine and strategy. Both Swamy and Murari agree that these facets were run by the group's leader, Prabhakaran<sup>1</sup>. This chapter will provide evidence to support the claim that the LTTE chief was solely responsible for these core facets, but also that the change to his decision-making framework in 2004 was instrumental in altering the way in which the LTTE operated. The evidence will also expose how his views after the departure of key advisors, meant that he was no longer able to execute the same skill of decision making, policy planning and military activities after 2004. This coincided with a change in government policy and military activity. The evidence will demonstrate that until 2004, Prabhakaran was displaying qualities of extremely sound military judgment, luck (and critically his own luck) and vision. These, accompanied by his charismatic attraction, drew Tamil fighters and money to him making the LTTE leader an exceptionally powerful and successful insurgent leader. His ability to orchestrate military operations in several parts of the country simultaneously, differing in objectives, violence and methodology was impressive. Prabhakaran was recognized internationally, as well as in Colombo and New Delhi, as the key to achieving a lasting settlement for the Tamil people in Sri Lanka<sup>2</sup> and perhaps more widely in Tamil Nadu and

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<sup>1</sup> M R Narayan Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind* (Colombo: Srilankabooks, 2003), pp.xiii-xix, and S Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga: The Rise and Fall of an Eelam Warrior* (New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2012), pp.xvii-xix.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Cedric Hilburn Grant, R. Mark Kirton (Eds), *Governance, Conflict Analysis and Conflict Resolution* (London: Ian Randle Publishers, 2007), pp.278-279, and Amaia Sánchez-Cacicedo, *Building States, Building Peace: Global and Regional Involvement in Sri Lanka* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), pp.99-100.

across the Tamil diaspora. In 2004-2005 he had the opportunity to achieve a Tamil two-state solution: admittedly not his secessionist ideal, but closer to it than anyone had thought possible for two decades.<sup>3</sup> Prabhakaran decided against it, and his troubles were just about to start.

The analysis of subsequent behaviour draws on pre-2004 evidence as a normative behaviour baseline. As such it could be subject to the criticism of questionable “cause logical fallacy” (i.e. *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, literally - after this therefore because of this). To overcome this potential pitfall the author has used Bayesian methodology<sup>4</sup>: a process that mitigates potential issues related to causation and correlation by using evidence contrast analysis of behaviours in order to determine key variables. This methodology allows the evidence of the post 2004 era, more obvious in 2005 and later when events exposed the flaws of the new decision-making regime, to be viewed in a different light. As such, the chapter demonstrates the natural break point in the LTTE that radically altered it from, in Staniland’s definitions, a ‘Vanguard’ group to a ‘Fragmented’ one. Specific examination in the context of Staniland’s framework occurs in Chapter 4.

To understand the centrality of the leader within the LTTE organisation, it is necessary to contextualise Prabhakaran’s evolution as a leader. This chapter achieves this by providing a biography from sources close to him<sup>5</sup>, as well as exploiting existing documentation. It then develops behaviours in an analysis of his behaviours after the loss of two key advisors, Anton Balasingham and Colonel Karuna in 2004.

### **The Shaping of Prabhakaran**

Whilst Prabhakaran was brought up in a middle-class family with the associated trappings and security of education, he did not thrive in formal education. His influences were not

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<sup>3</sup> "Tamil Tigers call off peace talks". *BBC News*. 21 April 2003. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/2964349.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/2964349.stm). Accessed 4 January 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Jackman, *Bayesian Analysis in Social Sciences* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Such as S12-3: Childhood acquaintance of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in October 2012 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, T12: Mail runner between Prabhakaran and senior Tamil-Indian politicians when in latter was in Tamil Nadu, India between 1974-1978. Interview conducted in January 2008 in Brussels, Belgium and TW33: First mate of a LTTE logistics vessel (fishing/smuggling boat). The numerous passages which Prabhakaran made in boats crewed by this man made him a strange, and only periodic confidant for Prabhakaran. Interviewed in October 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

from his family but, rather, came from significant individuals and events. Prabhakaran was, like Mao, shaped by experience rather than education.<sup>6</sup> The one major influence that impacted on his future behaviour was a book by the Indian nationalist, Subhas Chandra Bose, given to him early in his terrorist career.<sup>7</sup> Bose was an unusual personality for a Tamil to take an interest in at that time: most Tamils were fascinated and almost obsessed by Mahatma Gandhi instead and his brand of pacific resistance against occupation. Bose's alternative view of achieving nationalism embraced a Machiavellian approach: he was willing to embrace both the Chinese and the Nazis in furthering his aims of an independent India. Whilst Bose knew and initially had been working with Gandhi, he soon rejected both the pacifist philosophy that Gandhi was advocating.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Bose adopted a pragmatic approach to nationalism that saw whatever ends necessary being embraced in order to achieve his ends.<sup>9</sup> Prabhakaran adopted similar means in his approach to the Tamil insurgency, and inferred that ethos on the LTTE as a whole: the influence is clear, but it is not simply a case that Prabhakaran read a book. There were other significant influences on him.

Throughout the 1950s, Prabhakaran's wider interest in revolutionary figures was difficult to satisfy because he was only proficient in reading Tamil at that time. He devoured everything there was regarding Bose, but was then limited to some work on Napoleon and a few plays by Socrates.<sup>10</sup> He was not religious, a theme throughout his life, but did attend regular Hindu plays and performances. He was always lacking therefore an alternative philosophical view to his perceptions of situations – there was a single narrative for his formative years that centred on violent reaction to occupation. That is not to say that Prabhakaran was a revolutionary from the outset, far from it. He was interested in football and kite flying. His light reading was the Tamil classics and novels that glorified the Tamil homeland and dynasty. He admitted later in his life that these had a significant impact on his views and

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<sup>6</sup> Comparison of similarities between Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), pp.163-165, and Jung Chang, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Random House, 2005), pp.5-32.

<sup>7</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.10-28

<sup>8</sup> Netaji Subhas Bose, *The Essential Writings of Netaji Subhas Bose* (New Delhi: Oxford Indian Paperbacks, 1999), p.19.

<sup>9</sup> Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), p.xi. Prabhakaran was so inspired by Bose's concept of Azad Hind, that he based the LTTE philosophy on it: the ideology was based on a trans-national government of Eelam.

<sup>10</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), p.24.

life's objectives.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Prabhakaran was also fascinated by *The Phantom* of DC Comics fame – a loner who lived in jungle with a small band of warriors who fought evil doers.<sup>12</sup> It is possible that the very American anti-imperialistic tone of the publication could have subliminally affected Prabhakaran. During the 1960s, like with most small boys, he took up and became proficient with a catapult and subsequently an air rifle/pellet gun: he took up both Karate and Judo so as to emulate *The Phantom*. Experimentation on insects and animals was nothing out of the ordinary for a Sri Lankan at that age, neither was the experimentation with some basic chemicals and fuel to make basic explosives, but his parents were noticing a change from the once obedient and shy boy. From 1970 onwards, Prabhakaran was taking more of an interest in politics and the unrest fermenting within the Jaffna area.<sup>13</sup>

The coastal area that Prabhakaran grew up in was a familiar area to smugglers from the Tamil Nadu area of India, who brought goods into the country illegally over the short twenty-mile passage between the two countries. The level of activity was such that it formed a regular and accepted element of life, as did the use of the sea to further horizons and exploit opportunities: something that Prabhakaran would use regularly in the future. All of these things formed the basis of Prabhakaran's education, but he was also being shaped by the events taking place in Sri Lanka at the time. The slow fermentation of his agitation was taking place in an environment of Tamil frustration, the start of intransigence and was stoked by his associates. People such as Sathasivan Kristnakumar, known as Kittu, who was a neighbour to the Prabhakaran family and Sivakumaran, a local Tamil militant being pursued by police.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Interviews with 11-3/TD11-3 (A junior commander in the LTTE who was with Prabhakaran at the formation and early stages of the movement. Later a more senior infantry cadre formation commander before deserting in the final stages of Eelam War IV. Interviews conducted September 2007 in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, in July 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka and again in March 2013 in London).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with D3-1 (Captain of a LTTE logistics vessel (fishing/smuggling boat). Worked often with TW33 and have independently corroborated many of each others' observations and comments. Interviewed in July 2010 Jaffna, Sri Lanka), and TW33 (First mate of a LTTE logistics vessel (fishing/smuggling boat). The numerous passages which Prabhakaran made in boats crewed by this man made him a strange, and only periodic confidant for Prabhakaran. Interviewed in October 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka).

The government of 1956 forced Tamil nationalism to the surface after declarations regarding language and marginalization of Tamil politicians. The Prime Minister's attacks on the Tamil spirit stoked considerable resistance, particularly in younger members of the Tamil populous – Prabhakaran was one of the disaffected student youths of the time in Jaffna, the intellectual, organizational and physical centre of unrest. Anti-government protests became more violent but mostly consisted of damage to property rather than attacks on people.<sup>15</sup> By 1970, student disaffection had become endemic in Jaffna and regular damage was the result of noisy protests whether stoning of Government buses or just blocking roads with cut down trees. Government ministers were greeted by Black Flags of protest, while other students began experimenting with stolen chemicals to make bombs. This environment was having a profound impact on Prabhakaran who joined the Tamil Students' League and the Tamil Youth League and he was at many of the student protests in 1970. He became known for his youthful exuberance in discussions but crossed the line in the early 1970s when he set fire to a government bus about two miles from his family home.<sup>16</sup> Witnesses reported Prabhakaran's behaviour to his father, who was apparently livid but more concerned at the potential impact on his Government job.<sup>17</sup>

Prabhakaran's other key influences at this time were the actions of his other associate, Sivakumaran. In September 1970, Sivakumaran tried and failed to assassinate a Sri Lankan Government minister who was visiting Jaffna and in February 1971 he made an attempt on Jaffna Mayor Alfred Duriappah's life. Again Sivakumaran failed and by now he was the prime suspect and was pursued by police until he was surrounded in 1974. Rather than be taken prisoner, Sivakumaran took a cyanide capsule that he carried with him.<sup>18</sup> The impact on Prabhakaran was substantial: his first assassination was of that same mayor and Prabhakaran also decreed that every LTTE member follow the example of Sivakumaran in both carrying a cyanide capsule and in using it rather than face capture. Given his activities and higher profile, it is not surprising that Prabhakaran came to the attention of the authorities, but he was lucky and was not captured (another feature of his life – the luck). This did not extend to accidents and he had his legs badly burned at a bomb-making factory one night: he became

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<sup>15</sup> Swamy, *Tiger of Lanka* (Colombo: Vijtha Yapa Publishers, 1994), pp.24-26.

<sup>16</sup> Interviews with 11-3/TD11-3, op cit.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Swamy, *Tiger of Lanka* (1994), p.28.

known as *karikalan* (“the-black-legged”) as a result of the burns. The police did not have a picture of Prabhakaran at the time and used to check people’s legs when trying to identify him.<sup>19</sup>

### **Actions and words**

As police pressure mounted both on Prabhakaran and his family, he left Sri Lanka for the first time taking a smuggler’s boat to Tamil Nadu in India and thence to Madras where he met a fellow Tamil outlaw, Chetti, on the run for robbing a bank. Both men were embraced and hosted by local Tamil-Indian politician, Janardhanan, although they had accommodation, they found food by their wits and it was not long before both men wanted to return to Sri Lanka and continue their fight.<sup>20</sup> The significance of Prabhakaran’s first foray to India is important: here he found safety, support and intellectual stimulus in both political and military terms. Whilst the majority of Tamils in India were not aware of the ethnic disputes in Sri Lanka in the early 1970s, this was changing and when Prabhakaran returned subsequently he would see a gradual change. At this early stage he certainly saw the potential for a secure rear area for his insurgent movement.<sup>21</sup>

Shortly after returning to Jaffna, Prabhakaran decided on two important actions: first that he would create a formal movement that was going to use violence to bolster the Tamil nationalist political parties, and second that a very clear action was needed to mark the level of intent which the new group possessed. He formed the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) shortly before he assassinated the mayor of Jaffna: that target, Duriappah, was a choice not only for political purposes but also because the previous attempts on his life had been by his hero, Sivakuman.<sup>22</sup> Where Sivakuman had failed, Prabhakaran succeeded: a fact that no doubt emboldened him considerably, particularly understanding that he held Sivakuman in such high regard.

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<sup>19</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), p.27, Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), p.29.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with subject T12: Mail runner between Prabhakaran and senior Tamil-Indian politicians when in latter was in Tamil Nadu, India between 1974-1978. Interview conducted in January 2008 in Brussels, Belgium.

<sup>21</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota’s War* (2012), pp.52-55.

<sup>22</sup> Interview S12-3: Childhood acquaintance of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in October 2012 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The assassination of a political figure gripped Sri Lanka in 1975 and a large man-hunt began specifically targeting Prabhakaran who was already a high priority target for the police: he was also becoming a revered figure to other Tamils. Whilst the authorities thought he had absconded to Tamil Nadu (again), in fact he remained in the Jaffna province and used his notoriety to start to select co-conspirators. Amongst them were ‘Baby’ and Kittu and some other hard-line youths many of who would play central roles in the insurgency for years to come. By 1976, Prabhakaran had a sufficient mass to create a successor to the TNT and created the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE). He was the self appointed leader of the council with a coherent constitution and clearly defined aims.<sup>23</sup>

A month after Prabhakaran initiated the LTTE, a local politician created the TULF political party with the aim of gaining a separate and independent Tamil state through a secessionist political agenda. The subsequent elections verified the ground swell of Tamil emotion, routing the mainstream parties. Using both his own notoriety and the understanding of ground swell public support, Prabhakaran commenced his first deliberate operation – unpicking the police presence, support and intelligence networks in Jaffna city.<sup>24</sup> In addition he began to recruit and train his first fighting cadre. Prabhakaran initiated a tough draconian regime of living in the jungles, hunting wild animals and physical exercise which was highly selective: those who withstood the initiation became quickly proficient with a variety of firearms captured from police and civilians in raids.<sup>25</sup> The attacks against police in Jaffna began in July 1977 when he had established a sufficient core of fighters to carry out attacks: the reaction from the civilian police force was extreme and targeted Tamil civilians. When the new mayor ordered the military into Jaffna to restore order, they only poured fuel on the fire – literally, they set fire to properties and the main market. Far from resenting the LTTE, the local Tamils saw the LTTE as the legitimate expression of their own outrage at the injustices meted on them.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Interview KK65: Senior commander in TNT who refused to transfer to LTTE in 1976 but retained close contact with Prabhakaran and the LTTE during the formative years until moving overseas in 1988. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in January 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Interview K9-09: Another former member of TNT who did transfer to the LTTE but failed to pass the physical elements of LTTE jungle training. Emigrated. Interviewed in London in May 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Interview KK65, op cit.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

By 1978, Prabhakaran and his band of fighters were on the run from the authorities but were still conducting both surgical attacks on security personnel and robbing state-owned banks to fund their activities. Meanwhile, the reaction from the police had killed over 300 people and driven many Tamils into hastily constructed refugee camps. The impact was now being felt by the Sinhalese in Jaffna as local Tamil youths reacted to their perception of the ethnic injustice being dealt by the local and state Government. Many of these Tamil youths who could not enter the LTTE formed alternative groups: the main ones being TELO and EROS – both of which would continue to play a part in Prabhakaran’s life and the evolution of the LTTE as an insurgency.<sup>27</sup> These organisations matured extremely quickly and harnessed a variety of outside influences that were not open to Prabhakaran’s closed organisation. As the violence in Jaffna continued albeit with a much greater police presence, Prabhakaran sailed for Tamil Nadu again: significantly he was accompanied on this occasion by a local poet, Kasi Anandan who had just been released from a five year prison sentence. It is likely that during this trip Kasi stimulated Prabhakaran’s interest in Che Guevara for he spent the next six months translating Che’s book into Tamil from English, which he subsequently passed to Prabhakaran.<sup>28</sup> He stated in interviews that Guevara was the only Marxist revolutionary who had ever interested him: his understanding of Guevara’s approach is likely to have confirmed his own strategy selection which it appears was fairly mature by this stage.<sup>29</sup>

Significant events occurred while Prabhakaran was in India: he reached out to the expatriate groups in London under the auspices of EROS and he befriended and became close to another TULF member, Uma Maheshwaran. The latter’s reports alongside EROS reports from London provided Prabhakaran with an opportunity to understand other revolutionary movements, notably from discussions with Robert Mugabe, the IRA and the PLO. The latter organisations were providing training to EROS with modern weapons from assault rifles to anti-aircraft guns, land mines, booby traps and explosives. The offer of free training and weapons was a gift to Prabhakaran and the LTTE but he sent a single fighter to the PLO for training.<sup>30</sup> The LTTE Chief’s reticence seems well-founded, as on his return, the reports

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<sup>27</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), p.65.

<sup>28</sup> Interview AK12: A former clerk of the LTTE. Interviewed in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in July 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Swamy, *The Tigers of Lanka* (1994).

<sup>30</sup> Interview E4: Sister of the LTTE cadre sent to train alongside the PLO in 1977. Interviewed in Manama, Bahrain in March 2013.

were most disappointing, and in all likelihood served to undermine Prabhakaran's confidence in alternative movements and increase his organizational self reliance: something which was to become a theme in the LTTE in the following years.

Prabhakaran returned to Sri Lanka with Uma in 1978 and assassinated an ex-TULF Member of Parliament who had transferred political allegiances after being elected. Prabhakaran and Uma walked to the front door of his house in Colombo and shot him point blank, and then (like *The Phantom*) safely made their escape to the jungles around Jaffna. The attack stunned the Government and the Sinhalese people in the South, who had previously been relatively unaffected by the Tamil violence in the distant North of their country. The police reaction was to send a well-known police inspector and specialist team to hunt Prabhakaran. The team was dead in weeks.<sup>31</sup> The success of their operations and their apparent invincibility to Government suppression only emboldened the LTTE movement and swelled their numbers considerably. Their next attacks destroyed an aircraft at the main Sri Lankan international airport in Colombo and relieved a state run bank of more than 1.2 million rupees. The spiral of violent attacks spurred on other Tamil nationalist groups, and critically led to a split between Prabhakaran and Uma, as well as between Prabhakaran and the TULF.<sup>32</sup> This split between their nearest political ally and the LTTE triggered a desire for public recognition of the LTTE in their own right. In 1978 therefore the LTTE went public with their successes:<sup>33</sup> it was no mistake that this was done in London, the hotbed of Marxist revolutionary idealism, where Anton Balasingham was a key figure.

### **The Introduction of Anton Balasingham**

Uma had become an ideological theorist and de facto head of the LTTE Central Committee: his expulsion for having sexual relations with another LTTE member while on guard led to a vacuum in the LTTE, a fact felt strongly by Prabhakaran who had lost his confidant and sounding board. The machinations of the split brought a London based Tamil journalist to the attention of Prabhakaran. Anton Balasingham was an ex-Colombo based journalist who had previously done some freelancing work for the LTTE in writing leaflets. His move to

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<sup>31</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.46-48.

<sup>32</sup> Interview UD5: Former TULF commander. Interviewed in Toulon, France in March 2013 by skype.

<sup>33</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), pp.34-38.

London and association with other revolutionary movements in the 1970s had cemented his Marxist philosophy as well as giving him grounding in discussions with insurgent leaders in exile in London. Prabhakaran had read several of his publications in Tamil and was keen to meet him, thus there was an air of expectation when Balasingham and his Australian associate, the nurse Adele Wade, flew to the capital of Tamil Nadu, Madras, in 1979.

According to those who witnessed the initial meetings of these two men, there was an instant rapport, and whilst Prabhakaran showed no empathy towards the Marxist ideology preached by Balasingham, he spent many hours listening intently. Balasingham was one of the few people who dealt with Prabhakaran as an equal, and developed such a close bond that soon the two began joking and socialising together, not something the quiet, pensive Prabhakaran was known for doing. In Balasingham's company, Prabhakaran was known to bend his core rules for the organization and played poker with other LTTE fighters, even indulging in smoking – a forbidden activity within the LTTE since its establishment. Whilst Balasingham lectured a core LTTE group on Marxism, National Liberation strategies and even sexual conduct, Prabhakaran showed no objection, which Balasingham took as silent approval for this ideology to be adopted within the LTTE movement. It is unlikely that Prabhakaran thought this significant: the constitution of the LTTE stated an intent to disband the group immediately a separate Tamil independent state was established. Balasingham on the other hand saw an opportunity within the group to establish a core left-leaning ideology, which could also benefit from the synergies with other Marxist revolutionary movements he had been experiencing in London during the 1970s.<sup>34</sup>

After Uma left the LTTE, for sexual misconduct, a new central committee was elected and Balasingham was a new central figure, albeit with Prabhakaran remaining at the head. Almost immediately Balasingham returned to London and Prabhakaran to Sri Lanka for a short time, to continue his attacks on the police and intelligence networks in Jaffna. The pressure in Sri Lanka caused him to return to Tamil Nadu again in 1982 to focus on training his core fighters

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<sup>34</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.41-42. It is worth acknowledging that Anton Balasingham also appreciated that Marxist typologies could not be simply overlaid on the Tamil societal structures in Sri Lanka: the distinctive European class system was not coherent with the Tamil caste one which was (and is) dominated by the middle class Vellalas. Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), pp.34-35.

in secret training camps, facilitated by the Indian foreign covert intelligence service, known as the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).<sup>35</sup>

It was in 1983 that Prabhakaran was arrested in Tamil Nadu following a chance meeting with Uma which ended up in a shoot-out in the central area of Madras. When the Sri Lankan authorities discovered that Prabhakaran was in the custody of the Indian authorities, they were jubilant and applied for extradition. The Sri Lankan Government had not reckoned on the plans of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi however who was focused on a different strategic issue and ordered Prabhakaran released on bail in Madras, effectively allowing him to continue to operate to gain further funding, political support and even conduct further military training of his cadres.

In the midst of the Cold War, Gandhi's India was a distinctly left leaning nation that had intervened in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to install a more favourable political leadership there. Sri Lanka had a very Western, indeed American, outlook and was viewed not only with suspicion but also some fear of the influence it could drive regionally. Gandhi's greatest worry was that the Sri Lankan Government would allow an American naval base to be built in Trincomalee allowing American Naval power access to the Indian Ocean – something they currently lacked.<sup>36</sup> Support to the Tamil revolutionaries was thus viewed as in India's best interest: destabilizing Sri Lanka internally would perhaps allow Indian intervention along the lines of those successfully achieved in East Pakistan.<sup>37</sup>

As Gandhi mused how much support she was willing to give the Tamils, Prabhakaran absconded from his bail conditions and returned to Sri Lanka, shifting his attacks from those against the Government intelligence network in Jaffna province to outlying police stations. The audacity of his actions found success quickly with the closure of nineteen provincial police stations, and causing police power to centralize in Jaffna city. The vacuum they left in the rural areas was quickly filled by Tamil insurgents. The plan was not without achieved

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<sup>35</sup> Indian Classified RAW report dated xx xxx 1983 signed by 'G Singh' (New Delhi, Indian Secret Archives).

<sup>36</sup> Vernon Marston Hewitt, *The International Politics of South East Asia* (USA: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.56. It is ironic that in 2010, the Chinese secured access to build a naval facility in Sri Lanka much to the chagrin of the Indian Government.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with 'D': Senior Indian Civil Servant within the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Delhi. Interviews conducted in New Delhi in August 2010 and in April 2013 by Skype.

without loss, however, and several of Prabhakaran's key colleagues were killed. The psychological impact on him drove a series of high profile attacks (for example in the 1983 the killing of 13 soldiers near the University of Jaffna), as well as releasing statements designed to embarrass the Sri Lankan Government internationally: whilst the Sri Lankan Prime Minister was in London, the LTTE released a statement taunting the authorities that they could not catch the fighters who were able to operate with impunity across the capital.<sup>38</sup>

The summer of 1983 saw the spiral of violence between the Tamils and Sinhalese reach new levels of bloodletting. The mob riots and killings of 1956, 1958, 1977 and 1981 paled into insignificance over what occurred following the killing of Sri Lankan Government soldiers in Jaffna. The army, activated to conduct constabulary duties in support of the civilian police force to restore law and order, either stood by and watched or took an active part in the ethnic cleansing that was taking place throughout Sri Lanka. India saw the opportunity and attempted to calm the situation with emissaries, but also took the decision to start increase covert support to the Tamil people through the RAW.<sup>39</sup>

In London, Balasingham was appalled by the events unfolding in his homeland and stepped up fund-raising efforts in Europe before returning to Madras with his new wife, Adele, at the express bidding of Prabhakaran.<sup>40</sup>

### **The lessons from Indian Covert Training**

Indira Gandhi was not selective in who she wanted to train to support the Tamils and destabilize the Sri Lankan authorities. RAW was instructed to conduct military training and provision of weapons to all Tamil insurgent groups. But although EROS, TELO, EPRLF and PLOT all undertook training, the LTTE was not approached for the programme. Whilst the other groups were able to boast of size and scale, they did not have the operational record or expertise of the LTTE. It does not appear that Prabhakaran was concerned and only sought Indian support after pleas from Balasingham who saw the opportunities for both organizational recognition and legitimacy. Prabhakaran did eventually accept training offers

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Follow up interview regarding re Tamil Nadu politics conducted xx April 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Indian Classified RAW report dated xx xxx 1983 signed by 'G Singh', op cit.

<sup>40</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), p.35.

and weapons from RAW but, as with the offer from the PLO, was exceptionally circumspect in doing so. The fighters he sent for training found that the military tactics they were taught were not as effective as those they had already learnt, indeed that the instruction in conventional warfare was not suited to their current methodology.<sup>41</sup> It is likely that Prabhakaran must have also suspected the wider motives of Indira Gandhi. He instructed his fighters to give false names and avoid contact with their Indian training teams outside of instructional hours. Other groups did not follow the same rules and eventually found themselves hunted and captured by the Indian army during the subsequent occupation of Sri Lanka by the Indian Peace-Keeping Force. Prabhakaran was also the first to withdraw from the RAW training program after he saw the quality of training markedly decline. The LTTE did not come away empty handed however, now being equipped with a variety of weapons from more modern assault rifles, to rocket propelled grenades and 81mm mortars. Prabhakaran saw the opportunity for changes in tactics based on the additional firepower now available to him. The period was also important in his own demeanour. Reports at this stage indicated a shift away from guerrilla leader to military commander.<sup>42</sup>

The lesson for Prabhakaran reaffirmed his experiences with other groups and political movements, and drove an almost obsessive requirement for self-reliance, independence and security within the LTTE. His distrust of external groups, even those pursuing broadly similar goals, was now firmly seated in his conscious and became a theme throughout the remainder of his life.

### **New Funding and Weapons**

As news of the massacres in Sri Lanka conducted by Sinhalese on their Tamil neighbours reached the wider region, expressions of support for insurgent movements began to appear particularly in Tamil Nadu. Politically, Balasingham pursued these and only introduced Prabhakaran to discussions when he was absolutely clear of the most sincere intentions. One such meeting occurred in 1984 was with the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M G Ramachandran (also known as MGR), who on the basis of the meeting, and without any

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with KK65, op cit.

<sup>42</sup> Interview D13-1 (Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013), and verified by Indian Classified RAW report dated xx xxx 1984, op cit.

strings, made a donation of 20 million rupees to the LTTE. In future, Prabhakaran would judge all donations to this standard. It is noteworthy that after the money had been delivered, Prabhakaran and Balasingham decided that it could not deal with such a quantity and asked instead for the monies in instalments.<sup>43</sup>

The pause in India while his troops were being trained gave Prabhakaran and Balasingham the opportunity to think and to strategize. They started to plan how operations would be conducted in Sri Lanka but also to determine how the country would be governed by the LTTE until a Tamil state was founded. The part played by Balasingham focused on this element of planning, whilst acting as a foil for Prabhakaran's military musings. With newfound wealth and an understanding that Indian support would probably wane in the near future, the pair determined to begin accessing independent suppliers of arms overseas without the knowledge of the Indian authorities.<sup>44</sup>

The task of arms procurement was given to K Pathmanabhan (aka KP) who initiated equipment purchases with weapon suppliers and established a shipping company under several layers of deception, buying several cargo ships to bring the weapons to Sri Lanka without the knowledge (and unreliability) of others. The first drop of weapons, from Lebanon, arrived in 1984.<sup>45</sup> KP was also specifically tasked to procure cyanide capsules for all fighters to be worn in a phial around the neck. Prabhakaran led by example and wore one for the remainder of his life. The inherent reference to Sivakumaran's death from earlier in his life, is further evidence of how his own experiences rather than doctrine or external events, influenced his behaviour and beliefs – a theme notable throughout the coming decades.

### **The Rise of the Prabhakaran'LTTE**

While the early stages of 1984 saw resurgence in Tamil led violence as fighters returned from training in Tamil Nadu, the LTTE held off as part of Prabhakaran's deliberate strategy and allowed other groups (TELO, PLOTE and EROS) to take the lead. Initiating the next round

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<sup>43</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), p.107.

<sup>44</sup> M R Swamy, "MGR and the Freedom Fighter", *Indian Times*, 21 November 1994.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with KAP12/KP A 12-11: Former senior LTTE logistics 'fixer' and later on the personal staff of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in June 2013 in Brussels, Belgium by skype.

of LTTE violence, Prabhakaran gave an interview and announced his intent. He deliberately by-passed the Jaffna city stronghold of the army and pressed to the border of the Mannar province, conducting a series of audacious attacks against both police and regular army forces and outposts. Correctly, Prabhakaran had assumed that the security forces would focus on the Jaffna peninsula, specifically in the capital city of the region. He also understood that other Tamil groups would be doggedly following Marxist and Maoist theories of revolutionary warfare that they had been instructed on in India, and campaign for support in rural Jaffna, and within the city respectively.<sup>46</sup> Prabhakaran assessed that to conduct such operations would result in meeting engagements with a trained security forces that would require longer attritional fighting with equal losses, not something the small band of fighters could match given the size of the Sri Lankan Army reserve. He thus correctly applied a manoeuvrist doctrine, applying his strength in guerrilla fighting against the Government's weakness, exposing areas of vulnerability on the battlefields and within the enemy's rear area: a move designed to unsettle military commanders and gain the initiative. The selection of this strategy was a masterstroke and achieved exactly its aims. Prabhakaran was not singularly focused on a geographic area, rather in gaining an intellectual advantage by varying guerrilla activity throughout Sri Lanka and against a novel target set. He instructed attacks against the Sri Lankan Navy and political targets in Colombo: all the while careful to deconflict actions with other groups, specifically EROS who was also conducting the occasional foray into Colombo.<sup>47</sup>

Whilst the fighting was successful, Prabhakaran had a personal crisis. To date his puritanical existence had underpinned much of the strict regime within the LTTE: he had become almost deified as a result of his self-imposed personal standards. In 1984 however he fell in love with another LTTE fighter, a young student called Mathy. The conflict he felt almost destroyed him as a leader and was seriously inhibiting his ability to conduct and orchestrate operations. It was Balasingham again who stepped in. Balasingham explained the deep Tamil roots that connected love and war, an argument that played to Prabhakaran's psyche. Mathy became a fixture at Balasingham's house in Tamil Nadu where Prabhakaran became a frequent visitor in the courtship. Prabhakaran was married to Mathy in late 1984: not only

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with KAP12/KP A 12-11: Former senior LTTE logistics 'fixer' and later on the personal staff of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in June 2013 in Brussels, Belgium by skype.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

was Balasingham best man but he had achieved an even deeper connection to Prabhakaran beyond both the ideological a social foil he had already become. Their two lives were now divinely connected in Prabhakaran's eyes.<sup>48</sup>

### **The Indian Reversal and Insurgent Unity**

Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her bodyguards on 31 October 1984 in her New Delhi Residence: she was succeeded by her son Rajiv. The Sinhalese in Colombo celebrated with abandon, but their joy was short lived as various groups staged more and more sophisticated attacks on the police and army. The TELO group, reasonably quiet until this point, staged two spectacles in quick succession which shocked the whole of Sri Lanka, an attack and massacre in a police station in down town Jaffna, and destroying a military train carrying army personnel to support the security crackdown occurring in the Jaffna region. It was not the latter attack that impressed Prabhakaran, rather the subsequent ambush of Sri Lankan Army recovery teams going to the crash site. The LTTE pressed hard for greater unity of effort of these groups under a banner party of the Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF), consisting of TELO, EROS, EPRLF, PLOT and the LTTE. The grouping was not successful, however, and the LTTE leadership came to regard it as a distraction. Prabhakaran and Balasingham together attempted to forge it into a more streamlined and effective group, but with little success.<sup>49</sup> Progress on coherent attack planning was further undermined when Rajiv Gandhi ordered the interception of a cargo ship laden with weapons destined for PLOT, EROS and TELO. The Indian authorities refused to release the cargo under increased pressure from Colombo, despite the protests from the insurgent groups and the politicians in Tamil Nadu. Rajiv, as Prabhakaran and Balasingham had correctly predicted, shied away from his mother's commitments and began a gradual reversal of positions.

The LTTE by now had established a secondary supply of logistics, weapons and support free from Indian influence. Much to the annoyance of other groups, the LTTE were able to continue their operations without a pause, but refused to share their supplies with other

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<sup>48</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), p.89 and Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), 142-146 A claim supported by theories published by Bruce Mazlish, *The Revolutionary Ascetic* (London: McGraw Hill, 1977), pp.120-121, and Sydney Hook, *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1945), pp.172-184.

<sup>49</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), pp.98-99.

groups that Prabhakaran thought should have been better prepared and were thus lacking in vision, strategy and foresight. Based on this he deemed them untrustworthy. He became so paranoid that they would turn on him that he refused to take food or drinks from them at discussions, believing they could be poisoned.<sup>50</sup>

The Sri Lankan Army now recognized the LTTE as the most lethal of the groups and was surprised that they could never capture LTTE fighters alive. The corpses were instantly recognizable due to their unique battle fatigues and sophistication of equipment, including high power communications equipment. Some of the LTTE standards and planning process was adopted by other groups and under the ENLFB banner: Tamil insurgent violence in Sri Lanka reached an all time high with audacious attacks being executed and prosecuted against Army targets.<sup>51</sup>

The Sri Lankan authorities found an opportunity to exploit a political success in 1985 however. The LTTE conducted an independent operation in the Sinhalese sacred town of Anuradhapura, the centre of which is a sapling taken from the tree under which Buddha is said to have found enlightenment. Forty LTTE fighters, dressed as members of the Sri Lankan army arrived in the town by bus and began attacking as they dismounted. Before departing, they had killed 146 civilians, including monks and priests (there were no police or security people in Anuradhapura). The LTTE had killed 120 Sinhalese civilians the previous year in two remote areas, but an attack on a sacred site was different to both the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka and to Indians in New Delhi. After the event Rajiv Gandhi notably shifted his stance to support Colombo more openly: the first sign was allowing the onward movement of a plane of armaments to Colombo, which had had to make a forced landing in Southern India. It was a sign of things to come, but Rajiv was prepared to make one last attempt at finding a peaceful solution and called for all insurgent leaders to attend a summit in Thimphu. Having declared a temporary ceasefire, the delegates assembled for talks with the Sri Lankan Government, mediated by the Indian Foreign Minister. Prabhakaran was reluctant to attend but Balasingham talked him into it, arguing that failing to attend would give others, notably the TULF, a more powerful voice in any agreement. The talks failed after news reached the

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<sup>50</sup> D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Assessment by Sri Lankan Army G2 dated xx xxx 1984 (Colombo: Sri Lankan Army Archives).

discussions of renewed violence in Sri Lanka. Whilst other groups continued to talk, the LTTE representatives returned to Sri Lanka and next day blew up a jeep in Trincomalee, killing four soldiers. This was a typical reaction from Prabhakaran to intransigence at peace talks and was underlined by a statement from Balasingham the next day, “We reserve the right to retaliate”.<sup>52</sup>

The failure of the talks and the subsequent violence tipped the scales for Rajiv Gandhi and despite the pressure from native Tamils, he ordered the expulsion of several Sri Lankan Tamil leaders from India. Balasingham was for a short time deported to London and only returned once Prabhakaran had ensured his safety and immunity with the New Delhi leadership. The damage with India was done however: in addition, Prabhakaran felt that the other Tamil groups had betrayed their origins and he rounded on them too, branding them traitors. Whilst he stopped short of attacking the Indian Government, his stance became more stubborn the more pressure that they applied on him. Every instance when the Indians asked for concessions from Prabhakaran, his position would become more entrenched – supported by a Balasingham who was becoming equally feisty in his dealings with the Indian diplomats. His attitude appealed further to Prabhakaran who must have viewed them as the only true believers in their cause. The link between them, not necessarily ideologically but certainly intellectually, them was now absolutely solid. Their co-existence was becoming a dependency for the LTTE.<sup>53</sup>

### **Coalescence or death?**

April 11, 1986 was a critical moment for the LTTE. Prabhakaran had been led down a path of events that required him to deal with the other Tamil insurgent groups: his decision had been whether to coalesce or to destroy them. Having attempted the former strategy under the umbrella of the ENLF and see it fail, he changed course drastically: whilst he discussed the issue with Balasingham, few others were involved in the decision-making.<sup>54</sup> He now adopted a strategy that would see the LTTE as the single solution of Tamil independence. In the early hours of that morning LTTE fighters across Sri Lanka executed attacks on camps of TELO,

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<sup>52</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003). p 123

<sup>53</sup> Interview KP A 12-11, op cit.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

EPRLF and PLOT. By mid-morning those movements had ceased to exist and Prabhakaran was the single voice, exactly as he had planned. The ferociousness with which his cadres conducted their attacks was brutal in the extreme: burning fellow Tamil fighters alive was one of the popular methodologies. Sri, the TELO leader, had his body publically displayed at a local bus station riddled with 28 bullet holes. Prabhakaran's decision had been based on his disputes with TELO: fighters from the other groups were a secondary consideration in case they reacted against the LTTE in vengeance and split subsequent effort.<sup>55</sup>

Balasingham and Prabhakaran had further motives in attacking the TELO. Both had become aware that the groups were considered New Delhi's protégés and with their own opinions regarding Rajiv Gandhi's motives now firmly decided, they viewed TELO as a potential path through which India was attempting to gain a foothold in Sri Lanka. This was clearly unacceptable to Prabhakaran – a view broadly reinforced by Balasingham. Whilst RAW continued to provide occasional training and weapons to the LTTE, the majority of the Tiger's logistics and funding now came from the Tamil Diaspora in Europe and Canada. Now the single movement for Tamil Resistance, and after coaching from Balasingham, Prabhakaran started to demonstrate eloquence with journalists, able to quote Mao, Marx and Lenin as well as Gandhi. He rarely quoted Bose in public and never used political doctrine with his troops (or in private). He was spending more time with Balasingham as he and his wife had a second child.<sup>56</sup>

Prabhakaran's plan at this stage was to grow in fighting strength through weapons, funding, training and recruitment.<sup>57</sup> He understood that his methodologies for attack and the response being employed by the Sri Lankan military would drive Tamil fighters into his hands. His attacks on Colombo at the airport and in the city centre brought reprisal raids from the Government on Tamil civilian population centres. Where the reaction was without result, Prabhakaran increased the stakes and attacked small pockets of Sinhalese in Northern Sri

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Swamy *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.132-138, makes some reference to this but is not specific. His comments were the start point for the author's interviews with subject KP A 12-11, op cit, who corroborated and elaborated on this.

<sup>57</sup> KK65: Senior commander in TNT who refused to transfer to LTTE in 1976 but retained close contact with Prabhakaran and the LTTE during the formative years until moving overseas in 1988. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in January 2013.

Lanka. As the Sri Lankan Army got more frustrated, it began to use the Air Force for strikes against supposed Tamil strongholds – normally Tamil towns in the Jaffna peninsula. The resulting anti-Government sentiment throughout the Tamil community and Diaspora became overwhelming and forced a withdrawal of the Army to smaller enclaves: within a short time, Government presence in the province became limited to the besieged Dutch Fort. The remainder of the town was now under LTTE control: noticeboards dictated LTTE policy and rules, trading was taxed by the LTTE and a highly visible police force enforced law and order, brutally. At Balasingham's insistence, the LTTE also opened schools and employed teachers – a move which met little resistance from Prabhakaran given the recent birth of his second child.<sup>58</sup>

### **Indian Peace Initiatives**

Given all of his education and experience with revolutionary groups, it appears that Balasingham agreed entirely with both the aims and methodology of Prabhakaran.<sup>59</sup> The brutality and the militarization of the political outcome were never in doubt between the two men. When the Indian authorities established secret meetings between Prabhakaran and Sri Lankan President Jayewardene in an attempt to seek common ground for a ceasefire, Balasingham accompanied him.<sup>60</sup> Whilst the very existence of the meeting remains disputed by several parties, witnesses to the meeting have stated that and the aftermath indicate, Prabhakaran and Balasingham were of a single mind – compromise was unacceptable: a single separate Tamil homeland was the only possible outcome.<sup>61</sup> It was shortly after this that Prabhakaran left India officially: it was under his own terms but the pressure from the Indian Government had become fierce despite reactionary pressure from politicians in Tamil

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<sup>58</sup> Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), p.140.

<sup>59</sup> UD5: Former TULF commander. Interviewed in Toulon, France in March 2013 by skype.

<sup>60</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.146-147.

<sup>61</sup> Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), pp.26-28, claims high ranking officials met but never the leaders), Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), p.153, reports that Gota Rajapaksa (current Defence Secretary of Sri Lanka) is another who doubts the reports of a meeting. Yet both Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.146-147 and interviews with source D (a low level LTTE cadre who progressed to Company Leadership position and accompanied Prabhakaran on the trip - interviewed in October 2008 in Colombo, Sri Lanka), both provide evidence that discussions in Bangalore actually took place, facilitated by the Indian Government. Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), p.100, provides the evidence for discussions of Balasingham and Prabhakaran after the meeting regarding their views of the future for the organisation and the insurgency more generally.

Nadu. Unlike EROS and the remaining of PLOT personnel, Prabhakaran viewed it as an opportunity and did not fight the decision.<sup>62</sup> This was to have positive repercussions for the LTTE in the future, yet more evidence that Prabhakaran was able to make decisions based on clarity of long-term goals and an understanding of the balance of benefit.

His time in India had also militarized Prabhakaran considerably: by 1986 he had formalized saluting in the LTTE and had designed its own uniforms. He insisted on personal grooming standards as well as strictly enforced discipline and fitness regimes. Not only had he and the LTTE become militarized, it had become a professional military organisation.<sup>63</sup>

1986 saw the Sri Lankan Government make several approaches, under pressure from India, towards the LTTE and other Tamil groups, notably EROS. All of these failed, and the final straw came when the Indian Government persuaded President Jayewardene to declare a ceasefire during the ten-day new-year celebrations that both Sinhalese and Tamil people recognized in 1987. The LTTE had not accepted the proposal and used the break in security to execute a series of devastating terrorist spectacles across the country including a massive bombing of the Colombo main bus depot which killed more than 100 and injured around 300, including women and children.<sup>64</sup>

This was the final straw for Jayewardene who authorized shore bombardment of positions and villages in Jaffna by the Sri Lankan Navy, and an embargo on fuel and motor parts as well as food stuffs and metals on Jaffna – finally an attempt to sever supplies that gave the LTTE the means of generating their own mobility and manoeuvre. This was only a precursor however and a bare two months after the attacks on the bus depot, Jayewardene authorised a large-scale military operation named *Liberation*. The combined arms of the Sri Lankan military executed an impressive joint operation that was enabled by a political will to see results. The Government forces recaptured large tracts of land and coast, forcing the LTTE to retreat despite hard fighting. It was Prabhakaran's first exposure to conventional military operations rather than policing and security approaches to his insurgency, and he could see the finality of his campaign: his hometown and district of his childhood quickly fell

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<sup>62</sup> Interview TA 3, op cit.

<sup>63</sup> E4: Sister of the LTTE cadre sent to train alongside the PLO in 1977. Interviewed in Manama, Bahrain in March 2013.

<sup>64</sup> Indian Classified RAW report dated xx xxx 1987, op cit.

– an area which he felt was impenetrable. The impact on him was marked. Under advice from Balasingham, Prabhakaran wrote to his political contacts in Tamil Nadu, notably MGR, for assistance. At the last minute his pleas were answered and the Indian Government intervened, calling on the Sri Lankan Government to cease attacking and allow Indian ‘humanitarian’ supplies to reach those in dire need. This may have been surprising given the détente that was emerging between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene: the former was however under severe pressure internally to provide a measure of support to the Tamils – that group inside the federal Government of India held significant sway. The support offered by Gandhi was only humanitarian and RAW was not permitted to provide more overt assistance to the LTTE or any other Tamil insurgent group.<sup>65</sup>

Rajiv Gandhi was pressing hard for a peaceful solution to the ethnic issues in Sri Lanka and believed he could achieve a solution that saw recognition for the Tamils in a self governing area comprising East and North Sri Lanka, under a federated Government in Colombo: a model based on his own experiences in India. The main hurdle in achieving this came from Prabhakaran and Gandhi began to expend considerable effort in bringing him to the table. The list of compromises that Prabhakaran required of the Sri Lankan authorities was significant, but Gandhi achieved all these and more. Prabhakaran, under pressure to accept the accord, was in turn becoming more concerned that Indian motives were not altogether altruistic and rather more aligned with an expanding Indian regional governance strategy: there is little reason to doubt Prabhakaran’s analysis.<sup>66</sup>

Just as the LTTE appeared to be accepting of terms from New Delhi, Prabhakaran learned that EROS, the only other Tamil insurgent group to have earned his respect and support, was not going to accept the deal. While not required to, Prabhakaran suddenly had further doubts. As if to test the sincerity of Colombo and New Delhi, or perhaps even in a deliberate attempt to derail the peace talks, Prabhakaran launched a novel attack methodology. A LTTE operative codenamed Miller was the first modern suicide bomber.<sup>67</sup> He was selected for his

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<sup>65</sup> Interview New Delhi, RAW operative and element training commander 1985-1989. September 2013 in Paris, France.

<sup>66</sup> Vernon Marston Hewitt, *The International Politics of South Asia* (Manchester University Press, 1992), p11.

<sup>67</sup> “Speaking Truth to Power: The Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka”. *Paxchristi*. Retrieved 26 March 2006.

driving skills and deliberately drove a truck loaded with explosives into a school building being used as a military headquarters near Jaffna and detonated it. The resulting explosion devastated the building and the military command and control network. While the methodology of the latest attack shocked the Indian sub-continent, it did not deter Gandhi or indeed Jayewardene from their course.

Eventually Prabhakaran and Balasingham were flown by the Indian Air Force to Madras and eventually to New Delhi to sign the peace deal.<sup>68</sup> As the LTTE leaders considered their options, it was becoming clear that they were faced with the choice of either signing or not leaving India. Their house arrest in the hotel was becoming more obvious and they started to be denied access to the press and communications methods. It is not clear when Prabhakaran decided to sign and then renege on the deal, but that quickly became obvious to those in his close circle immediately after his meeting with Rajiv Gandhi.<sup>69</sup> His return to Sri Lanka was after the leading elements of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (Army) had arrived in Jaffna. Ironically one of Prabhakaran's final demands was that the Sri Lankan military should not be responsible for security and policing in the new Tamil areas: the result was not what he had intended. Rather than delegating the task to the LTTE as Prabhakaran had hoped, his demands had led to the deployment of a foreign army to Jaffna.<sup>70</sup> The presence of an external actor in his own land deeply disturbed Prabhakaran: he was torn between the desire for Tamil independence and fact that he had intimately involved the superpower neighbour in his fight.<sup>71</sup>

The LTTE Chief had also promised to handover weapons within 48 hours of the signing of the declaration. On returning to Jaffna, he quickly determined that this course of action was not wise and only passed to Indian forces very old and obsolete weapons. Prabhakaran was now concerned at reprisal raids on his fighters by other Tamils as well as by Sinhalese groups: his fears were well founded and Jaffna became disputed territory once more as the

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<sup>68</sup> K9-09: Another former member of TNT who did transfer to the LTTE but failed to pass the physical elements of LTTE jungle training. Emigrated. Interviewed in London in May 2013.

<sup>69</sup> Interview KP A, op cit.

<sup>70</sup> Depinder Singh, *The IPKF in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Trishul, 1992), pp.2-5), and Harkirat Singh, *Intervention in Sri Lanka: The IPKF Experience Retold* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2006), pp.99-101.

<sup>71</sup> TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013.

LTTE lost their policing powers. Several members of the LTTE were assassinated, some in the presence of their Indian Army escorts.<sup>72</sup> Prabhakaran determined the solution was to hit back hard and launched a deliberate and brutal strike against rival Tamil groups and gangs in June.

It is clear that during that summer, Prabhakaran made another change in strategy.<sup>73</sup> He publically announced that he would never give up his dream of a free and independent Tamil Eelam but privately he was re-orientating himself and the LTTE to shift their attack axis to removing the Indian Army from Sri Lankan soil. Prabhakaran and Balasingham obviously understood the magnitude of this task and realized that yet another novel approach would be required to enable them to begin waging an open battle against the Indians whilst retaining support of the Diaspora. The latter addition was entirely Balasingham's.<sup>74</sup> At this stage several other members of the close circle of confidants could have made the suggestion to Prabhakaran, but coming from Balasingham, this amendment to his plan was accepted unconditionally.

The tactic to be used was drawn from India's own experiences, specifically those of Mahatma Gandhi. Prabhakaran got a young LTTE cadre, Dhileepan, to go on a very public hunger strike at a Jaffna shrine unless the Indian authorities accepted some rather outrageous LTTE demands, effectively handing the administration and security of Jaffna and the Tamil areas to Prabhakaran. Neither of these were acceptable. Alongside an Indian approach which was finding it challenging to retain its middle ground given the intransigence of all parties, violence started to erupt between Tamils and the Indian occupying army: a situation that deteriorated as quickly as Dhileepan's condition.<sup>75</sup> Rajiv Gandhi appeared to understand the severity of the situation through reports from his emissaries and military commanders on the ground. He finally persuaded Jayewardene to accept Prabhakaran's demands, and may have

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<sup>72</sup> "Destroying a symbol". *International Federation of Libraries Association*.  
<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/papers/119-Knuth-en.pdf>. Retrieved 2007-02-14.

<sup>73</sup> Interviews KP A and TA 3, op cit.

<sup>74</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), p. 82, 84 and 89.

<sup>75</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.174-177.

achieved a position from which Prabhakaran could not escape if it was not for a single event at sea.<sup>76</sup>

On 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1987, a Sri Lankan Navy patrol boarded a Tamil fishing boat north of Jaffna and discovered a weapons cache along with seventeen members of the LTTE. Two of these personnel were senior LTTE leaders who had been involved in a previous well publicised massacre of Sinhalese civilians: Colombo was delighted and ordered the men to be brought back to Colombo for public trial. Despite frantic efforts by the LTTE and the Indian military commanders, it quickly became apparent that there was no way to stop the men from being moved to Colombo. Whilst in Indian army custody, Balasingham visited them and delivered each man a cyanide capsule – Prabhakaran had determined that each could benefit from a fighter's death rather than answer to the illegitimate authority of Jayewardene and the Sinhalese. Twelve of the men took their own lives before their captors could intervene. The loss was personal to Prabhakaran and the days that followed the parade of coffins in the Tamil heartland became filled with attacks on Sinhalese civilians. The Indian army was now at risk of seeing the already marginalized Sinhalese turn against them as well and was forced to act.<sup>77</sup> The crack down by the Indian forces met severe reaction from the LTTE. A jeep carrying four Indian soldiers was attacked, the soldiers killed, tyres hung around their necks and they were burned to cinders. Reactions from each side gradually increased the level of violence with the LTTE eventually directly shelling the Dutch fort in Jaffna – headquarters of the Indian army in Sri Lanka. Shortly thereafter, Prabhakaran was at war with the world's fourth largest army. It was a deliberate strategy that led him to this situation, not something he appears to have welcomed, but the necessity removing the Indian forces from his homeland had become his primary requirement.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with D3-1: Captain of a LTTE logistics vessel (fishing/smuggling boat). Interviewed in in July 2010 Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

<sup>77</sup> K M Silva and Howard Wriggins, *J R Jayewardene of Sri Lanka: A Political Biography, Volume II from 1956 to his retirement in 1989* (Sri Lanka: J R Jayewardene Cultural Centre, 1994).

<sup>78</sup> Interview with T: LTTE Intelligence Analyst to Command Group. Interviewed in Jun 2013 in Mumbai, India.

## War with India

When India had dispatched 5,000 lightly armed infantry to Sri Lanka as a Peace Keeping force, its assessment was that the total manpower of the various Tamil Insurgencies was around 600, a figure based on their training throughput at the RAW training camps. Their expectation was that on arrival of the Indian troops, the majority of the groups would lay down their arms and revert to peaceful occupations. The hard-line elements that might remain were expected to be no more than 250 insurgents. The independent estimates of RAW were larger, around 3000 fighters, but again with an expectation of the majority following the reconciliation and demobilization process (laid down as a requirement for the LTTE by Prabhakaran in the original agreement). Both the Indian Army and RAW were now updating their estimates. Their recognition of the power and training of the LTTE also now acknowledged that Prabhakaran had found an alternative source of weapon supply.<sup>79</sup> The Military commander on the ground, Lieutenant General Amarjit Singh Kalkat, requested and was sent additional troops – eventually leading to a force of more than 100,000 troops on Sri Lankan soil, supported by artillery and attack helicopters with further aviation support based in India. The scale of this force did not perplex Prabhakaran: he understood that he must switch the LTTE strategy to an entirely counter-Indian methodology and leave the Tamil secessionist motives until later. He knew he had time on his side – his discussions with Balasingham reveal that he understood that his insurgency would be protracted, perhaps even generational.<sup>80</sup>

Publically Prabhakaran walked a careful line in his letters to Rajiv Gandhi that reveal both astonishment that the Indian army was allowed to operate with such freedom, and that Gandhi was prepared to renege on his previous discourse. Eventually, the final five letters he sent to the Indian leader between 1987 and 1988 effectively contained an ultimatum for Gandhi, which the latter refused<sup>81</sup>. Privately, Prabhakaran continued to mistrust Indian motives and other Tamil insurgent groups<sup>82</sup>. He understood Colombo's wider motives, and

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<sup>79</sup> Indian Classified RAW report dated xx xxx 1987, op cit.

<sup>80</sup> Interview KPA and TA, op cit.

<sup>81</sup> 'D': Senior Indian Civil Servant within the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews conducted in New Delhi in August 2010 and in April 2013 by Skype.

<sup>82</sup> D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

the underlying strategy of New Delhi. Prabhakaran also correctly understood the limits to the amount of pressure that could be Indian politicians in Tamil Nadu, specifically the amount of support he could continue to rely on from MGR and others: a secure rear base was possible, but activities would have to remain covert.<sup>83</sup>

Prabhakaran's strategy against the Indians began by using the LTTE's instinctive knowledge of the ground, the people and the operating patterns of the Indian army alongside the trademark LTTE ruthlessness. Whilst small guerrilla activity continued, the LTTE focused in Jaffna – the city had become synonymous with the LTTE movement and Prabhakaran was unwilling to cede control to the Indians.<sup>84</sup> The subsequent urban fighting in Jaffna was bloody. The LTTE focused almost their entire fighting strength there, but were roundly defeated by the Indian's superior training and mass, despite the use of almost the entire wing of the female suicide-bombing cadre between 1987 and 1990. Recruiting and training in this specialist cadre had begun in August 1985 employing mostly teenagers and women in their twenties. Their hair was arranged in long plaits and they dined with Prabhakaran the night before each of their attacks.<sup>85</sup> These were fearsome fighters who made concerted attacks against Indian Army personnel in Jaffna, but even this tactic did not bring success to the LTTE.<sup>86</sup> The defeat sent Prabhakaran reeling – until this point he believed that he had the upper hand<sup>87</sup>: there was only one occasion previously where he had lost the military initiative and never in such a fashion. He discussed with both Balasingham and, this time, with Karuna that countering the might of the Indians would require a different strategy.<sup>88</sup>

As always, Prabhakaran took careful stock of the situation and decided upon a campaign that could unite the Tamil and Sinhalese against the Indians – he understood that his insurgency alone, even with its sophisticated guerrilla tactics, could not dispatch the well-trained Indian force. His close advisors thought this to be a mistake and dared even to venture that

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<sup>83</sup> T D S A Dissanayaka, *War or Peace in Sri Lanka, Volume II* (Mumbai: Swastika, 1998), p 332.

<sup>84</sup> BGxx-12: Member of LTTE interrogation team between 1989-2000. Interviewed in Washington DC in January 2010.

<sup>85</sup> D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

<sup>86</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), p.190.

<sup>87</sup> H3: Undoubtedly a member of EROS, and later claiming membership to LTTE senior leadership. Interviews conducted in March 2010 in Muscat, Oman by Skype

<sup>88</sup> Interview with AK12: A former clerk of the LTTE. Interviewed in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in July 2010.

Prabhakaran might be perceived as betraying the Tamil cause.<sup>89</sup> Prabhakaran was undoubtedly thinking of Bose, but quoted Mao's alignment with Chaing Kai-shek in driving the Japanese from China<sup>90</sup>. Balasingham was careful to ensure an international dimension should be entertained in the formulation of this plan, to garner greater mass appeal abroad for legitimacy and funding. While Balasingham had utter confidence in Prabhakaran's abilities, it appears he underestimated the LTTE leader's diplomatic skills. Balasingham expressed doubts that Prabhakaran could achieve the level of support from Colombo that he was discussing within his inner circle.<sup>91</sup>

Prabhakaran established an underground headquarters deep in the jungles, fortified by reinforced concrete and secure from external attack by three concentric rings of security. The main accommodation was built into solid rock: leadership were accommodated in rooms thirty to forty feet under the mountains, with Prabhakaran even deeper underground.<sup>92</sup> The base, codenamed Base One Four, was their second bunkered complex: a previous one at Nithi-kai-kulam, having been over run by the Indian Army. Acutely aware that the Indian army was employing sophisticated technology against them, Prabhakaran's communication centre was nearly two miles from his headquarters and he rarely talked to commanders directly in his HF radios.<sup>93</sup> When he did so, the Indians recorded him and sought to locate him (DF), followed by artillery bombardment of the position.<sup>94</sup> At this time the process was always too slow to catch him. It was not purely for operational security that Prabhakaran did not speak on the radio: he was a keen advocate of meeting and talking to commanders personally.<sup>95</sup> It was from this secure area that Prabhakaran and his close-knit command team

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<sup>89</sup> D: Low level LTTE cadre who progressed to Company Leadership position. Interviewed in October 2008 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009.

<sup>90</sup> UD5: Former TULF commander. Interviewed in Toulon, France in March 2013 by skype.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with T3: High level former LTTE leader defecting along with Colonel Karuna. Interviewed in September 2012 and June 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka by skype.

<sup>92</sup> D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

<sup>93</sup> TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013.

<sup>94</sup> Op Completion Report – Operation Balawegaya, 31 October 1991, Signed Brigadier Vijaya Wimalaratna.

<sup>95</sup> BGxx-12: Member of LTTE interrogation team between 1989-2000. Interviewed in Washington DC in January 2010.

carefully analysed their mistakes and the vulnerabilities of their enemies. His team included; his deputy military commander, Mahattaya: his close personal friend and confidant Balasingham, also charged with propaganda and Public Relations: Shankar as logistics chief inside Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu: Pottu Amman as intelligence and counter intelligence chief: and KP as the international procurement wing, as well as burgeoning shipping conglomerate.<sup>96</sup> Eight district commanders ran operations under this central construction that orchestrated the use of military power as well as logistics and external relationships. Not only did this group run operations, they also laid down a rigorous set of policies for the movement. The result was a carefully documented and closely-knit organization that not only recorded military activity honestly (a rarity in military forces), but also personal records of all fighters, their political motives and details of their families.<sup>97</sup> The only exceptions to the meticulous personnel records were the central committee's covert members and the Pistol Group – a small elite band of Special Forces within the LTTE who were used for assassinations and activities that Prabhakaran needed to be able to deny.<sup>98</sup>

Such organisation was an impressive achievement in organizational development: in military terms the development of such a sophisticated headquarters is rarely seen in insurgent groups and has no doctrinal provenance in revolutionary warfare as advocated by Mao, Lenin or others.<sup>99</sup> The centralized control was developed entirely by Prabhakaran and serves to provide a baseline from which future conclusions can be drawn. The following examples serve as evidence of Prabhakaran's military genius for strategy, prioritization, control and resource allocation with an agility and flexibility that was reaching its zenith for the Chief and the LTTE as a whole.

Each LTTE team was required to undertake at least one military action against the enemy every day, making honest reports and assessments of activity back to Prabhakaran. It is from this information that Prabhakaran managed to keep such a careful track of both the Indian

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<sup>96</sup> DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009.

<sup>97</sup> PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013.

<sup>98</sup> K9-09: Another former member of TNT who did transfer to the LTTE but failed to pass the physical elements of LTTE jungle training. Emigrated. Interviewed in London in May 2013.

<sup>99</sup> Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter Insurgencies: Guerrillas and their Opponents since 1750* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p.237, talks of "Spiritual insurgencies" in this light.

activity and the success of tactics being employed. He was the central authority for disseminating suggested successful tactics to other groups, but neither he nor his deputy mandated tactics to commanders in the field. Prabhakaran trusted their judgment completely and whilst ruthless in dealing with actions counter to the LTTE manifesto, never disciplined a local commander or leader for unsuccessful actions – he did relieve them however after defeats.<sup>100</sup>

Prabhakaran's plan was largely to fight a guerrilla delaying action until the next Sinhalese elections: he realized there was no way President Jayewardene could be persuaded to align to the Tamil cause<sup>101</sup>. The LTTE activity was not however limited to Tamil areas. Occasionally, LTTE cadres would emerge from Sinhalese areas, fire at Indian troops and withdraw into the civilian population. The occasional overreaction from Indian troops was exactly what Prabhakaran was hoping for<sup>102</sup>, and the handful of deaths of Sinhalese at the hands of Indian troops was turning wider opinion across Sri Lanka. Press reporting started to focus not on the LTTE and the Tamil insurgency, but rather the atrocities of the Indian occupation force<sup>103</sup>.

As the finality of the Jayewardene government became acknowledged, Rajiv Gandhi perceived a need to find a short-term solution that would allow him to withdraw his field forces.<sup>104</sup> The political pressure for him at home was increasing and with his own elections looming and a steady drum beat of well-reported deaths in Sri Lanka of his own forces was causing distinct embarrassment for the regional hegemon.<sup>105</sup> New Delhi's direct approaches to Prabhakaran for a further round of peace talks and ceasefires were firmly rejected by the

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<sup>100</sup> Interviews KP A, op cit, and PR 4 (PR 4 was a former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013).

<sup>101</sup> TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013.

<sup>102</sup> UD5: Former TULF commander. Interviewed in Toulon, France in March 2013 by skype.

<sup>103</sup> Ikram ul-Majeed Sehgal, *Defence Journal of the Indian Army: Press cuttings*, Vol 3, Issues 5-8, and analysis, p.8.

<sup>104</sup> 'D': Senior Indian Civil Servant within the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews conducted in New Delhi in August 2010 and in April 2013 by Skype.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

LTTE.<sup>106</sup> Instead as President Premadasa was elected, the LTTE leadership sought a direct meeting with Colombo. Balasingham led the group and met with the new President, calling on him to demand a unilateral Indian withdrawal from Sri Lanka. As a sign of goodwill, the LTTE negotiation team handed over a revolver by way of the movement's "surrender" to Colombo. Premadasa issued the demand publically on 31 July 1989.<sup>107</sup> Gandhi was left with little choice but to comply – his decision was to leave a force in the Tamil held east and north called the Tamil National Army.

### **A united Sri Lanka**

Premadasa took the opportunity to partner with the LTTE in both hands: not only was he complying with its broader requests for unity against the Indian Government but soon started to directly supply the LTTE with weapons and logistics support.<sup>108</sup> There is no doubt that the LTTE could obtain these same supplies through its own - now well established - supply routes from overseas, but there was a certain perverse attraction for Prabhakaran in getting these from the Sri Lankan Government.<sup>109</sup> Nor did Prabhakaran stop his attacks on the Sinhalese politicians or army during this period.<sup>110</sup> As the final Indian troops left Sri Lankan soil on 24 March 1990, Prabhakaran was jubilant – he understood that he had defeated the fourth largest army in the world, a global hegemon, in a three-year campaign.<sup>111</sup> He had developed intellectually, as well as demonstrating his prowess as a strategic thinker, shifting from the tactical, but retaining his control there as well. His ability to conduct high profile political assassinations was teamed with an understanding of how diplomacy and information could turn be welded with military application into achieving the outcome he desired.

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<sup>106</sup> "NorthEast Secretariat Report on Human Rights 1974-2004". *TamilNet*. [www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2006/01/civilians\\_affected\\_ne.pdf](http://www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2006/01/civilians_affected_ne.pdf). Accessed 21 January 2014.

<sup>107</sup> John Richardson, *Paradise Poisoned: Learning about conflict, terrorism and development from Sri Lanka's Civil Wars*. (wiki 47). p. 562.

<sup>108</sup> A-3: An overseas LTTE operative central to the logistical support of the organisation. Interviewed in December 2011 in Halifax, Canada.

<sup>109</sup> 11-3/TD11-3: A junior commander in the LTTE who was with Prabhakaran at the formation and early stages of the movement. Later a more senior infantry cadre formation commander before deserting in the final stages of Eelam War IV. Interviews conducted September 2007 in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, in July 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka and again in March 2013 in London.

<sup>110</sup> J N Dixit, *Assignment Colombo* (New Delhi: Sage, 1990), pp.72-77.

<sup>111</sup> N Manoharan, "National Security Decision Making Structures in India: Lessons from the IPKF Involvement in Sri Lanka." *Journal of Defence Studies* 3, 4 (October 2009): 49-63.

Thus when the Indian army departed, Prabhakaran was left as feudal chief of the lands that the Indians had occupied, nearly one third of the Sri Lankan landmass and more than two thirds of its coastline. He formed a political party, the People's Front of Liberation Tiger (PFLT), and set about his secessionist agenda. Balasingham persuaded Prabhakaran that the time was ripe to complete an account of the events so far, to sculpt a compelling narrative according to the Tamil people rather than from Government sources that could inspire and assist other revolutionary insurgent movements at home and abroad. The theme was something Prabhakaran enjoyed, but Balasingham's actual motives impressed Prabhakaran more – the information campaign would renew overseas financial and diplomatic support for the next stage of the conflict.<sup>112</sup>

Prabhakaran engineered the commencement of the military element of his campaign on 10 June 1990 when his careful provoking<sup>113</sup> of the remaining police in Jaffna caused them to respond against the civil Tamil population rather than conduct more targeted operations against the insurgents. The reaction from the LTTE was purely military – the police force in Jaffna was wiped out, and Sinhalese people across the Tamil held areas were killed. Premadasa's hopes of a peaceful resolution to the conflict were buried and, as predicted by Prabhakaran and his team<sup>114</sup>, he allowed the Sri Lankan army an opportunity to take military action.<sup>115</sup> The LTTE was waiting for them and slaughtered the government soldiers as they emerged from their barracks. Fading into the population after attacking, the Sinhalese troops were left with no targets and took their anger out on the local population. Whilst the Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne understood he had lost the initial round of fighting he began to prepare for a major land offensive against the Tamils. Mid way through his planning he was killed by a car bomb en route to his offices in Colombo.<sup>116</sup> Prabhakaran had increased the pressure again, operating across the spectrum of conflict and developing coherent approaches

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<sup>112</sup> Interview with 4-2: A member of the LTTE central finance committee. Interviewed in December 2012 in Toronto, Canada.

<sup>113</sup> TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> 'D': Senior Indian Civil Servant within the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews conducted in New Delhi in August 2010 and in April 2013 by Skype.

<sup>116</sup> Rajan Hoole, *The Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence and Murder* (Jaffna, Sri Lanka: University Researchers for Human Rights, 2001), pp.107-109.

to sequenced operations to achieve maximum impact. During a 107-day siege of the sole remaining army post in Jaffna, the Sri Lankan army position was blockaded and attacked with some novel and unique weapons, including a large catapult which would hurl bombs deep into the compound.<sup>117</sup> Eventually the Sri Lankan Air Force staged a withdrawal of the troops and the LTTE had finally removed the Sri Lankan army from Jaffna province.<sup>118</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch built fort was razed to the ground. Quickly following his military success at siege warfare, Prabhakaran ordered all Muslims to leave the Jaffna peninsula with only the clothes they were wearing and a little money and cash: the Muslims were given two hours notice.<sup>119</sup> Their remaining possessions were taken by the LTTE as an ethnic tax<sup>120</sup>: the organisation was carving out a truly Tamil homeland.

Whilst Prabhakaran appeared to be achieving his desires in Sri Lanka, he remained concerned about Indian rhetoric<sup>121</sup>, specifically the resurgence of Rajiv Gandhi who appeared as if he would run for office again in May 1991. Gandhi did not appear to be embarrassed by the Sri Lankan episode of his previous administration, rather that it was unfinished business for him personally and as such was an area he would continue to take an active interest<sup>122</sup>. Prabhakaran feared another attempt by India to occupy the Tamil heartlands, and he became set on a single course of action.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Prabhakaran was undoubtedly using the knowledge he gained from his reading whilst inside Base One Four. According to an Indian agent, the LTTE supremo is known to have read almost continuously on Mao, Mandela, Napoleon and just about anything he could find related to weapons of all eras. His interest in new technology was continuously testing his suppliers, as he still could not read in any other language but Tamil and thus a good deal of translation was required. Indian Secret Service Agent (Research and Analysis Wing – RAW Operator) in September 2013 in Paris, France.

<sup>118</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.190-196, provides an excellent, if not scholarly, account of the evacuation under fire.

<sup>119</sup> John Richardson, *Paradise Poisoned: Learning About Conflict, Terrorism and Development from Sri Lanka's Civil Wars* (International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2005), p. 562.

<sup>120</sup> E4: Sister of the LTTE cadre sent to train alongside the PLO in 1977. Interviewed in Manama, Bahrain in March 2013.

<sup>121</sup> KK65: Senior commander in TNT who refused to transfer to LTTE in 1976 but retained close contact with Prabhakaran and the LTTE during the formative years until moving overseas in 1988. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in January 2013.

<sup>122</sup> 'D': Senior Indian Civil Servant within the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews conducted in New Delhi in August 2010 and in April 2013 by Skype.

<sup>123</sup> DX: Low level LTTE cadre who progressed to Company Leadership position. Interviewed in October 2008 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

## Decisive Action

Once Prabhakaran had decided to kill Gandhi, he handed the task to his much-feared Intelligence chief, Pottu Amman. The team that he put together had contingency for failures at every level and ensured that once the action had been approved nothing could stop it. Understanding the Indian state of mind, and specifically that of their security forces, Amman determined that the assassination should be carried out by a female suicide bomber and a 25 year old girl named Dhanu used a religious (Buddhist) ruse to get close to Rajiv Gandhi at a final election rally, blowing herself up and killing about one third of Gandhi's immediate family as well as the protective detail. Sixteen people were killed in an extremely public way.<sup>124</sup>

The reaction against the Tamils in India devastated the LTTE networks. Conspirators were rounded up, and whilst the LTTE did not claim responsibility for the attack, twelve of them committed suicide with cyanide capsules, reinforcing the evidence of the Indian Authorities that Prabhakaran was responsible.<sup>125</sup> There is no direct evidence that Prabhakaran understood how this single act would unpick his support in Tamil Nadu, but based on his careful decision making to this point, it appears likely that he had weighed the risks and decided that under cutting the potential of another Indian intervention in Sri Lanka was worth the sacrifice.

In Sri Lanka, the battle of Elephant Pass was raging as a conventional meeting engagement<sup>126</sup> that cost the LTTE dearly. Nearly 600 LTTE fighters died in that extended battle during 1991. Whilst Prabhakaran had defeated the Indian army, he had not won a successful mobile warfare campaign to date, in fact his experience as a conventional military force commander was a list of defeats. He was not deterred however, and decided to study the conventional training of the Sri Lankan army to understand better how to use employ a conventional force

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<sup>124</sup> Swamy, *Elusive Mind* (2003), pp.222-230, provides an alternative (equally compelling) account again laying the assassination squarely at Prabhakaran's door but which the authors interviews did not find was corroborated by those in Prabhakaran's immediate circle at the time.

<sup>125</sup> Indian Secret Service Agent (Research and Analysis Wing – RAW Operator) in September 2013 in Paris, France.

<sup>126</sup> A meeting engagement is where the opponents encounter one another in a deliberate fashion, in a manner for which both are prepared. This is in contrast to a battle where one side attacks an unsuspecting or unprepared enemy position.

of his own.<sup>127</sup> By 1991, he had a force of more than 10,000 fighters to train in conventional warfare tactics and procedures.<sup>128</sup> Despite the economic sanctions and movement restrictions imposed by Colombo on the Tamil run territories, Prabhakaran continued to run a daring campaign that spanned the full spectrum of violence in military terms. Whilst border wars with the Sri Lankan army continued, the most effective method he employed whilst developing his conventional army was the suicide bomber, which he used to devastating effect on military and political targets in Colombo.

The long term planning of the LTTE was not widely appreciated until 1993 when a long term sleeper agent of their intelligence arm turned into a suicide bomber killing President Premadasa and several of his aides. The agent, named Babu, had established himself within the President's retinue over the course of two years gaining access to the President himself as well as an understanding of the political agenda and discussions occurring in the privacy of the Presidential residence.<sup>129</sup> As was likely the case with Rajiv Gandhi, Prabhakaran had displayed an understanding of the balance of benefits he was achieving from intelligence operations versus direct action. Babu was not indoctrinated as a Black Tiger (ie, a nominated suicide bomber) but Prabhakaran persuaded him that this was the cause to follow.<sup>130</sup> It is thus highly likely that Babu understood the larger aim of his organization and saw with some clarity the requirement to attain it. The loss of a key agent inside the President's home was a significant sacrifice for the LTTE, and it is likely that many commanders would have argued against it.<sup>131</sup> But Prabhakaran did not discuss some of the wider strategies with his close advisors, and with the notable exception of Balasingham, information was closely compartmentalized. This, along with his brutal single mindedness, did lead to conflicts with his own commanders.

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<sup>127</sup> DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009.

<sup>128</sup> Indian RAW Assessment dated xx xxx 1992, op cit.

<sup>129</sup> BGxx-12: Member of LTTE interrogation team between 1989-2000. Interviewed in Washington DC in January 2010.

<sup>130</sup> Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), pp. 140-142, provides a fuller account of the Premadasa assassination.

<sup>131</sup> D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

## Dealing with internal dissent: Mahattaya and Kittu

Prabhakaran's military deputy was known as Mahattaya, a codename derived from an episode when he executed Sinhalese civilians who cried for mercy from his weapons by shouting "*Mahattaya, Mahattaya*" (a derivation of the Sinhalese word for "Sir").<sup>132</sup> Like Prabhakaran, Mahattaya came from Velvettiturai from a family of government workers. His early dreams were to travel the world aboard a ship, but instead he found himself in Prabhakaran's guerrilla training camps during the 1970s. He grew with the LTTE and with Prabhakaran: he survived the purges of other Tamil insurgent groups and the attacks by the Indian occupation force to become a very successful military district commander for the LTTE. His personal relationship with Prabhakaran was not one of equals, rather he almost regarded his superior as a deity.<sup>133</sup> Mahattaya always publically acknowledged that Prabhakaran was the only possible leader for the Tamil people – he understood the respect that Prabhakaran commanded and venerated that.<sup>134</sup> It was largely a result of Prabhakaran's insecurity that would lead to Mahattaya's death. When a district commander during the 1980s, both he and Kittu were becoming infamous as great military commanders for the LTTE, but rumours abounded that Mahattaya was jealous of Kittu's greater public profile, the latter being the champion of Jaffna. The rumours went so far as to implicate Mahattaya in the grenade attack against Kittu that damaged his leg.<sup>135</sup> The rumours eventually died, but his loyalty continued to be doubted and some believed that he attempted to kill Prabhakaran in a high-level power struggle for central control of the LTTE. None of this was publically

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<sup>132</sup> Much of the following evidence arose from discussions with various Tamil sources including Interview with D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013, DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009, AK12: A former clerk of the LTTE. Interviewed in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in July 2010, and KK65: Senior commander in TNT who refused to transfer to LTTE in 1976 but retained close contact with Prabhakaran and the LTTE during the formative years until moving overseas in 1988. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in January 2013. Both Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), and Swamy, *The Tigers of Lanka* (1994) corroborate elements of the new source evidence.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009.

<sup>134</sup> KK65: Senior commander in TNT who refused to transfer to LTTE in 1976 but retained close contact with Prabhakaran and the LTTE during the formative years until moving overseas in 1988. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in January 2013.

<sup>135</sup> AK12: A former clerk of the LTTE. Interviewed in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in July 2010,

acknowledged by Prabhakaran but continued to play on his mind.<sup>136</sup> That did not stop his appreciation of Mahattaya's military skills. When Prabhakaran went to India he would make Mahattaya the de facto commander, with orders to disobey instructions from him (Prabhakaran) if it appeared he was under duress.<sup>137</sup>

The first real signs of a break between the two men occurred in 1989 regarding the approach to be used in dealing with the Sri Lankan President. Again, the disagreement was publically discounted but as Prabhakaran started to make more and more unilateral decisions without consulting his deputy, Mahattaya began to be distanced from the leader being demoted from deputy commander, first to district commander and eventually without rank or position. This may have been sustainable except for the death of Kittu at the hands of RAW intelligence and under pressure from Indian Commandos in a LTTE commercial ship off the Sri Lankan coast. Kittu had been dispatched to London as LTTE Ambassador but was eventually expelled in 1991. Rumours abounded of his acting as a double agent for RAW, but the majority of evidence points to employment rather as a double agent for Prabhakaran feeding disinformation to the Indian Intelligence Agency.<sup>138</sup> Eventually, Kittu flew to Singapore via Austria to board an LTTE vessel loaded with weapons and arms. RAW received a tip-off, located and surrounded the vessel. Just before the boarding was to take place, Kittu blew up the ship and then took his cyanide capsule and killed himself.<sup>139</sup>

The death of Kittu was a serious blow to Prabhakaran who began to associate the old rumours of Mahattaya's jealousy over Kittu's place in the LTTE with the RAW intelligence.<sup>140</sup> Even this could have been over-looked, Mahattaya started a hunger strike as a protest to his perceived unfair treatment at the hands of his leader. The very public announcement was

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<sup>136</sup> D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

<sup>137</sup> D3-1: Captain of a LTTE logistics vessel (fishing/smuggling boat). Worked often with TW33 and have independently corroborated many of each others' observations and comments. Interviewed in July 2010 Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013, and DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009.

<sup>139</sup> Indian Secret Service Agent (Research and Analysis Wing – RAW Operator) in September 2013 in Paris, France.

<sup>140</sup> DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009

made at the Balasingham's house. There is little doubt that Mahattaya understood that making such a statement in the presence of Prabhakaran's closest confidant would lead to a direct confrontation with him, but it appears that Mahattaya believed this was the only way to gain an audience with the LTTE chief and to clear his name. Such a challenge could not be permitted by Prabhakaran who viewed the announcement as tantamount to a challenge for his leadership.<sup>141</sup> Mahattaya was captured and handed to Pottu the LTTE intelligence chief for a prolonged interrogation. It emerged, whether true or not, that Mahattaya had indeed conspired with RAW: he was summarily tried and executed along with a small group of his followers in December 1994.<sup>142</sup>

The evidence presented to date reinforces the author's opinion of Prabhakaran as a most proficient insurgent leader and organizational genius who was capable of brutal but most effective leadership: rational decision making, albeit perhaps not 'rational' in a Western sense', and intellectual agility were characteristics of his behaviour to this point. Discussion and honesty with his close commanders and confidants allowed him to make sound strategic decisions, taking the initiative from both the Sri Lankan Government and the Indian administration. What he lacked to this point was anything more than smaller military success in anything more than guerrilla and terrorist activities. The exception was the LTTE success at the Battle of Pooneryn.

Having recently assassinated two political leaders and with world opinion turning against him, Prabhakaran was walking a tightrope: thus when an opportunity presented itself in the form of a ceasefire with the new Sri Lankan moderate President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Prabhakaran was persuaded by Balasingham to view it favourably.<sup>143</sup> Chandrika brought in negotiators from Norway, the Netherlands and Canada to mediate, a factor that immediately begat suspicion for Prabhakaran.<sup>144</sup> Balasingham was adamant that the LTTE leader must pursue the avenue while international support for him waivered and Prabhakaran relented,

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Interview BGxx-12 (BGxx-12: Member of LTTE interrogation team between 1989-2000. Interviewed in Washington DC in January 2010).

<sup>143</sup> TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013.

<sup>144</sup> D1: Former LTTE Infantry commander and later Staff Officer to LTTE command Group between 1989-2005. Interviewed in December 2012 in London, UK.

establishing a personal dialogue with Chandrika through letters. A condition of the ceasefire was that Colombo would lift all sanctions on the northern and eastern areas of Sri Lanka under LTTE control. Chandrika went some way to doing this but not entirely – there was a great deal of protest from the Sinhalese electorate that she was giving away much without reciprocation. Prabhakaran’s trust in the process was broken by the failure of Chandrika to deliver complete compliance with the LTTE demands and his final letter to her—denied by the Sri Lankan authorities—on 18 April 1995 stated his decision to recommence hostilities.<sup>145</sup> The next day, in a series of pre-planned and decisive military activity, the LTTE commenced Eelam War III. The initiators were somewhat unusual targets – explosive laden boats. The Sea Tigers sank two Sri Lankan Naval vessels at the main Naval Base in Trincomalee whilst elsewhere the LTTE demonstrated their newly acquired Surface to Air Missile capability by shooting down Sri Lankan Air Force helicopters.<sup>146</sup>

The orchestration of violence on 19 April 1995 was further demonstration of the LTTE’s ability to strike in novel and usual ways at targets, which the Sri Lankan Armed Forces had previously thought invulnerable targets. The procurement and training on such weapons that could cause such damage on first use demonstrates Prabhakaran’s longer-term vision in developing them, but also that he had been planning for further attacks for some time. Understanding that the Sri Lankan Army was poised for a further attack to the North, he ordered Jaffna to be evacuated. The city became a ghost town by the time that government forces entered Jaffna in December 1995: Prabhakaran did not cede it lightly though and the 50 days of urban combat cost the Sri Lankan military dearly. Prabhakaran publically noted that he was ordering the evacuation of all civilians to protect them from the ferocity and brutality of the Sinhalese army, but the reality is also that through the evacuation he was able to significantly increase the number of fighting people available to him.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> The author was able to view copies of several of these letters (in both Tamil and English), but the holder was unwilling to allow copies to be made. Government Sources in Colombo continue to deny existence of these letters (as at 2011).

<sup>146</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota’s War* (2012), pp. 220-222, gives a somewhat dubious account of the missile engagements from a Sri Lankan Government perspective.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, pp.223-228, again provides an alternative (government) narrative for the Battle of Jaffna in 1996. His assessment however is at odds with accounts from Indian RAW operatives present in the city at the time. The author cannot provide a more detailed and balanced view however and thus the deductions of this battle are minimized in the later assessments of Prabhakaran’s ability to shift, change and morph strategic aims and objectives.

## Wrath through Mobile Military Operations

Jaffna had become symbolic of the Tamil cause both to Prabhakaran and the Tamil Diaspora.<sup>148</sup> The loss of the city to the Indian Army was a psychologically difficult moment: his reaction was one of massive retaliation (Operation Unceasing Waves), which lasted nearly four years. He followed this up with a conventional military attack on the Sri Lankan Army garrison at Mullaitivu – previously thought to be well beyond the Tiger's reach: the 1,200 military personnel occupying the position were all killed. The audacity and brilliance of the action, as well as its brutality, shocked the world.<sup>149</sup>

Prabhakaran went on the general offensive. As the Sri Lankan Army had had to withdraw a large number of personnel from other bases in order to execute its operations in Jaffna. The LTTE deliberately exploited the resulting void in military presence not only taking control of bases and land, but also capturing large quantities of mainstream weapons and ammunition.<sup>150</sup> This was to prove the Sri Lankan army's undoing in subsequent activity, eventually losing the Battle of Kilinochchi. Colombo ordered a wide area attack against the LTTE strongholds in the north with three divisions of conventional forces with added weight from artillery and air support. Initial gains in September 1997 left an exposed flank that the LTTE was quick to exploit. This, teamed with massed firepower from captured artillery and protected by a sophisticated Surface-to-Air missile network was able to make the Sri Lankan army gains look like an over extension their supply routes. The fighting dragged on for more than eighteen months with Colombo eventually withdrawing in defeat.<sup>151</sup> As the first real victory for Prabhakaran against a large scale and reasonably trained conventional force, this result was to embolden him further. Not only did Prabhakaran conduct conventional operations, but even during a period of high tempo operations against the regular army, he

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<sup>148</sup> A-4: A senior LTTE finance operator operating in the Netherlands and Canada. Interviewed in December 2011 in Halifax, Canada.

<sup>149</sup> "The Return of the Exile". Front Line, 1999. <http://www.flonnet.com/fl1603/16030530.htm>. Retrieved 20 January 2012.

<sup>150</sup> "Sixth anniversary of Unceasing Waves-III commemorated". *Tamilnet*, 3 November 2005. <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=16249>

<sup>151</sup> Sri Lankan Army 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Publication (1999), and Sri Lankan Army Archives: Contact Reports (various) 1976-2009.

orchestrated a series of continuing guerrilla and terrorist activities against targets deep inside government held territory. In October 1997, the LTTE bombed the World Trade centre in Colombo killing 15 people and injuring more than 1,500.<sup>152</sup> In addition to attacking the economic heart of Colombo, Prabhakaran also ordered a strike against Sinhalese buddhist religious monuments, and instructions to kill any Tamil perceived as holding moderate or compromising views on the secessionist ideology.<sup>153</sup> Several assassination attempts were made on government ministers in Colombo, including against Chandrika who lost her right eye in a suicide attack against her.<sup>154</sup>

Whilst the Sri Lankan Army had taken a year to capture some towns in the north, Prabhakaran, now fully on the offensive, recaptured the area in a matter of months. As he outlined in his Heroes Day Speech in 1999<sup>155</sup>, Prabhakaran stated that there were two key areas of critical significance for the LTTE. The first was the Elephant Pass isthmus that linked the Jaffna province to the remainder of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Army continued to hold this position in January 2000. Second was Jaffna city: it became a specific aim of Prabhakaran to 'liberate' Jaffna and bring it back to Tamil control. Both were marked as campaign goals for the LTTE in 2000.<sup>156</sup>

Vanni was quickly lost to the LTTE and subsequent attacks in the region culminated in the LTTE capturing the Paranthan Chemical factory and the Kurrakkan Kaddukulam base killing another 516 soldiers and injuring more than 4,000.<sup>157</sup> Elephant Pass was captured with the loss of 1,008 Sri Lankan soldiers: however, the LTTE advance on Jaffna was halted by the dogged defence of the Sri Lankan Army.<sup>158</sup> Prabhakaran conducted a daring raid on Colombo International Airport in July 2001, bare months before the September 11th World Trade

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<sup>152</sup> "17 Die, 100 Wounded by Huge Bomb and Gunfire in Sri Lanka", *New York Times*, 15 October 1997. <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/15/world/17-die-100-wounded-by-huge-bomb-and-gunfire-in-sri-lanka.html>

<sup>153</sup> UD5: Former TULF commander. Interviewed in Toulon, France in March 2013 by skype.

<sup>154</sup> "Sri Lanka". Human Rights Watch. 1990. [http://www.hrw.org/reports/1990/WR90/ASIA.BOU-11.htm#P718\\_161127](http://www.hrw.org/reports/1990/WR90/ASIA.BOU-11.htm#P718_161127). Retrieved 7 August 2012.

<sup>155</sup> "Prabhakaran Heroes Day Speech 20 November 1999". *Tamilnet*. Accessed on 30 October 2007.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Op Completion Report – Operation Kinihira (53<sup>rd</sup> Division), 26 September 2000, Signed Major General S Wanigasekera.

<sup>158</sup> Op Completion Report – Operation Kinihira II, 5 October 2000, Signed Major General K J N Senaweera.

Centre attack in New York, in which his Tigers destroyed nearly half the Sri Lankan Air Force and a substantial proportion of the government owned commercial airline.<sup>159</sup>

Prabhakaran was orchestrating multiple insurgent activities across the country, as well as being intimately involved in logistics, financial accounting and governance of occupied areas. His continuing efforts at recruiting both from the Tamils in Sri Lanka and further abroad were drawing in new fighting cadres daily. Whilst this would have been an impressive performance for any leader, events in the US were to provide an added layer of complexity and challenge to the LTTE. After the Al Qaida attacks on 9/11, in 2002 the LTTE became an outlawed organization in the US, EU and much of the remainder of the rest of the world. Whether Prabhakaran and Balasingham had seen this coming is often mooted by conspiracy theorists.<sup>160</sup> Undoubtedly they had links with terrorist groups across the world, leveraging them for training, weapons and finance, but their ideology was anything but religious in outlook and the secrecy and compartmentalisation in which both the LTTE and Al Qaida organisations employed make this most unlikely. Both Weiss<sup>161</sup> and Hashim<sup>162</sup> argue that it was these events that forced the LTTE into ceasefire discussions, facilitated by the Norway.

### **The Norwegians**

Balasingham had been urging Prabhakaran to conduct discussions with the Norwegians for sometime, understanding that it could only aid international opinion if the LTTE was seen as actually seeking a pragmatic solution<sup>163</sup>: Balasingham argued that accepting the Norwegian approach would both balance the more ruthless tactics that Balasingham was aware were losing them support overseas, as well as unsettling their adversaries.<sup>164</sup> It was the latter view that struck Prabhakaran as not only sensible in military terms but also highly amusing.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> "Sri Lanka: displaced civilians killed in air strike". International Committee of the Red Cross. 11 July 1995. <http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/57jmas?opendocument> . Retrieved 7 August 2013.

<sup>160</sup> Tamil Discussion Boards online: *DarkWeb*.

<sup>161</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), p. 245.

<sup>162</sup> Hashim, *When Counterinsurgency Wins* (2013), p.114.

<sup>163</sup> TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013.

<sup>164</sup> AK12: A former clerk of the LTTE. Interviewed in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in July 2010.

<sup>165</sup> Interview BGxx-12, op cit.

Thus in 2000, Prabhakaran and Balasingham met the three Norwegian negotiators for the first time. There are few indications that Prabhakaran believed the rhetoric of the negotiators, but Balasingham continued to argue that having militarily defeated the Colombo government, a solution was feasible under a federal plan: indeed it was probably the only one left to them as the US would likely start to rearm Government forces.<sup>166</sup>

The vision of Prabhakaran was demonstrated once again. Eventually welcoming the Nordic Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission in 2002, Prabhakaran used their presence to build capability and capacity in novel forces, to train a larger cadre of fighters and to rebuild international support and finances. In all these aims he was successful, indeed he needed the time to consolidate his positions and the losses he had experienced in his command structures after successful raids by the Sri Lankan Army's Long Range Reconnaissance Groups.<sup>167</sup> The global memory was short lived and the LTTE abuses were quickly forgotten as the West became engaged in Afghanistan and then Iraq.<sup>168</sup>

Since 1995, Prabhakaran had been seeking to expand from land locked operations and his understanding of the coastal areas and opportunities was growing.<sup>169</sup> He was keen to note the failure of Napoleon by failing to adopt a maritime philosophy that could have defeated his enemies.<sup>170</sup> Thus Prabhakaran embarked on a development programme that would not only give him an ability to resupply and protect his seaward flanks, but also to exploit that access for attacks from the sea. In 1996, the LTTE and FARC (Colombia) co-operated in building of a semi-submersible in the jungles of Utria National Park in Colombia. The transfer of

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<sup>166</sup> Susannah Price, "Norway Role in Sri Lanka Peace Plan." BBC News, 1 February 2000. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/627281.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/627281.stm), provides an international media perspective, which is largely corroborated by interview with TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK.

<sup>167</sup> "1998 Report – Amnesty International". *Amnesty.org*. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/report/info/ASA37/002/1998>. Retrieved 13 October 2013, "Sri Lankan army hails capture of Jaffna". CNN, 5 December 1995. [http://web.archive.org/web/20050206004515/http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9512/sri\\_lanka/index.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20050206004515/http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9512/sri_lanka/index.html). Archived from the original on 6 February 2005. Retrieved 9 March 2007.

<sup>168</sup> "Sri Lanka". *Human Rights Watch*. 1997. Retrieved 7 August 2006.

<sup>169</sup> D3-1: Captain of a LTTE logistics vessel (fishing/smuggling boat). Worked often with TW33 and have independently corroborated many of each others' observations and comments. Interviewed in in July 2010 Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

<sup>170</sup> TW33: First mate of a LTTE logistics vessel (fishing/smuggling boat). The numerous passages which Prabhakaran made in boats crewed by this man made him a strange, and only periodic confidant for Prabhakaran. Interviewed in October 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

knowledge allowed Prabhakaran to commence his own vessel-building programme: he ventured further in 2000 and began an operation to build a fully-fledged submarine with some assistance from ex-Russian and ex-South African naval personnel.<sup>171</sup> The first hull of the LTTE submarine fleet was captured prior to launch in Indonesia in 2002.<sup>172</sup>

As but one example, it is ample demonstration that Prabhakaran did not open himself completely and honestly to the SLMM and the peace process. He often discussed with Balasingham the futility of the Norwegian efforts, and he worried that he was betraying his goal of a separate Tamil nation.<sup>173</sup> As a sop to his concerns, Prabhakaran also embarked on a campaign to capture and control key areas around Sri Lankan military bases, including the key naval installation at Trincomalee.<sup>174</sup>

### **The Criticality of Advice: Balasingham and Karuna**

Anton Balasingham's battle with cancer began in 2004, but he had been ill previously with renal failure and diabetes.<sup>175</sup> He was refused treatment in India or Colombo during 2004 and was forced to return to Europe.<sup>176</sup> His immediate marginalization from the LTTE leadership was in recognition of his imminent death but also a deliberate distance that Prabhakaran needed to put between himself and the coming emotional turmoil the loss of his confidant would bring.<sup>177</sup> After his withdrawal from working life in 2005 and eventual death at the end of 2006, Prabhakaran was without an intellectual springboard or devil's advocate. His consistent victories and successes to this point, despite the disappearance of everyone round

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<sup>171</sup> TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK, and TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Sri Lankan Navy Eastern Area Commander, November 2007, Trincomalee.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK.

<sup>175</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), pp.350-352.

<sup>176</sup> Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), pp.296-300.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK.

him gave Prabhakaran a feeling of invincibility, of hubris and of deity.<sup>178</sup> He was almost certainly suffering from the Bathsheba syndrome (when previously successful men suffer from ethical and/or intellectual failures), and was starting to make decisions that would eventually unpick his movement and success.<sup>179</sup> No one challenged these decisions nor did they doubt Prabhakaran's wisdom – a regular task of Balasingham.<sup>180</sup>

The crucial nature of Prabhakaran's relation with Balasingham is clear from the above evidence. Their mutual dependency was based on a reciprocal respect between the intellectual and the military strategist. There is no doubt that the former was simply a foil to the LTTE Chief in his formulation of strategy and plans. Balasingham proved time and again the moderating influence, able to steer Prabhakaran away from more destructive courses of action: destructive not in terms of military and civilian casualties (there is no evidence that Balasingham felt any more compassion and revulsion at the deaths caused by the actions of the LTTE), but rather in political and diplomatic decisions with the international community. However, Balasingham's role was limited to this: he had become a confidant who, whilst perhaps not expressing dissent or opinion, was a trusted enough advisor that Prabhakaran could use him as a sounding board for his strategies and to discuss the progress of his plans. As is often the case, discussing plans aloud allowed Prabhakaran to voice externally his own concerns and stimulated his thought processes - this is often the case with puritanical, narcissistic leaders.<sup>181</sup> Whilst he did not die until 2006, Balasingham's departure for treatment in 2004 left a void for Prabhakaran. It was possible that Colonel Karuna, the LTTE deputy military commander, could have taken over an element of this role, but this was not to be the case. Things changed after 2004 for Prabhakaran because Karuna defected from the LTTE in 2003.

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<sup>178</sup> TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013.

<sup>179</sup> Dean Ludwig and Clinton Longenecker, "The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Business Leaders", *Journal of Business Ethics*, 12 (1973): pp. 265-273.

<sup>180</sup> A point noted in his obituaries. See Priyath Liyanage, "Brain behind the Tigers brawn", BBC news on line (14 December 2006), [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/6180653.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6180653.stm), and "Anton Balasingham: Obituary", *The Independent* (London), 18 December 2006. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/anton-balasingham-428974.html>

<sup>181</sup> Mazlish, *The Revolutionary Ascetic* (1977), p.23.

Vinayagamurthy Muralitharan (aka Colonel Karuna) was Prabhakaran's deputy in the LTTE command for much of the Eelam conflicts. He had built a solid reputation as a fearless leader of men with a tactically astute mind: that combination resulted in a series of successful military operations to his name.<sup>182</sup> As the only member of the LTTE inner circle not to hail from the Jaffna area, Karuna was a balance to the Northern mind-set domination in the decision-making circles. His birth and early life in Batticaloa was interrupted in 1983 when he joined the LTTE, functioning initially as a member of the Tiger Organisation Security Intelligence Service in Chennai and later as a personal bodyguard to Prabhakaran himself.<sup>183</sup> Karuna worked under a variety of commanders in both the East and North, including Pottu Amman the future intelligence chief of the LTTE.<sup>184</sup> His star as a commander started to rise during operations against the IPKF and the TNA after the withdrawal of the Indians.<sup>185</sup> The Indian commanders had remarked at their respect for Karuna as a fighter: they knew of him from his periods training and operating in Tamil Nadu, but his progress was startling to them.<sup>186</sup>

Karuna's strengths lay not just in commanding but also in recruiting and training: he raised the LTTE's second infantry division in the East, made up of only fighters originating in the Eastern provinces (a marked change from the Antony Charles division in the North who took all comers). It was with these battalions that Karuna made his mark with both Prabhakaran and more widely.<sup>187</sup> During the 1990s when government forces were making key gains in the North during Operation Certain Victory, the LTTE Chief sent a call for assistance to Karuna.<sup>188</sup> The Eastern division came north and not only halted the Sri Lankan Army

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<sup>182</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), p.350.

<sup>183</sup> DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with subject 11-3/TD11-3: A junior commander in the LTTE who was with Prabhakaran at the formation and early stages of the movement. Later a more senior infantry cadre formation commander before deserting in the final stages of Eelam War IV. Interviews conducted September 2007 in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, in July 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka and again in March 2013 in London, and corroborated by interview with subject DA3-4.

<sup>185</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), p.91.

<sup>186</sup> Lt Gen S C Sardeshpande, UYSM, AVSM (Retd), *Assignment Jaffna* (New Delhi: Lancer Publications, 1992), p.25. Sardeshpande was the commander of the Jaffna Division of the Indian Peace Keeping Force.

<sup>187</sup> Interviews with subjects DA3-4 and TA1-6, op cit.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

advance (just as Prabhakaran's Headquarters complex was going to be over-run), but reversed them, launching an audacious counter-attack. Karuna's success as a military commander led to his appointment as field commander for Operation Unceasing Waves, during which the LTTE wrested back control of territory from Government forces.<sup>189</sup> These victories gave way for his appointment as LTTE Special Commander in the East, a title that gave him virtual autonomy in the Amparai and Batticaloa Districts.<sup>190</sup> After this point, Karuna's success in recruiting became self-perpetuating and he was able to raise four more infantry divisions (two male and two female), as well as an artillery unit and an Officers Training School. He took over the Tamil Government Agricultural School, other educational infrastructure as well as constructing the Thenagam base complex.

His power and reach in the East were becoming apparent: he started to project himself as the 'Eastern National Leader' in his speeches, replicating many of Prabhakaran's symbolic acts in the East such as the lighting of an eternal flame on Heroes' Day.<sup>191</sup> In 2002, Prabhakaran made Karuna a member of the negotiating team between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka.<sup>192</sup> Whether this was a sop to the Tamils of the east, often critical of having their interests subservient to those in the North, or a genuine promotion of Karuna in Prabhakaran's estimation is not clear from any of the other members of the negotiating team. According to Weiss, his activities as part of this group in 2002 undoubtedly shaped the way for Karuna's departure.<sup>193</sup>

In 2003, Karuna officially split from the LTTE in a move that shocked Prabhakaran<sup>194</sup>, and formed a splinter group the Tamil Eela Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP). His fiefdom collapsed in just six weeks as Prabhakaran reacted with his usual ferocity. Karuna escaped and with a small band of fighters began attacking the LTTE directly. Their impact against

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<sup>189</sup> Balasingham, *Will to Freedom* (2003), p.330.

<sup>190</sup> Interview with TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK.

<sup>191</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), pp.197-205.

<sup>192</sup> Sri Lankan peace talks: the LTTE bows to international capital, World Socialist Web Site (WSWS), Editorial 21 September 2002. <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2002/09/sril-s21.html>. Accessed 11 November 2013.

<sup>193</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), pp.222-231.

<sup>194</sup> PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013.

the LTTE has been vastly exaggerated.<sup>195</sup> against the mass of the LTTE in the East their presence at that stage was insignificant.<sup>196</sup> It is telling, however, that despite his position and history with the Tamils in the East that Karuna could be so quickly cut out of the organization: according to sources close to the command group<sup>197</sup> of the insurgents, the LTTE maintained its administrative and military control over the Eastern Districts despite Karuna's departure. It was at this stage that the Sri Lankan Military Intelligence began providing the Karuna faction, as it became known, with weapons directly in exchange for information.<sup>198</sup> In essence the Sri Lankan Intelligence arm started to use the splinter group as a proxy to hold Prabhakaran's attention in the East. It took another two years before the government forces had sufficient mass to be able to start to use Karuna's fighters in more innovative ways.

In his analysis of the LTTE and the military campaign waged by the Sri Lankan Government, retired Indian General Raj Mehta identifies the split of the LTTE and the defection of Karuna as the start of the downfall of the LTTE.<sup>199</sup> Whilst this thesis disagrees with his conclusion, it is acknowledged that the division of the LTTE was a significant factor in its eventual defeat. Critically however, the defection of Karuna affected Prabhakaran at an important moment for the LTTE. Not only had Prabhakaran lost his most trusted friend and advisor in Anton Balasingham in 2004, but now the only military commander who he viewed as a near peer defected and deserted him.<sup>200</sup> The loss of his other key trusted advisor was indeed important, but the Prabhakaran overtly viewed the criticality of this event as a most serious breach in operational security.<sup>201</sup> Prabhakaran was always aware of fundamental importance of secrecy within the organisation: the LTTE's operational security was exceptionally good,

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<sup>195</sup> Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), pp.247-256.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK.

<sup>197</sup> Including PR4, TA1-6 and DA3-4.

<sup>198</sup> Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), p.249, and M R Swamy, *The Tiger Vanquished* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2010), pp, xxxix-xli.

<sup>199</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2012), p.54.

<sup>200</sup> Interview with TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK, corroborated by interview with subject TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

and those who broke it or showed disloyalty were usually killed before they could make a departure (as was the case with Mahayatta). This was not the case with Karuna.

There is no doubt that the betrayal of Karuna as well as the departure of Balasingham to illness altered the decision making and strategizing environment that Prabhakaran was used to operating in for the previous 20 years.<sup>202</sup> The significance of these events has not been highlighted previously however. It is also a likely result that the remaining command group within the LTTE was wary of Prabhakaran's reactions as well as his distrust in them. Meetings with his political and military commanders from 2005 onwards were less frequent and less productive.<sup>203</sup> Externally, the LTTE chief became more presidential, but within the organisation the command group started to focus more on internal matters: investigations, trials and recriminations and investigations became far more frequent and there was a lack of discussion regarding the environment in which the LTTE operated, including what its enemy was doing.<sup>204</sup> A high turn over of senior staff occurred and the LTTE negotiating team was broken up and reformed of more junior and less informed personnel.<sup>205</sup> Whilst the propaganda arm continued in a prolific manner, many military operations were curtailed. Some reports also indicate that Prabhakaran's own ideological view started to change in 2005-2006.<sup>206</sup> a possible turning back from his original end-state of a separate Tamil state to

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<sup>202</sup> Jerry B Harvey and R Albertson, *Neurotic Organizations: Symptoms, Causes and Treatment*, in *Personnel Journal*, September and October 1971, identifies how neurotic organizations can be cured through the presence of those who 'speak truth to power'. Ironically, whilst there is little doubt that Prabhakaran was a neurotic with narcissistic tendencies, these were mainly kept in check until 2005: if one follows the studies and logic of the academic and psychologist then this was clearly the impact of Balasingham and to an extent Karuna. Certainly their absence after this point allows such destructive traits in Prabhakaran's decision making to come to the fore.

<sup>203</sup> Interviews with subjects TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013, and subject PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013.

<sup>204</sup> J K Sinha, "Sri Lanka: A Challenge and an Opportunity", *Indian Defence Review*, 20(4), October-December, 2005, p.85.

<sup>205</sup> P Sarvanamuttu, "Pitfalls and Possibilities" in B Raman (ed.) *Sri Lanka: Peace Without Process*, (New Delhi: Samskriti, 2006), pp.3-7.

<sup>206</sup> Interviews with subject 11-3/TD11-3 (September 2007 in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, in July 2010 in Jaffna, Sri Lanka and again in March 2013 in London), and corroborated by interview with subject TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK.

perhaps a federal solution. All these factors were a marked change from what he had been considering until that point.<sup>207</sup>

### **Military Operations 2004-2009**

The first indication that Prabhakaran was not operating in his normal fashion came in 2005, shortly after the departure of Balasingham. During the ceasefire and peace negotiations, the LTTE continued their guerrilla activity on land and at sea.<sup>208</sup> The fund-raising effort abroad continued apace, and pressure from the political operators under Balasingham attempted to prevent international community from inflicting wider sanctions on the LTTE. After 9/11 many understood the dangers of being branded a terrorist organization by Western governments: a situation highlighted by the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by a US led coalition. Until 2005 therefore the LTTE maintained a doctrine of strictly proportional attacks and responses with the government of Sri Lanka: attacks focused more on military and political targets.<sup>209</sup> The international community appeared to accept that this was acceptable behaviour on condition that the LTTE continued to take part in the peace process. This deal was not evident to Prabhakaran and in 2005 he authorized a series of attacks in which would depart from this activity.<sup>210</sup>

The new plan started with attacks on naval personnel and troops. The LTTE claimed was a reaction to Sri Lankan army undercover attacks on their own cadres in the Trincomalee area. Whilst government forces may have had prior knowledge of such covert action, it is more likely (given the area and timing), that there were undertaken by the Karuna faction instead. The reaction was not proportionate in the eyes of the Norwegian-led Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission: the sinking of a Sri Lankan Navy Fast Attack Craft at sea was a military success for

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<sup>207</sup> Sukanya Podder, "Challenges to Peace Negotiations: The Sri Lankan Experience", in *Strategic Analysis* (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses) Vol 30, No 3, Jul-Sep 2006, pp.576-598.

<sup>208</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.296-297.

<sup>209</sup> The "proportionality" expressed here is in contrast to previous activity and attacks by both the LTTE and the Government forces based on the author's military experience and inference from interviews.

<sup>210</sup> Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), p. 274. Murari purports that Prabhakaran stated his intent to return to violence as a means to a two state solution in his annual speech in 2004. This is not borne out by the official transcripts, nor in their translation. <http://velupillaiprabakaran.wordpress.com/2012/11/11/leader-v-prabakarans-heros-day-speech-1992-2008-english-translation/>. Accessed on 12 December 2012.

the LTTE but met with general condemnation from both the international community and the monitors who declared the attack as a major breach of the ceasefire agreement.<sup>211</sup> The LTTE warned the monitors not to be on board the vessels prior to the subsequent attack that killed eighteen naval personnel as well as an unknown number of Sea Tigers who conducted further attacks using waterborne suicide craft. The declaration of these actions as a ‘grave violation’<sup>212</sup> of the ceasefire agreement was in itself nothing to be concerned over; the reaction of the European Union was. The sanctions imposed on the LTTE by the EU both in terms of banking scrutiny, fund-raising and supporting activities would make support from the Diaspora increasingly difficult for the LTTE thereafter.<sup>213</sup> There is no doubt that Balasingham would have understood the consequences of such actions and explained them to Prabhakaran during one of their evening strategy discussions, but Balasingham was no longer there and Prabhakaran was now operating alone: nor did not the LTTE leader have Karuna there to discuss the military implications of such activity. Should he have been able to pause, misdirect attention, geographically shift attacks, or find a suitable scapegoat to continue his violence after the land based attacks, Prabhakaran and the LTTE may have managed to maintain their pre-2005 *modus operandi*. As it was, indications of a change in agility and flexibility of LTTE operations were more evident after this point. It is as if Prabhakaran had a doctrine up to 2005 which he used to guide his strategy: thereafter the doctrine became dogma to which adherence was required. Whilst he lost none of his ability to orchestrate information and military action across physical, mental and cognitive boundaries, the LTTE chief lost the will to adapt: the strength of the LTTE over conventional forces was not their arms, but rather Prabhakaran’s agility in strategy. The history identified in Chapters 1 and 2 provides evidence that corroborates this theory. By 2006 even greater decline in adaptability was evident.

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<sup>211</sup> Muralidhar Reddy, “India Sri Lanka Deplore Violations of Ceasefire by LTTE”, *The Hindu*, 31 December 2005. Accessed 13 September 2013.

<sup>212</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch World Report 2005 - Sri Lanka*, 1 January 2005, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/421da31a28.html>. Accessed 31 March 2014.

<sup>213</sup> The Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission Report. The Official Account of The Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission, compiled by the mission, 2008-2009. [http://www.slmm-history.info/filestore/slmm\\_report\\_101029\\_final.pdf](http://www.slmm-history.info/filestore/slmm_report_101029_final.pdf). Accessed on 11 November 2013.

With a detailed understanding of the LTTE presence and level of operations in the Eastern districts gleaned from Karuna<sup>214</sup>, it is hardly surprising that the government forces commenced its renewed offensive there. The local populace and farming community around Trincomalee relied on water from the Mavil Aru reservoir. The LTTE had gained control of this area in 1999 prior to the implementation of the ceasefire, but on 21 July 2006 it shut the sluice gates, thereby depriving some 15,000 people of water. The Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission failed to persuade the LTTE to open the gates and as a result the Sri Lankan forces commenced operations to re-open them on humanitarian grounds. The land offensive resulted in heavy fighting and also utilized precision bombing by the Sri Lankan Air Force which burst the gates open on 8 August, with government forces recapturing the entire reservoir by 26 August.<sup>215</sup> Fighting in the Eastern provinces continued for nearly a year until eventually the government declared it had gained control of Thoppigala (Baron's Cap) on 11 July 2007.<sup>216</sup>

During 2006 and 2007 Prabhakaran's supply chain and training camps started to be attacked deep inside his own territory and internationally by the Sri Lankan Navy and Air Force. Key personalities were killed by Mossad-trained, Sri Lankan deep-penetration units<sup>217</sup>, including Colonel Charles (head of LTTE Intelligence at this stage), and more than 41,000 tonnes of LTTE shipping was sunk on the high seas sometimes at ranges greater than 2,000 miles from Sri Lanka.<sup>218</sup> Prabhakaran spent the intervening period focusing on his own forces different attack methodologies. Believing he had bested both the Sri Lankan and Indian Armies in both conventional and unconventional warfare, he also believed that bringing about his desired result from the military campaign could not be achieved by use of land forces

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<sup>214</sup> Op Completion Report – Vakara (23<sup>rd</sup> Division), 30 October 2006 – 21 January 2007, Signed Brigadier R M D Ratnayake.

<sup>215</sup> There remains some dispute over who actually opened the gates with both LTTE, SLMM and Sri Lankan Government forces claiming responsibility (TamilNet, military.lk, SLMM Final Report – all op cit).

<sup>216</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2010), p.149, and Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.321-327.

<sup>217</sup> Op Completion Report – Silavathurei (Special Forces Bde), 23 September 2007, Signed Colonel N A Dharmaratne.

<sup>218</sup> Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), pp.367-371, and Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe, "Maritime Counter Terrorism and the Sri Lankan Navy." *Asia Pacific Defence Reporter* 35, 9 (November 2009): 32-33.

alone.<sup>219</sup> He adopted strike capabilities based on air and maritime delivery methods: his own air force delivered some very successful strikes against both economic targets and military bases.<sup>220</sup> Prabhakaran's attention was allegedly entirely focused on these activities, as well as the orchestration of attacks in a co-ordinated fashion.<sup>221</sup> His failure to delegate this activity, as well as his concerns regarding security and his uncertainty about the reliability of his closest aids, left him isolated and without a group with whom he felt able to discuss options without losing face.<sup>222</sup> His strategy became fixated and his once agile approach became dogmatic. By the conclusion of 2007 he had passed the military initiative to the Sri Lankan government, leaving Prabhakaran for the first time looking to the international community for support to provide him with an exit strategy or at least time to regroup.<sup>223</sup>

Prabhakaran had also made another strategic error by committing to recommence an attack on Jaffna as an attempt to liberate the city again in 2006 from Sri Lankan army control. In December that year the Northern Infantry Division, supported by artillery and anti-aircraft regiments made massed attacks on Muhamalai but could not regain control from a ferocious defence by the Sri Lankan Army: it appeared now that the LTTE was unable to recapture ground it had previously lost.<sup>224</sup> Certainly, until 2004 Prabhakaran would have privately acknowledged his failure and probably would have made studies into training of the infantry, examined weapons expenditure for deficiencies, and probably sought some reflective time in order to discuss his approach with Balasingham and perhaps Karuna.<sup>225</sup> Instead he now did none of this and remained tied to his previous strategy. No one in his command group

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<sup>219</sup> Interview with subject 4-2: A member of the LTTE central finance committee, supervisor of A-3 and A-4. Interviewed in December 2012 in Toronto, Canada.

<sup>220</sup> 2007 operations by the LTTE air force included 27 Mar and 27 Apr attacks against the air-force base at Katunayake, 26 and 29 Apr attacks against oil distribution depots in Colombo (the latter during the cricket world cup, causing deeply disturbing TV outage), 22 October combined arms attack against SLAF airbase at Amuradhapura destroying eight SLAF aircraft and damage to several others.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with subject TA1-6: Former Personal Staff Officer to Command Group between 1997-2007. Interviewed in September 2013 in Salisbury, UK.

<sup>222</sup> Indian Secret Service Agent (Research and Analysis Wing – RAW Operator) in September 2013 in Paris, France.

<sup>223</sup> Author's own military experience was useful in corroborating interviews with subject KP A 12-11: Former senior LTTE logistics 'fixer' and later on the personal staff of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in June 2013 in Brussels, Belgium by skype.

<sup>224</sup> Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga* (2012), pp.275-276.

<sup>225</sup> DA3-4: Former member of Colonel Karuna's personal staff. Interviewed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2009.

emerged as a mediating voice, indeed none was allowed to have open and free discussions with him.<sup>226</sup> Prabhakaran may indeed have replaced failing commanders but he never discussed his strategy with anyone in his inner circle again, certainly not with anyone whose opinion he respected and acknowledged.<sup>227</sup> His immediate circle, including Prabhakaran's family, were contributing to his nadir and eventual failure by their blind faith in his judgment and ability. If anything, Prabhakaran had surrounded himself with a group that was reinforcing the failing strategy in a syndrome sometimes called the 'Abilene Paradox'.<sup>228</sup> This is a theory within group decision making when the controlling group collectively decide on a course of action that is counter to the preferences of many of the individuals in the group.

Despite having alienated many major powers, and having lost the eloquent and coherent voice of Balasingham, Prabhakaran was still able to call on support from the Tamil diaspora who, in turn, added significant pressure on international governments to intervene. When this failed, Prabhakaran became more bellicose<sup>229</sup> and stubborn in his defence.<sup>230</sup>

Increasing reliance on more and more junior suicide bombers, less sophisticated equipment and tactics, and forced conscription, Prabhakaran's strategy during the final stages was dogged defence, but without the golden touch he had once had. His luck also departed him as his forces started to suffer loss after military loss and the mass of the Sri Lankan Army took

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<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, corroborated by PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013.

<sup>227</sup> Interview with subject D13-1: Former member of Prabhakaran's protection detail. Interviewed in Swindon, UK in September 2013.

<sup>228</sup> Jerry B Harvey, "The Abilene Paradox: The Management of Agreement", in *Organizational Dynamics*, Summer 1988, p 17-43 and deeper in Jerry B Harvey, *The Abilene Paradox and Other Mediations in Management* (Washington, Lexington Books, 1988). In this paradox, Harvey explains that organizations frequently take actions in contradiction to what they really want to achieve and therefore defeat the very purposes they are trying to achieve. The corollary is that the inability to manage agreement is a major source of organizational dysfunction. Harvey sites various examples of the Paradox including elements of *Watergate*. Notably, Harvey notes that a bypass to the Paradox is vocalization of plans to an honest broker or non-aligned voice: Karuna and Balasingham's previous role certainly acted in this manner breaking with the tyranny of agreement suffered throughout the remainder of Prabhakaran's advisors and command groups.

<sup>229</sup> The author's own words based on cumulative interviews with more than four of the sources previously identified.

<sup>230</sup> Such traits are noted by Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness* (London: Beacon Press, 1970) which gives an in depth description of the impact of the role of alienation, separation, and loneliness.

its toll. His previous *modus operandi* would have been to withdraw, resupply and regroup<sup>231</sup> but his logistical support and manoeuvre once afforded by the sea was effectively severed by the Sri Lankan Navy. He was now caught in an attritional campaign against an adversary who possessed quantitative and qualitative superiority and who was able to operate without the previous engagement restrictions.<sup>232</sup> As a result Prabhakaran's forces were slowly eradicated from the Jaffna peninsula and finally encircled in a small area of marsh just north of Mulliativu. It was here that Prabhakaran, his remaining fighters, and their families all met their deaths.

### Conclusion

Karuna's defection enabled the Sri Lankan Army to become more effective in their search and destroy missions over the coming years: it is almost certain that his defection allowed the campaign to be shortened but the information he took with him did not change the Sri Lankan government's plan decisively. Neither did the absence of Balasingham change the nature of the campaign per se: rather it changed the agility and analysis with which Prabhakaran was able to make decisions. His previously impressive ability to change the direction and shape of LTTE military and political activity to suit the changing environment in which he was operating was no longer visible. The LTTE chief's pre-2005 doctrine was no longer evident as a handrail, but had rather become a dogma to which he stuck and became his undoing.

The government had already put in place a strategy that would defeat Prabhakaran and the LTTE, but this plan would not have succeeded if Prabhakaran had still been able to operate as he had prior to 2005. In fact it is somewhat counter-factual that if Prabhakaran had been able to fall back on Maoist doctrine, he would have had a plan that dealt with set-backs in a military sense: the LTTE would have simply retreated into the jungles and lived to fight with guerrilla tactics until he had regained sufficient strength to fight again another day. But without this doctrine, knowledge or advice from his stalwart supporters (Balasingham and Karuna), the LTTE chief was not even aware of that option. That he was no longer able to strategize

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<sup>231</sup> The method of sacrificing geographic areas in order to preserve strength for the longer fight is a practice identified in Maoist doctrine. See Stuart Schram (translator), *Mao Tse Tung: Basic Tactics* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), p.120.

<sup>232</sup> Known in military circles as Rules of Engagement (ROE). These changed to reflect the government military plans in late 2006. Classified Sri Lankan Joint Chiefs Memorandum, dated February 2008.

effectively was just not due to the loss of commanders but rather his psychological ability to do so.

The dynamic had changed starkly within the LTTE – it was the key variable that had altered between the combatants. The very nature of the insurgent organisation had altered, more so that the differing plans and constructs within the government in Colombo, or the changes to force levels in each of the belligerent groups. Different authors have explained how insurgent groups can be classified by a variety of metrics and allow for changes within their own typologies.<sup>233</sup> However, key facets within the LTTE (including the outcome of defeat without any accompanying political representation) marks it as different – a group that does not adhere to the distinction of most methodological classifications.<sup>234</sup> The exception is provided by analysing the LTTE through the social-institutional framework provided in Paul Staniland's new work, *Networks of Rebellion*. Here the changes in behaviour and performance of the LTTE can be examined by fusing complex changes alongside differences in activity and overall structure, differentiated by looking at variables pre- and post-2005 in order to derive better understanding. The following chapter examines this in more detail.

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<sup>233</sup> Just some of the scholars who have addressed typologies of insurgent groups include, Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter Insurgencies: Guerrillas and their Opponents since 1750* (New York: Routledge, 2001), Bard E O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), John McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), and Bruce Mazlish, *The Revolutionary Ascetic*. McGraw Hill, 1977.

<sup>234</sup> For example, within Bard O'Neill's typology, the LTTE could be classified within any of his seven types: anarchist, egalitarian, traditionalist, pluralist, secessionist, reformist and traditionalist.

## Chapter 4: Understanding the LTTE breakdown

*“Numbers, weapons, and strategy all count in war, but major deficiencies in any one of those may still be counterbalanced by superior cohesion and discipline.”*<sup>1</sup> Samuel Huntington.

### Introduction

It is clear from the research and the evidence outlined in the previous chapters that there was a significant change within the LTTE after 2005. This change played a major role in determining the outcome of the conflict: insurgent failure without any form of political recognition or settlement. The orthodox position of those to have documented the wars is that this outcome was primarily due to the approach of the Sri Lankan government. Yet the neither side has altered its fighting tactics too far from previous experience of either belligerent, nor did the Sri Lankan Armed Forces achieve a significant advantage in number of forces available to it. The equipment of both parties progressed in a linear and orthodox manner, and neither side achieved a competitive edge after 2005 in the types of weapons that they were available to them or that they were willing to use. The social structures of the Tamils and the Sinhalese did not alter significantly during the period under examination, nor did their ideologies. Therefore, such variables cannot account for the radical changes in fortune within the conflict, and as such this thesis has presented evidence that it was the changes within the LTTE decision-making structure that was the chief variable. However, these deductions are based on evidence gathered from potentially biased sources. A supporting conceptual, academic framework would certainly add weight to the theory put forward thus far.

The analysis presented in previous chapters allows for a different way of understanding the conflict – the alternation in organisational control within the LTTE. Recognising this broad factor in insurgencies has precedent. Stathis Kalyvas published such research in 2006, concluding that cohesion affects the balance of power and control in insurgent groups, which

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel P Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), p.23.

in turn explains key dynamics of violence.<sup>2</sup> However, his research did not cover the Sri Lankan case study, nor does it reach beyond the analysis of dynamics of violence. It could be utilised as a framework to understand how the LTTE changed, already demonstrated in this case from the evidence, but not why those factors were critical to the final outcome of this conflict.

Other authors have outlined the importance of how insurgent cohesion shapes the conduct of wars, how they end and the politics that result from them.<sup>3</sup> Research into these areas cover changes in material resources, mass popular support, ideology, and state structure and policies. But such methodologies for analysis do not adequately explain the outcome of the Eelam campaigns. As previously stated, other authors have found ways of nullifying the changes inside the LTTE by ignoring the evidence or not having it available to them, thus focusing on state-centric theories.<sup>4</sup> Others have examined the conflict through an ethnic prism, noting that pre-war social structures determine the dynamics of an insurgent group – linked specifically to class divides within the Tamil population.<sup>5</sup> Yet this is not evident from the research conducted by this author or from others familiar with this field.<sup>6</sup> Finally, broader insurgent typology studies rely on homogenising belligerent groups to find common themes within them and drawing patterns that fail to recognise the individuality of such groups, and the unique context in which they all operate.<sup>7</sup> In these frameworks, failures, metrics and

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<sup>2</sup> Stathis Kalyvas, *The logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> James Moody and Douglas White, “Structural Cohesion and Embeddedness.” *American Sociological Review* 68 (2003), pp.103-127.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Weiss, *The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers* (London: Vintage Books, 2012), C A Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (Mumbai: Piyasiri Printing Systems, 2012), and Ahmed Hashim, *When Counter Insurgency Wins: Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Asoka Bandarage, *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity and Political Economy* (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2009), William Clarence, *Ethnic Warfare in Sri Lanka and the UN Crisis* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), Neil DeVotta, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (California: Stanford University Press, 2004), K N O Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Assertiveness in Sri Lanka* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1992), amongst others.

<sup>6</sup> S Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga: The Rise and Fall of an Eelam Warrior* (New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2012), and M R Narayan Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind* (Colombo: Srilankabooks, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (London: Brassey's, 1990), or John McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).

performance standards all take central places and organisational change dynamics are subjugated to become insignificant factors.

In examining insurgent groups, Paul Staniland uses a social-institutional argument to frame a discussion of typologies in insurgent groups.<sup>8</sup> In his analysis of belligerents, Staniland outlines a different way of examining how changes within organisations plays a key role in their performance and, in turn, the probable outcome of campaigns against them. The basis of the framework is an appreciation that successful insurgent groups can be best comprehended by understanding the processes of control, and that such methodology remains valid even when there are changes to the state policies and activity being applied against them. This element is derived from research into networks and mobilisation of dissension.<sup>9</sup> Staniland is an interesting methodology by which to analyse and understand the LTTE. He does so himself within his book, yet there are key differences to the conclusions reached here and the ones he draws. By his own admission, Staniland did not have the research base from the LTTE from which to draw, but that does not undermine his framework, merely the conclusions from which one can draw.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter therefore aims to outline Staniland's thesis, to classify the LTTE both before and after 2005 within that framework, and to outline why typologies offered here are different to those made by Staniland. It uses the new evidence exposed herein to support Staniland's theory of social-institutional change in the LTTE. The chapter seeks to use the social-institutional argument to provide academic rigour and a conceptual framework to support the evidence gained from the research, and to validate the conclusions drawn from it. This leads to the conclusion where the basis for such a change in understanding and comprehending the conflict could generate a new way of understanding the Sri Lankan-Eelam wars.

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Karen Barkey and Ronan Van Rossem, "Networks and Contention: Villages and Regional Structure in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no.5 (1997): 1345-1382, and John Padgett and Christopher Ansell, "Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434," *American Journal of Sociology*, 98, no.6 (1993): 1259-1319.

<sup>10</sup> Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (2014), pp.141-177.

## Social-Institutional theory

In his 2014 book, Paul Staniland espouses a theory that the success of insurgent groups is based on their ability to control activities within their organisation, and their ability to deal with challenges.<sup>11</sup> In this way, the author does not merely accept the construction of the organisation as a fixed factor, but accepts that it can and will change over time because of the challenges it experiences from within. Staniland classifies insurgent groups according to their central and local processes of control and against the nature of dissent within the organisation. By doing so, Staniland exposes not only the methodologies of command and control within an organisation, but also how such organisational dynamics might alter because of differing drivers for change within the group.<sup>12</sup> The four categories of insurgent group that emerge are parochial, integrated, vanguard and fragmented.

A parochial group is one in which there is strong local control of insurgents but weaker central structures. Control on the ground might work well in these groups but, according to Staniland, they are not linked by a central orchestrator and as such tend to be made up of groups of semi-independent actors that operate together because of a shared central strategy. The inference from their description seems to be a shared ideology that would provide sufficient pull to make actors within these groups work towards a common goal, albeit through differing activities. Pakistani Taliban, the Iraqi Anbar Awakening, and the anti-Qaddafi military opposition in Libya in 2011-2-12 are examples cited by Staniland that bear this out. In Sri Lanka it would appear that the broader Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF) organisation in 1984 could also be seen as an example of such a typology. Here, the union of the LTTE, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students, the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front formed an alliance of insurgent organisations that was largely designed as the military wing to the political TULF party.<sup>13</sup> Yet the union was short-lived, and by 1986 Prabhakaran had either decimated the other groups or

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp.1-14, similar to work conducted in 2003 by Jasen Julio, "The Will to Fight: Explaining an army's Staying Power" (PhD diss, University of Chicago, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Here Staniland relies on Kathleen Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 400.

<sup>13</sup> Mehta, *Lost Victory* (2012), p.51.

amalgamated their fighters within his own LTTE cadres. The LTTE itself cannot therefore be classified as a parochial group within such a descriptor alongside the evidence.

Integrated groups are those that have complete local compliance with a strong central leadership, usually noted for their strong indoctrination and military discipline. These groups rarely see leadership splits or dissent and usually have a high degree of military proficiency. It is easy to see why Staniland classified the LTTE as such a group, based on his limited evidence, albeit that he did so on the admission that he had little qualitative evidence to make a conclusive deduction.<sup>14</sup> However, whilst the LTTE was most successful militarily, and was centrally controlled, there was evidence of greater leadership dissent than Staniland pays heed to. The desertion and dissent from Mayahatta, Kittu and Karuna, all members of Prabhakaran's inner circle, is clear evidence of this.

A group that is strong centrally, but fragile locally is termed a Vanguard group according to this typology. The characteristics of such a group, a clearly defined strategy that is adhered to across the organisation, production of an ideological vision and clear political guidelines, are all evident within the LTTE before 2005. As allowed for within this classification, there was both local and central dissent that was dealt with harshly from a central management. It does not align instinctively with the examples that Staniland uses, namely the Russian Bolsheviks in 1917 or Al-Qaida in Iraq since 2004. But Staniland's conceptual framework is based on a dynamic that sees the urban movement and elite leadership draw on the peasant masses to mobilise a fighting force.<sup>15</sup> This is a popular assumption for insurgent typologies that has been the basis of classification systems for insurgent groups for some time, being based on strict Maoist doctrine.<sup>16</sup> The LTTE did not adhere to this paradigm and drew fighters, resources and support from the indigenous population (often urban), and the global diaspora, as well as from Indian Tamil Nadu. Those recruits were from across the economic

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<sup>14</sup> Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (2014), p.142.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> Mao Tse Tung, *Selected Military Writings* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963). Bard O'Neill is a just one of the academics who has developed a classification system for insurgent groups that depends on Maoist characteristics as the basis for typological groupings. See Bard E O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* Second Edition (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005).

and political divides of caste and class.<sup>17</sup> As such there are deviations from the strict scholarly classification of the author. Yet it is this group to which the LTTE most closely aligns before 2005.

The final group is termed fragmented and is one in which there is fragile local and central control and pervasive internal dissent. As a result it struggles to achieve any form of cohesion, co-ordination or control across the organisation or its activities. Staniland indicates that there is little chance of such a group being successful in insurgent operations since such organisations usually fail to develop into a militarily capable group due to the lack of discipline required for warfare. Importantly, Staniland states that, “This structure [sic] is often the end point for groups that begin with a different structure:....vanguard, parochial, and even integrated groups can become fragmented, often as a prelude to total collapse.”<sup>18</sup> This was indeed the case for the LTTE after 2005.

### **The LTTE as a Vanguard group**

The evidence exposed during research for this thesis revealed an insurgent group that had a clear structure, ethos and approach to its secessionist agenda before 2005. That group, whilst it experienced internal dissent, was able to adapt to the various attempts by government forces to destabilise and destroy the organisation over a period of nearly twenty years. The LTTE demonstrated clear fighting prowess, adaptability in constructing central governance structures—albeit heavily militarised ones—and in furthering a clear, uncompromising political agenda.<sup>19</sup> Dissent was present within the organisation, but never became a serious challenge to the central leadership or decision-making dynamic during until 2005. As such,

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<sup>17</sup> This was clear from all of the interviews conducted during research for this thesis. Sources who cited this specific dynamic included, S12-3: Childhood acquaintance of Prabhakaran. Interviewed in October 2012 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. KK65: Senior commander in TNT who refused to transfer to LTTE in 1976 but retained close contact with Prabhakaran and the LTTE during the formative years until moving overseas in 1988. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in January 2013. K9-09: Another former member of TNT who did transfer to the LTTE but failed to pass the physical elements of LTTE jungle training. Emigrated. Interviewed in London in May 2013. AK12: A former clerk of the LTTE. Interviewed in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in July 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (2014), p.8.

<sup>19</sup> John M Richardson, *Paradise Poisoned: Learning about Conflict, Terrorism and Development from Sri Lanka's Civil Wars* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2005) p.28, Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, “From Difference to Ethnic Solidarity,” in *Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalization*, ed. S H Hasbullah and Barrie M Morrison (New Delhi: Sage, 2004), p.110, and J N Dixit, *Assingement Colombo* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2009), p.93.

the group possessed all of the facets identified by Staniland of either a vanguard or an integrated group.

Staniland states that, “The Tamil Tigers were clearly an integrated organisation, even though they were ultimately annihilated because of a staggering imbalance of power.”<sup>20</sup> But he also explains that he was unable to make a full appreciation and examination of the LTTE, and as such it was a, “significant failure in [Staniland’s] argument.”<sup>21</sup> His lack of sources and evidence prevented Staniland from conducting an analysis of the Eelam insurgency in a coherent fashion, but that does not prevent this author from having conducted one exploiting such a framework.

Since the characteristics of both vanguard and integrated groups are so ill-defined, it is challenging to classify the LTTE as one or the other just by examining the internal organisation, social structures and level of internal dissent. However, by assessing how the insurgents failed it is possible to divine a distinction between the two groupings. Staniland is clear on the likely causes of insurgent failure for both vanguard and integrated typologies. The thesis states that integrated groups fail predominantly due to an over extension of ambition beyond their organisational capabilities. Such diagnoses are not new: Martin Smith raised such causal factors in his assessment of the demise of Communist Party of Burma in the 1980s.<sup>22</sup> This is something Staniland terms, “mismanaged expansion.”<sup>23</sup> The theory goes on to explain the causes of this failure can be attributed to either political competition or military desperation. For vanguard groups, failure usually stems from decapitation of the group, ie the removal of leadership personalities from the group that leads to a break down in group cohesion that cannot be replaced. Staniland expands upon this point by noting that decapitation as part of insurgent organisational break down usually stem from external agents, as internal dissent is explained within the core characteristics of the theory.

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<sup>20</sup> Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (2014), p.8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p.142.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, Second Edition (London: Zed Books, 1999), p.375.

<sup>23</sup> Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (2014), p.39

Since the evidence within this thesis offers an explanation for LTTE organisational change that broadly aligns with decapitation, that factor alone would indicate a reclassification of Prabhakaran's group as a vanguard insurgency, but does require an adaptation and extension of the current social-institutional theory, specifically with regard to understanding the decapitation subset.

### **Decapitation**

It should be noted that Staniland's theory, and his allowance for variables, deal with changes to an organisation because of external changes to the group, ie through action by the state opposition. The theory does not address internal dynamics that make result in the same paradigm, except when dealing with dissent rather than internal alterations due to other factors. This is important, because state actions on the leadership of the group is only one way that the internal processes of a group might be altered. Such was true of the LTTE. Whilst actions of external actors had a clear impact on the LTTE leadership at lower levels, the governments of Colombo were not successful in killing or destabilising the high level decision-making apparatus of the insurgents.<sup>24</sup> The personnel that the Sri Lankan Armed Forces did manage to kill were largely mid-level military commanders who were "easily replaced."<sup>25</sup> Even if one accepts the claim that the Sri Lankan government managed to turn Karuna away from the LTTE as part of a decapitation process, this single departure did not change the dynamics alone. Rather it was a single part of the change to internal dynamics and cohesion at the senior level that altered radically. Karuna alone was not the single factor.

Staniland identifies the susceptibility of vanguard groups to this type of attack, albeit from external actors alone.<sup>26</sup> By extending his theory to allow for decapitation by internal factors as well, the evidence supports LTTE collapse in accordance with this social-institutional theory. The removal of Balasingham and Karuna from the decision-support network of the leader, Prabhakaran, started a decay and break down of central processes that ultimately led to organisational failure.

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<sup>24</sup> Evidence from interviews with TA 3: LTTE cadre on personal staff of Anton Balasingham. Interviewed in New Maldon, London in October 2012 and March 2013, and PR 4: Former intelligence officer within LTTE Headquarters. Interviewed in London, UK in April 2013.

<sup>25</sup> D1: Former LTTE Infantry commander and later Staff Officer to LTTE command Group between 1989-2005. Interviewed in December 2012 in London, UK.

<sup>26</sup> Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (2014), p.47.

## Post 2005: Fragmented group?

There is an interesting dichotomy between the hardening of ties of individuals and units who come under extreme stress, such as those experienced under fire or attack from an external organisation, and the impact that the same pressures have in driving leadership personalities apart. This can be explained by relating the linkages between individuals through horizontal and vertical ties – the former being inside peer groups (particularly at the lower level), and the latter being between leaders and their foot soldiers.<sup>27</sup> Staniland's characterisation of fragmented insurgent groups sees both sets of ties breaking down under pressure from external pressure (in the case of the LTTE from government forces), and exacerbated by internal dissent and poor dynamics at the decision-making level.<sup>28</sup> This compound pressure was evident within the LTTE after 2005, as noted in chapters 2 and 3. As such it is the necessary academic crutch to support the evidence provided by sources within the LTTE at that time, and adds weight to the theory outlined at the start of this thesis.

## Conclusion

Whilst this chapter has used the framework of Social-Institutional theory—as identified by Paul Staniland—to analyse the LTTE, the theory in itself is open to critiques of selectivity. Staniland counters this by demonstrating that two of his case studies did not adhere to his principles – one of these being the LTTE. Yet as demonstrated above, that group can indeed conform to his framework when qualitative research is available and applied. This is the key reason why the organisation can be placed against the theory now when it has not able to be done previously. It is also the reason why this author differentiates the typology of the LTTE from the one put forward by Staniland's self-professed failed analysis of the group.

Classifying the LTTE as a vanguard organisation until 2005, and then a fragmented one thereafter within the Social-Institutional theory framework allows for the change dynamics inside the LTTE leadership to be identified a vital factor in their decline and fall from a conceptual point of view. It provides the theoretical and academically rigorous baseline for the alternative theory submitted within this thesis. This is important when contrasted to the orthodox position of the popular narrative espoused by others as noted in chapter 1. An

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<sup>27</sup> Will Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.38.

<sup>28</sup> Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion* (2014), pp.51-54.

appreciation of this new dynamic allows readers to take a new perspective on the conflict but also enables a new wider perspective on the conflict to emerge that challenges the current ordering, naming and chronological classification of the wars.

## Conclusion

*The first, and absolutely indispensable thing to do is throw overboard 99 per cent of the literature on counterinsurgency, counter-guerrilla, counter-terrorism, and the like. Since most of it was written by the losing side, it is of little value.*<sup>1</sup>

Martin Creveld

The events of March 2009 saw the LTTE completely annihilated on a beach in Millavantu. Here, Prabhakaran and his last remaining cadres, numbering anywhere between 10,000-60,000 (including civilians) were decimated at the hands of the Si Lankan Armed Forces. This was an ignominious end for a man who had once been the most successful leader, in insurgent terms, across the globe. The remarkable and absolute reversal in fortunes for the LTTE was also most unusual for Prabhakaran as an individual and for insurgencies in general. Until 2005, Prabhakaran had demonstrated a keen eye for changes in the behaviours and tactics of his enemies, and adapted the LTTE's fighting style and demands around them, out-maneuvring the government and armed forces at every turn. At the height of his power, he (and the Tamil people) had been offered a freedom from Sinhalese rule, albeit under a federalist framework. As noted by Andrew Mack as far back as 1975,<sup>2</sup> most insurgencies gain political access from even failed military insurgent campaigns, yet unlike these examples it seems that Prabhakaran was unwilling to accept this political settlement and held out for full and complete secession from Colombo.

The new evidence and analysis presented within this thesis aimed to rebalance the orthodox view of the campaign and derive a new understanding from it. In introducing accounts from Tamils and external actors, it is clear that the LTTE did not utilize historical doctrines or processes in formulating an approach to the conflict. Rather their own experiences and the decision-making paradigms in which they operated governed how they fought. Whilst the LTTE had a doctrinal input through Anton Balasingham, his ideologically motivated agenda was never truly adopted by the leader Prabhakaran, but rather leveraged as a methodology to gain external support. The LTTE chief's own military plans were determined by both his

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<sup>1</sup> Martin van Creveld, *The Changing Face of War: Combat from the Marne to Iraq*, (New York: Ballantine, 2008), p.268.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Mack, "Why big nations lose small wars: The politics of asymmetric conflict." *World Politics* 27.02 (1975): 175-200.

own experience and early reading of Sudras Bose, the Indian secessionist who forged alliances with both Nazi Germany and the Imperialist Japanese. This Machiavellian ethos was clearly present in many of Prabhakaran's own decisions and military tactics, as were his ascetic motivations and perhaps a tendency towards narcissism, a claim made by Raj Mehta.<sup>3</sup> His rejection of the offered federalist concessions by various Sri Lankan presidents testifies to his clear singular vision of an Eelam empire with the Sri Lankan north as its' capital. Compromise was never acceptable. Yet it does not appear that he was unwilling to reduce his vision from an Eelam empire to just a separate Tamil homeland, albeit one that had to be recognized as entirely independent. Balasingham's hand in this is evident in the more rational approaches Prabhakaran took after his arrival within the LTTE in the late 1980s compared to his more impetuous activity earlier that decade.

The loss of Balasingham from the LTTE supremo's inner circle due to ill-health and subsequent death, and the simultaneous defection of his military peer Karuna with whom he validated his evolving strategies for the insurgency, saw Prabhakaran become less adaptable and unable to structure a military plan that reacted as it had previously done to changes in the approaches of his enemy in Colombo. The evidence of those close to Prabhakaran, as well as sources from external actors within the region—notably the Indian government and their security service, the Research and Analysis Wing—provide a basis for drawing such conclusions. But the use of Staniland's social-institutional framework provides academic rigour to support such a theory. It is possible, by viewing the conflict in these terms and with the new evidence, to link the decline of the LTTE to the changes that occurred within the decision-making and leadership paradigms in which it operated.

That is not to say that the orthodox view of the conflict is entirely invalid. The changing tactics, resourcing and political mandate of government forces from 2005 onwards were clearly important. Without such changes, it is certainly possible that even an unsupported Prabhakaran would have been able to hold his position and wait for until the leadership in Colombo offered him a solution that he was willing to accept. The election of Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005 as President, along with his former army officer brother Gota as Defence Secretary and intellectual equal and presidential advisor sibling Basil, saw a remarkable change in the government approach. Eschewing all international advice and contemporary

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<sup>3</sup> Raj Mehta, *Lost Victory* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2010), pp.220-221.

lessons, Rajapaksa adopted a truly national strategy for countering the Tamil insurgency that had been running for two decades by the time he came to power. Having witnessed the successive failures of appeasement, containment and decapitation by his predecessors, Rajapaksa determined to follow a course that he knew would place him in direct confrontation with the international community. Not only that, but on taking office his brothers made him aware that the country was not in a state to deliver an outcome to the campaign based on a militaristic, attritionalist approach. His measures to restore the military balance through the procurement of finance, arms and economic support were carefully balanced to harness the international consensus against terrorism, as well as playing off regional and global hegemony against each other. It was a masterfully executed grand strategy which, in retrospect, delivered greater success than those counter insurgency operations conducted by the superpowers themselves in the Middle East.

The reader could be tempted to draw wide and far-reaching conclusions from such an analysis in terms of possibly a single successful methodology for the conduct of counter insurgency doctrine. However, in much the same way that Western militaries have drawn lessons from campaigns in Malaya and Northern Ireland, and from the writings of Mao and Guevara, a knee-jerk series of broad conclusions should be avoided without re-examining the decision-making paradigm, strategic culture and mind-set in which the belligerents operated, along with the international and media environment in which they delivered their respective activities.

### **Drawing Lessons From The Eelam Wars**

When compared to Western counter insurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan that utilized counter-insurgency doctrine outlined by Kilcullen, Galula and Mao,<sup>4</sup> the study of the Sri Lankan conflict is a most interesting contemporary example with a key facet attached

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<sup>4</sup> Dr David Kilcullen. *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2009). In this widely read (and ubiquitously praised book) Kilcullen establishes the primacy of 'The Population' in any Counter Insurgency Campaign. This book is acknowledged to have been a key influence on US Military Planning for the Iraqi 'Surge' Strategy and the US Central Command Afghanistan Counter Insurgency Strategy enacted through its commanders, General David Petraeus USA and General Stanley McChrystal USA. David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria* (Rand, 1963), and *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Rand, 1964). Galula specifically states that in his four laws of Counter Insurgency that, "The aim of the war is to gain the support of the population rather than control of territory", p.4.

to it – it was successful in military terms of defeating the enemy without allowing them political access. It also broke with the established norms in counter-insurgency strategy based on contemporary publications: in breaking those key tenets of modern approaches to the counter revolutionary war, Rajapaksa's campaign should have been doomed to failure and instead it made a significant contribution to the decisive result that the Sri Lankan government intended. The methods employed by Colombo after 2005 are perhaps not open to Western governments and militaries given the political acknowledgement that such a methodology would inflict large scale civilian casualties, open the way to possible international criminal indictments and made Colombo politicians the pariahs of the media and many in the international community. Yet in acknowledging and accepting these consequences, Rajapaksa took the only cause of action open to him that would end the campaign. By his Defence Secretary's own analysis, a continuance of previous policies of appeasement, containment or decapitation would have been doomed to failure: a view supported by the evidential chain and analysis. There is no doubt that prior to 2004, successive Sri Lankan governments were executing strategies in a dogmatic way that followed the then (and now) popular plans advocated by O'Neill as successful: police type counter insurgency constabulary activity backed by some localized decapitation (counter terrorism to use the modern phraseology) military activity intended to win the hearts and mind battle.<sup>5</sup> Indeed it appears that these approaches were probably part of a longer-term strategy that intended to bring the LTTE into the political fold by giving them legitimacy through the international peacekeeping and political moderators. The analysis conducted within this thesis demonstrates that these approaches failed during each attempt. In making a clear rejection of these doctrines and adopting an attritional campaign based on geographic control, the evidence indicates that the defeat of the LTTE is perhaps better explained by examining the decision-making paradigm of the insurgency.

However, as the sources cited within this thesis indicate, and supported by Staniland's theory, it was Prabhakaran's own approach that was the key factor to the outcome. Rajapaksa's strategy, along with the increases in size and mass of the armed forces, was not the vital variable identified by other authors – notably Hashim, Chandraprema, Weiss and Mehta. It is certainly not clear whether Rajapaksa and the Sri Lankan armed forces could have succeeded

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<sup>5</sup> Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, (London: Brassey's, 1990), pp.125-154.

if the LTTE had maintained its previous methodology of adaptation and flexibility. Prior to 2004-2005, military failures by the Sri Lankan military had been prompted by a radical change in activity by Prabhakaran. The single example of such an activity after 2005 is when Prabhakaran authorized the use of gas in response to attacks by the 58<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> Divisions in 2009, when two entire divisions were routed by the presence of a cloud of gas and the collapse of six men on the front line.<sup>6</sup> The methodology was not continued or exploited however; a radical change from how a pre-2004 Prabhakaran would have reacted. At this stage, Prabhakaran remained fixated on secession rather than a federal solution for the Tamil people within the Sri Lankan mainland, and was no longer challenged within the organisation after his key advisors had departed. Prabhakaran was offered a similar solution several times but on each occasion he revealed to his close allies that such a decision would represent a betrayal of everything he had achieved to that point. His unwillingness to accept anything less than a secessionist solution for his Tamil people trapped him into a single strategy without alternative avenues of approach. This key illustration effectively summarizes Prabhakaran's state of mind after 2004-2005.

This reflection on states of mind, organisational structure and decision-making dynamics is important and might offer a new way of conceptualising the wars in Sri Lanka more broadly. The pre- and post-2005 paradigms are distinctive for both protagonists, and it might be more helpful in studying the conflict to accept this dividing line, rather than the current position of ordering them as Eelam Wars I, II, III and IV that matches formal periods of violence and ceasefire. With the benefit of wider hindsight, the divide between pre-2005 activity and post-2005 activity is most clear when examining the geographic gains and losses of both parties. The first period saw a dramatic rise in fighting power, influence and geographic control of the LTTE, with an accompanying series of losses and failures for the government. After 2005 until 2009, the reversal is true. But similar differences are clear in decision-making paradigms for the LTTE, with the changes being signalled by the departure of Balasingham and the defection of Karuna. It is also true of the policies for the government in Colombo. The final years of the campaign by the Sri Lankan government led to a clear conclusion of the conflict but was fought not with the contemporary counter insurgency doctrine and strategy of 'ink spots' and 'population centric campaigns', but rather with an attritional

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<sup>6</sup> Discussion by the author with British Defence Attaché in Colombo, September 2009. The Sri Lankan Army purchased 250,000 S10 respirators from the UK shortly thereafter.

approach that directly attacked the Tamil leadership, the people and the insurgent groups with the aim of capturing and holding geographic terrain: in this sense it was 'older' style strategy which targeted the physical rather than the conceptual or cognitive domains.

Whilst, as detailed in chapters 1, 2 and 3, the international community did play a role in the conflict, it was not a decisive one. International opinion, pressure and engagement can also be defined in terms of pre- and post 2005 activity. Sanctions by the EU and intelligence provision from the USA matured and had an impact on government activity after 2005, but it was never decisive because the increase in provisions of novel weaponry from China and funding from the Tamil diaspora. The competitive dynamics of weapons procurement and funding do not appear to have changed that much either, certainly not enough to have been the central cause for the reversal of fortunes experienced by the LTTE.

Most modern military thinking on contemporary conflict is based on the assumption that linear forms of campaign approach lack the sophistication to deliver successful outcomes, neither do such approaches take account of the 'complexities' of modern societies.<sup>7</sup> The Sri Lankan campaign proved both these assumptions flawed within the social context of Sri Lanka: considerations such as the media, the international community and the population are broadly assumed to both limit the conduct of a conflict and determine the successful outcome. Rupert Smith's "war within the people and about the people"<sup>8</sup> could not have seen a more clear rejection: neither could David Kilcullen's widely lauded strategy for modern counter insurgency (*The Accidental Guerrilla*). Symmetrical, attritional warfare works in a counter insurgency campaign, given a number of key preconditions: political, military and sociological.

As highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, the evidence presented is from a variety of sources, some having experienced both the decision-making, some the military activities of the insurgency first hand. Whilst every effort has been made to corroborate their accounts with secondary or tertiary supporting evidence, this has not always been achieved. In

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<sup>7</sup> UK Military doctrine: JDP 3-00 "Campaigning" (previously known as *The Conduct of Operations*).

<sup>8</sup> General Sir Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005); a treatise on modern warfare that explains why the best military forces in the world win their battles but lose the wars. This is due to the paradigm change in military activity, from industrial war to the paradigm identified in the book as "war among the people" - a situation in which an outcome cannot be resolved directly by military force.

addition, given the emotive nature of the conflict and the removal of key evidence since the end of the conflict, there is likely to be both a revisionist account of activities on behalf of both parties, certainly in the medium term.<sup>9</sup> One would hope that in the longer term, more source documentation will be revealed that will enable continued scholarly research into this important conflict. There is every chance that such revelations will determine that some of the core assumptions in this thesis are flawed: the author makes does not deny that this may indeed occur, indeed these are to be welcomed. The analysis conducted in this work however has attempted to use the sources and evidence available now to draw valid conclusions, tested against a wide set of doctrines and historical precedent in order to provide an accurate assessment of the causation for the culmination of the conflict. The over-arching conclusion will not remain in doubt in its broadest terms: the LTTE lost and the Sri Lankan Government won. However, there is little compelling evidence to support the orthodoxy that it was primarily a military victory for the government. Staniland's social institutional theory supports this.

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<sup>9</sup> Weiss, *The Cage* (2012), Chandraprema, *Gota's War* (2012), and Hashim, *When Counterinsurgency Wins* (2013), are all guilty of this in taking a government perspective. Hashim alone acknowledges this potential pitfall (p.19).

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4-2: A member of the LTTE central finance committee, supervisor of A-3 and A-4. Interviewed in December 2012 in Toronto, Canada.

H3: Undoubtedly a member of EROS, and later claiming membership to LTTE senior leadership. Interviews conducted in March 2010 in Muscat, Oman by Skype

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T: LTTE Intelligence Analyst to Command Group. Interviewed in Jun 2013 in Mumbai, India.

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TZ1-7: Former senior Signals Officer to LTTE Command Group between 1998-2002. Interviewed in September 2013 in Bristol, UK.

D1: Former LTTE Infantry commander and later Staff Officer to LTTE command Group between 1989-2005. Interviewed in December 2012 in London, UK.

D3-1: Captain of a LTTE logistics vessel (fishing/smuggling boat). Worked often with TW33 and have independently corroborated many of each others' observations and comments. Interviewed in in July 2010 Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

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