

Lessons from Sri Lanka's War

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Terrorism has to be wiped out militarily and cannot be tackled politically. That's the basic premise of the Rajapakse Model.

Conduct of Operations

This is how the Sri Lankan government described (through a Ministry of Defence Press Release) the war strategy of its defence forces on May 18, 2009 after the annihilation of the LTTE.

“Security forces have marked a decisive victory in the humanitarian operations launched against terrorism by killing almost all senior cadres of the LTTE. The security forces commenced this humanitarian operation in August 2006 by liberating the Maavil Aru Anicut with the objective of wiping out terrorism from the country. An area of 15,000 square kilometres was controlled by the LTTE terrorists by 2006. Now the forces have completely liberated the entire territory of Sri Lanka from the LTTE terrorists. After liberating the Eastern Province from the clutches of terrorism on the 11th of July in 2007, the troops launched the Wannu humanitarian operation to liberate the innocent civilians from the terrorists in 2007.”

“The operation was launched by three battle fronts. On March 2007, the 57th Division of the Army under the command of Major General Jagath Dias commencing its operations from Vavuniya marched towards the North. They gained control of the Kilinochchi town on the 2nd of January this year, which was considered as the heartland of the LTTE. In parallel to this, the 58th division, then Task Force One, commanded by Brigadier Shavendra Silva commenced its operations from the Silavathura area in Mannar in the western coast of the island. After capturing Poonaryne and gaining total control along the western coast the Division moved towards Paranthan. Subsequently, the 58th Division then captured Elephant Pass, Paranthan, Kilinochchi, Sundarapuram, Pudukudiyiruppu and finally the eastern coast of the country. The 58th Division has recorded the most number of victories against the LTTE during the course of the humanitarian operation. The 59th division of the Army, commanded by Major General Nandana Udawatta opened another battle front in Welioya area in January 2008. The troops of this division achieved a land mark victory on the 25th of January this year by capturing the LTTE administrative hub, Mullaitivu.”

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“Meanwhile, the 53rd and 55th Divisions of the Army supervised by Major General Kamal Gunarathne and Brigadier Prasanna Silva respectively, conducted their operations beyond the Muhamale and Nagar Kovil Forward Defence Line. They consolidated Elephant Pass and Chalai, marking the liberation of the entire Jaffna peninsula from the terrorists. A total of five Divisions and

four Task Forces were engaged in operations against the LTTE in the recent past. Entering the last phase of the Wannai humanitarian operations troops of the 53rd, 55th, 58th and 59th Divisions jointly conducted the world's largest hostage rescue operation and liberated nearly 263,000 civilians by yesterday (May 17, 2009) morning. With liberating all the civilians held as hostages by the LTTE the military operations against the LTTE have reached a decisive juncture with the security forces entrapping the top LTTE rankers to a small patch of land in Mullativu. The Army has launched massive attacks targeting leaders of the LTTE since last night. Almost all top LTTE leaders were killed in these attacks and the troops have also recovered all their bodies."

"The Air Force, the Navy as well as the Police also contributed a lot for the success of these operations. Destroying of ten ships of the LTTE considered as floating arms storages could be defined as another significant achievement by the Navy. This helped a lot to destroy the military strength of the terrorists. The Navy also implemented a special marine security programme to avert possible escape of LTTE leaders via sea routes. Parallel to this, the Air Force carried out accurate air raids on identified LTTE targets. Indicating the accuracy of the air raids of the Sri Lankan Air Force, on 2nd of November 2007, then LTTE political head Thamil Selvan and four senior LTTE cadres were killed in an air raid. By transporting injured troops and their requirements the Air Force played a pivotal role in the fight against terrorism. Parallel to this the Police secured the law and order of the country by averting LTTE activities to disrupt the day to day life in the south. Detaining LTTE suspects and recovery of large hauls of weapons by the Police was another reason for the success of the Wannai humanitarian operation."

This official version of the war operations by the Ministry of Defence was released after being vetted by Defence Secretary Gothabaya Rajapakse. Careful planning and crafty military tactics led to the swift and surgical defeat and elimination of the LTTE. Even as the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) was called off in January 2008, the Sri Lankan armed forces were well stocked with multi-barrel rocket launchers, heavy artillery, precision guided missiles and bunker busters. Between 2002 and 2005 the recorded violations of the CFA by the LTTE stood at 3,800 while the government committed 350 violations. After two major attacks by the LTTE in the North and the East and the assassination attempt of General Sarath Fonseka by a pregnant suicide bomber, President Mahinda Rajapakse ordered the commencement of military operations to militarily eliminate the LTTE. In 2007 the East was liberated and Karuna, a LTTE child soldier who grew up to take over as the terror outfit's Eastern Commander, and then eventually broke away in 2004, was made the Chief Minister of the eastern province.

By December 2008 the Sri Lankan Air Force had launched 400 air strikes. The LTTE realized that it had under-estimated the resolve and resources of the Sri Lankan Army and that it just did not have the depth to fight a conventional war. So as the military advanced, the LTTE retreated taking the civilians with them. When the troops marched into Kilinochchi, the HQs of the LTTE, it was a ghost town. By April 2009 the LTTE along with its civilian captives were boxed in a 12 km stretch of coastal land, which the government declared as a No Fire Zone. It was declared as a civilian safety zone, which basically meant that the military would not resort to heavy artillery bombardment inside this zone to avoid civilian casualties. The daring military operation to rescue the entrapped civilians and the eventual killing of the top LTTE leadership is described by the Sri Lankan government as the "biggest humanitarian operation" in the world. It is indeed one of the most fascinating surgical military operations ever undertaken. Eventually 300,000 civilians were liberated and housed in the Menik Relief Camps in Vavuniya. In the early days of April 2009 the official government estimate was merely 70,000.

So how did the military prise open the human shield, liberate the civilians and get to the LTTE leadership? Here's the inside story. By the third week of April, the LTTE along with their civilian captives were bottled up in a rectangular 12 km No Fire Zone (NFZ) coastal stretch, with the Nanthi Kadal (lagoon) on the West and the Indian Ocean on the East. The Navy had set up a marine cordon sanitaire and the army laid siege on the land with troops of the 59 Division covering the West and Southern sides of the lagoon and the 53, 55 and 58 Divisions choking North and North-West approaches. The objective of the military operation was to bifurcate this last coastal stretch under LTTE occupation to facilitate the escape of entrapped civilians. The long coastal stretch from South of Chalai, once a major Sea Tiger base, to Karayamullivaikai was already under army control. On April 18, 2009 Lt General Sarath Fonseka spent his day at the Field Headquarters confabulating with his core team of army commanders and studying the aerial surveillance visuals taken by the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) of the Sri Lankan Air Force. But what was critical to the success of the Army was the stupendously brave and accurate ground intelligence gathering by troops of the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP). Elements from LRRP had infiltrated the NFZ where the LTTE was holed up disguised as civilians and these army intelligence operatives provided the crucial inside information that eventually proved crucial for the success of the military operations.

From the Field HQ in Vauniya, General Fonseka hooked up on the army line with Brigadier Shavendra Silva, one of the illustrious war heroes of Sri Lanka. He told Brigadier Silva that the plan to launch the “biggest hostage rescue operation” in the world was final and that he was being tasked to execute it. Brigadier Silva, commander of the 58 Division, by then had already accumulated a trail of glorious battle milestones from Mannar in the West Coast to Mullaitivu in the East.

The 58 Division, positioned just 300 metres away from the NFZ, had faced the brunt of LTTE suicide attacks for more than a week as the LTTE desperately tried to prevent the army's final assault. Waves of suicide bombers tried to breach 58 Divisions defences at Velayanmadam, Puthumatallan and east of Puthukkudiyirippu. But the brave soldiers of this Division continued their formidable and aggressive hold of the Forward Defence Line. Brigadier Silva was given a free hand to put together his best team for the final assault on the LTTE to free the trapped Tamil civilians. The 9th Gemmu Watch Battalion, 8th Gajaba Battalion, 11th Sri Lanka Light Infantry Battalion, the 2nd Commando Battalion under the command of Colonel Ralph Nugera and 1st Special Forces Battalion under the command of Colonel Athula Kodippili were handpicked for the rescue operation.

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The plan was simple: Breach the LTTE's Defence Lines and create a safe passage for the entrapped civilians to escape. But this was easier said than done because the LTTE had built a three kilometer earth wall or bundh from Puthumatallan to Ampalavanpokkanai. Behind this earth wall were the bulk of the civilians who were being used as human shields. Three attack formations were constituted. The Alpha Group comprising the 2nd Commando troops along with the 8th Gajaba Battalion were tasked to attack the northern edge of the earth bundh. The Bravo Group comprising 1st Special Forces and the 11th Sri Lankan Light Infantry were to assault the southern edge of the earth bundh and the 9th Gemmu Watch Battalion, the Charlie Group, was tasked to clear a safe passage for civilian egress.

On a dark Sunday night, April 18, at 11.40 pm, the rescue operation began as all assault formations equipped with night vision devices quietly waded through the Nanthi Kadal lagoon, advancing deep into enemy lines. The troops were given 2 am as the H Hour to reach the earth bund. The moment the troops reached the bundh they engaged the LTTE guard positions on the earth wall. The LTTE offered stiff resistance firing mortars and heavy artillery, but were soon overpowered by superior tactics and reinforcements from the 58 Division. Even as the troops overran LTTE defences, the Charlie Group of the 58 Division cleared mines and IEDs and provided covering fire for the civilians to rush over to government controlled territory secured by 55 Division. Immediately, check points were set up to screen the escaping civilians to ensure that LTTE suicide bombers didn't cross over in the melee. As dawn broke on April 19, more than 41,000 civilians had crossed over into army controlled area north of Puthumatalan. On same day again in the dead of the night the second phase of the operation was launched to cut off the LTTE's access to the coast as troops of the 58 Division tried to link up with troops of the 55 Division advancing along the coast.

The link-up of the two army divisions eventually happened by Wednesday – April 21, 2009. By then more than 100,000 civilians had escaped from the LTTE's clutches. Amongst them were Daya Master, LTTE media spokesman and George Master, English Translator of the LTTE leadership. As they crossed over the army check point at Puthumatalan, a civilian spotter employed by the Army identified them and immediately alerted the troops. The duo were immediately taken into custody and transported to Colombo for interrogation. Hundreds of LTTE fighters disguised as civilians also crossed over into army controlled area. Many including child soldiers were apprehended. At the last count more than 3,000 LTTE cadres were arrested as they tried to cross over from the NFZ as civilians.

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By now the LTTE had been squeezed into a 5 km zone with its access to sea severely constrained. Exactly a month after the rescue operation was launched the LTTE was exterminated on May 18, 2009. Two days before this momentous development the LTTE tamely admitted defeat, marking the end of Asia's longest running civil war that left approximately more than 70,000 dead in pitched battles, suicide attacks, bomb strikes and assassinations. On May 16, 2009 Selvarasa Pathmanathan, the LTTE's chief of international relations, said in a statement on the pro-rebel Tamilnet website that the war was at "its bitter end". "We have decided to silence our guns. Our only regrets are for the lives lost and that we could not hold out for longer," he added, calling for peace negotiations. But the military refused to let up in their offensive, saying troops were pushing on to recapture "every inch of land" held by the LTTE, which at that point in time was estimated at less than a square kilometre (half a square mile) of jungle. Forty eight hours later it was all over as the government information department sent out a text message to cell phones across the country announcing the killing of Prabhakaran along with his top deputies, Sea Tigers Commander Soosai and LTTE's intelligence chief, Pottu Amman.

The Eight Fundamentals of Victory

The news about the killing of Prabhakaran sparked mass celebrations around the country, and people poured into the streets of Colombo, dancing and singing. Looking back at the war General Fonseka made two insightful observations that must surely resonate in the minds of military strategists dealing with terrorism and insurgency in other parts of the world. The first is on the commitment of the political leadership to eliminate terror.

Eelam IV war began as a poll-promise. President Mahinda Rajapakse rode to power four years ago vowing to annihilate the LTTE. In the early hours of Tuesday the fight for Eelam, a separate homeland for the Tamils in Sri Lanka, begun in 1983 ended in a lagoon, the Nanthi Kadal. Vellupillai Prabhakaran's dead body, eyes wide open, top portion of the head blown off, the thick bushy moustache in place, was found in the lagoon by the Sri Lankan forces looking for remnant LTTE stragglers.

In the President's Office in Colombo officials talk about the 'Rajapakse Model' (of fighting terror). "Broadly, win back the LTTE held areas, eliminate the top LTTE leadership and give the Tamils a political solution." Sunimal Fernando, one of Rajapakse's advisors, says that the President demonstrated a basic resolve: "given the political will, the military can crush terrorism." This is not as simple as it sounds. Like most poll promises he did not have plans to fulfil his promise to militarily defeat the LTTE. Eelam I to III were miserable failures. So the 'Rajapakse Model' evolved, it was not pre-planned.

First Fundamental: Political Will

The first fundamental of this approach was unwavering political will. Rajapakse clearly conveyed to General Sarath Fonseka: "eliminate the LTTE." To the outside world he conveyed the same message differently: "either the LTTE surrenders or face, their end." Rajapakse instructed the Sri Lankan Army that their job was to fight and win the war. At whatever cost, however bloody it might be. He would take care of political pressures, domestic and international.

General Fonseka commented: "It is the political leadership with the commitment of the military that led the battle to success. We have the best political leadership to destroy terrorism in this country. It was never there before to this extent. The military achieved these war victories after President Mahinda Rajapakse came into power. He, who believed that terrorism should and could be eliminated, gave priority do go ahead with our military strategies. And no Defence Secretary was there like the present Secretary Gotabhya Rajapaksa who had the same commitment and knowledge on how to crush the LTTE. Finally, they gave me the chance of going ahead with the military plan."

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Second Fundamental: Go To Hell

Following from the first, the second principle of Rajapakse's 'how to fight a war and win it' is telling the international community to "go to hell." As the British and French foreign ministers, David Miliband and Bernard Kouchner, found out during their visit. They were cold shouldered for suggesting that Sri Lanka should halt the war and negotiate with the LTTE. As Rajapakse said during the post-interview chatter "we will finish off the LTTE, we will finish terrorism and not allow it to regroup in this country ever; every ceasefire has been used by the LTTE to consolidate, regroup and re-launch attacks, so no negotiations." Eliminate and Annihilate – two key operational words that went with the "go to hell" principle of the 'Rajapakse Model'. After Colombo declared victory the Sri Lankan Army Commander Lt Gen Sarath Fonseka used words used by Rajapakse. That the SLA will not allow the LTTE to "regroup".

Third Fundamental: No Negotiations

Naturally, the third fundamental was no negotiations with the LTTE. “The firm decision of the political hierarchy not to go for talks with the LTTE terrorists until they lay down arms had contributed significantly to all these war victories,” affirms Fonseka. But this meant withstanding international pressure to halt the war, the humanitarian crisis spawned by the war and the rising civilian casualties. Rajapakse did all of this by simply ensuring ‘silence’ and information blackout under which the war was conducted. Rajapakse’s biggest gamble was to give the military a free hand, shut the world out of the war zone.

When the United Nations, US and European countries raised concerns of high civilian casualties, Rajapakse, said that the international community was “getting in the way” of Sri Lanka’s victory against terrorism. “We knew that the moment the military is close to operational successes, there will be loud screams for the resumption of the political process of peace negotiations. But there will be no negotiations.” That was the rock solid stand taken and communicated by Sri Lanka’s Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse to all visiting dignitaries and diplomats.

Fourth Fundamental: Regulate Media

With just one version of the war available for the media to report, the Sri Lankan government ensured an unidirectional flow of conflict information. The information put out by the LTTE’s official website, TamilNet, could not be independently verified on the ground because access to the war zone was regulated and controlled. This was a vital fourth principle in the strategic matrix of the Rajapakse model.

“Presidents Premadasa and Chandrika Bandarnaike gave orders to the military to take on the LTTE. But when success was near, they reversed the orders and instructed the military to pull back, to withdraw from operations because of international concerns about the humanitarian crisis and civilian casualties. So we had to ensure that we regulated the media. We didn’t want the international community to force peace negotiations on us,” says a senior official in the President’s office who wishes to remain anonymous.

Fifth Fundamental: No Cease-Fire

Rajapakse’s brother, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who consistently maintained that military operations would continue unhindered. “There will be no ceasefire,” was Gotabhaya’s uncompromising message. The clear, unambiguous stand enabled other prominent personalities in the Rajapakse cabinet to speak in a uniform voice. “Human rights violations during war operations and the humanitarian crisis that engulfs civilians caught in the cross fire have always been the trigger points to order a military pull-back,” asserted Mahinda Samarasinge, Minister for Human Rights and Disaster Management. “The LTTE would always play this card in the past. They would use the ceasefire to regroup and resume the war.”

President Rajapakse was clear that he did not want to go down that route. That was the traditional way of fighting the LTTE – two steps forward, four steps back. The Rajapakse brothers’ commitment to a military solution was cast in stone. And it was anchored in a deft political arrangement. But first it is important to reveal the idea behind the political

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arrangement. “It was to ensure that there would be no political intervention to pull away the military from its task of comprehensively and completely eliminating the LTTE,” says a senior official in the President’s Office. “Prabhakaran was aware of the political contradictions in Sri Lanka and so was confident that the SLA will not indulge in an adventurous, all guns blazing, a full onslaught against the LTTE.”

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Sixth Fundamental: Complete Operational Freedom

Gotabhaya Rajapakse’s appointment to the post of Defence Secretary was made precisely to break this political logjam. Gotabhaya had a military past. He had taken voluntary retirement from the SLA. He had retained his long standing friendship with Lt General Sarath Fonseka. Gotabaya met Fonseka and asked him, “can you go for a win”? The battle-hardened veteran said “yes, but you will have to permit me to pick my own team.” Gotabaya and Mahinda agreed. “We will let the military do its job, while we hold the fort, politically,” they told Fonseka. This deft political arrangement worked because both, Gotabhaya and Fonseka, were recruited and commissioned into the army at the same time.

This is the team Fonseka handpicked by August 2006 – Major General Jagath Dias, commander of the 57 Division, Brigadier Shavendra Silva, commander of Task force One also the 58 Division (the SLA formation that has recorded the maximum victories against the LTTE), Major General Nandana Udawatta, commander of the 59 Division and Major General Kamal Gunarathne and Brigadier Prasanna Silva, commanders of the 53 and 55 Divisions respectively. Their task was to recapture 15,000 square kilometers of area controlled by the LTTE. The defection of LTTE’s Eastern chief, Karuna, helped the Army take over Batticaloa, Tamil Tigers’ eastern stronghold on July 11, 2007.

By the time of LTTE’s defeat in the East, the 57 Division under the command of Major General Jagath Dias started military operations north of Vavuniya. Eighteen months later, in January 2009, the 57 Division marched into Kilinochchi, the head quarters of the Tamil Tigers. Parallel to this the Task Force One (58 Division) under Brigadier Shavendra Silva achieved stunning success moving from Silavathura area in Mannar in the west coast, capturing Poonaryne and Paranthan. These troops then swiftly recaptured Elephant Pass, linked up with the 57 Division and further moved to Sundarapuram, Pudukudiyiruppu and finally the eastern coast of the country. Meanwhile, the 59th division of the Army, commanded by Major General Nandana Udawatta opened a new front in Welioya area in January 2008 and within a year marched into the LTTE’s administrative hub, Mullativu. Finally, troops from 53rd, 55th, 58th and 59th bottled up the LTTE in along a small patch of eastern coastal land in Mullativu and killed the top leadership, including Prabhakaran.

The decision to bring Fonseka out of retirement paid off because he was an hardcore advocate of military operations to crush the LTTE. With rock solid political backing Fonseka was able to motivate his troops and officers to go all out without fearing any adverse consequences. It’s not surprising why Eelam IV turned out to be a bloody and a brutal war. “That there will be civilian casualties was a given and Rajapakse was ready to take the blame. This gave the Army tremendous confidence. It

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was the best morale booster the forces could have got,” says a Sri Lankan minister who wishes to let this quote remain unattributed.

and other kinds of tactical support.

Is it any surprise, therefore, that LTTE wanted to assassinate Gotabhaya in 2006? Prabhakaran knew that if he could assassinate Gotabaya then the carefully constructed political-military architecture pushing the war operations forward would have been gravely undermined. Gotabhaya escaped the assassination bid and the rest as the cliché goes, is history.

So even though Gotabhaya came into the political set up virtually out of nowhere, he quickly became the bridge-head between the President Rajapakse’s government and the military. The Rajapakse brothers fused political commitment to a pre-set military goal. “He (Gotabhaya) was embraced and accepted by the military and his was a legitimate voice in the Army,” said a senior official in the President Office. Gotabaya communicated the military requirements to the government – men, material and weapons. His brother and head of the government, President Rajapakse, ensured the military got what it wanted. He in turn instructed Gotabhaya to tell the Army to go all out and get on with the task. The sixth fundamental of the Rajapakse Model also had a clause – Basil, the youngest of the Rajapakse brothers. “Neither Mahinda nor Basil saw their brother Gotabaya as a political threat to their political aspirations. So they gave him a free hand.” More importantly, Basil was used by President Rajapakse for political liaison, especially with India.

Seventh Fundamental: Accent on Young Commanders

The other critical element was empowering young officers as GOCs to lead the battle. “I did not select these officers because they are young. But they were appointed as I thought they were the best to command the battle. I went to the lines and picked up the capable people. I had to drop those who had less capacity to lead the battle. Some of them are good for other work like administration activities. Therefore, the good commanders were chosen to command this battle. I thought seniority was immaterial if they could not command the soldiers properly. I restructured the Army and changed almost all the aspects of the organization. I made the Sri Lanka Army a more professional Army. Everybody had to work with a sense of professionalism.”

Eighth Fundamental: Keep Your Neighbors in Loop

The seventh fundamental was India and an unsigned strategic partnership agreed by New Delhi and Colombo. India played a crucial part in the Sri Lanka military operations by providing intelligence and other kinds of tactical support. “The moral support, whatever support India gave us, is what they should have given to us. It is their duty to help us in this stage,” is President Rajapakse’s rather candid admission of the Indian involvement. “I can’t demand, I shouldn’t demand anything from a neighboring country. I request.” The first significant request from Colombo was naval intelligence and intelligence on the movement of LTTE owned merchant navy vessels.

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The 15,000 sq km area controlled by the LTTE in northern Sri Lanka known as Vanni was cut off from all land access. The A9 Colombo-Jaffna road ran through it. But in the Southern end was the Vavuniya frontline at Omanthai and in the North beyond the Elephant Pass was the northern

frontline. The only way for the LTTE to get its supplies, weapons and other essentials was through the sea route. It had eight 'warehouse' ships, vessels that transported "artillery, mortar shells, artillery shells, torpedoes, aircraft, missiles, underwater vehicles, diving equipment, radar, electro-optical devices and night vision equipment." These ships would travel close to the Sri Lankan coast but beyond the reach of Sri Lanka's coastal Navy. War material from these 'warehouse' ships would be transported into smaller boats protected by Sea Tiger units, which would then make its way to the Sea Tiger bases. This is how the LTTE sustained itself for decades and continually upgraded its conventional military capability through funding provided by the Tamil Diaspora.

India played a crucial role in choking this well established supply line of the LTTE. This enabled the Sri Lankan armed forces on the ground to make rapid advances. The Sri Lankan Navy led by Vice Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda, executed a maritime strategy based on intelligence on LTTE ship movements provided by India. In 2006 the SL Navy had tremendous success when, based on Indian intelligence, it launched operations to destroy six LTTE warehouse vessels. Subsequently, by 2007, two more were destroyed, which completely disrupted the LTTE's supply line. Some LTTE warehouse ships were located at about 1700 nautical miles, south east of Sri Lanka close to Australia's exclusive economic zone. SL Navy clearly does not have this capability and this shows how deep and extensive intelligence sharing between India and Colombo have been ever since 2006.

In a recent interview to the Jane's Defence Weekly, Admiral Karannagoda said, "It was one of the major turning points in the last 30 years of the conflict. That was the main reason why the LTTE are losing the battle, we did not allow a single supply of replenishment ship to come into (Sri Lankan) waters over the last two and a half years since 2006."

In the final analysis the Rajapakse model is based on a military precept and not a political one. Terrorism has to be wiped out militarily and cannot be tackled politically. That's the basic premise of the Rajapakse Model.

Will the LTTE Resurrect?

Will the remnant LTTE fighters and suicide bombers who infiltrated the Sinhala dominated southern Sri Lanka melt away or are they still capable of mounting guerilla attacks and terror strikes? That's a question which continues to haunt Colombo. One definite outcome of the war is the de-legitimization of the LTTE. Aerial surveillance visuals have confirmed LTTE firing at civilians trying to escape the war zone. These visuals also show a LTTE tank firing, from inside the No Fire Zone, at the advancing Sri Lankan Army troops. The tank positioned behind temporary shelters built by Tamil civilians, opens up in rapid bursts. The UAV visuals show the tank firing over the shanty refugee colony at the forward line of the advancing troops, knowing fully well that retaliatory fire by the Sri Lankan Army would result in civilian casualties.

Stunning visuals captured by the Sri Lankan Air Force of civilians breaking free from the clutches of the LTTE and fleeing towards government controlled areas showed the extent of desperation amongst the entrapped civilians. It also changed the international discourse on the LTTE because this was the clearest evidence that the LTTE did not have the support of the Tamil civilians. For this a lot of credit is due to the Hingurakgoda-based Mi 24 helicopter

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gunship squadron or the 09 Squadron. Working in close coordination with the Army's LRRP (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols) teams which forayed deep inside enemy territory, the 09 Squadron carried out 400 attack missions and several other missions to carry out aerial surveillance of the LTTE held area where the civilians were entrapped. This heliborne assault squadron played a crucial role in the defeat of the LTTE. In coordinated missions the army field commanders deployed the 14 Mi 24 choppers of the 09 Squadron, constantly engaging the enemy right across the Vanni theatre.

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The LTTE fired indiscriminately at civilians trying to escape from the NFZ. “We came through the lagoon. The Army started firing. I had two children. We had to travel through the lagoon. After hearing the firing, we lost ourselves, we lost our property,” said K Selvarasan, Assistant Director of Education, Mullaitivu. Even children caught in the conflict had remarkable stories to narrate. “The LTTE took us away from our parents and put us to fight. They would shoot at us if we tried to escape,” said 12-year old Farna Denosa, Kilinochchi. “When we tried to escape they tried to block our movements. When they fired, four of my family died. We did not have food or clothes to wear. I lost my brother, two brothers-in-law and a cousin. But we had to leave their bodies behind,” said Jyotishwari, a 10 year old. “Till we escaped we used to hide from the LTTE. If they found us at home they would catch us. They would give some training and deploy us as LTTE fighters,” said Sasi Kanakariga Pillai. “They also caught me. I trained with them for two months. I managed to escape.”

In the refugee camps there are as many stories as there are people of LTTE's forcible recruitment of children for its frontlines. “I have two children. My 17 year old was caught. We ran the same day to escape. The LTTE were so desperate that they were recruiting any child they could spot. They assaulted parents to catch children,” said Selvarasan. “We lost 100 students in the war. They were recruited by the LTTE and used in the war. I also ran away to save my 18 year old daughter. On March 18th at midnight I ran away. If I was there, they would have taken her away. I saw most of the children being taken away by the LTTE,” said Rajendra, principal of Bhartiya Vidyalaya, Kilinochchi. It was known for three decades that the LTTE recruited child soldiers. But these testimonies of what it was like to live in a territory controlled by a terror outfit have demolished the myth of the LTTE fighting for the political rights of Sri Lankan Tamils.

Nearly 300,000 civilians are now housed in the Manik Refugee Camps in Vavuniya, which is spread over more than 1,000 acres. These camps are enclosed by barbed wires and access is controlled by the military. Retired army officers have been recalled to manage these camps. Like Brigadier R Jeyasinghe (ret'd), who is in charge of Kadirgamar Village refugee camp which shelters 22,000 IDPs. “Once demining operations in the Vanni region are complete and the government has set up basic infrastructure these civilians will eventually be resettled back to where they came from,” said Jeyasinghe.

The Sri Lankan government continues to deny open access to the refugee camps and only allows military-conducted visits. So it's difficult to accurately assess reports of deepening humanitarian crisis in the camps with regard to lack of water, hygiene and sanitation. Reports published in credible international journals, newspapers and magazines suggest a high death rate in the camps because of water borne diseases. Despite these troubles the IDPs are happy to be in safe zone. “We are happy here. Getting a meal in LTTE areas was difficult,” said Sinnaiah Rosalingam, who managed to escape from Matalan.

But the fear of the LTTE still remains. “We were suffering from dictatorship. We like democracy. In democracy lies our future. I wouldn’t like to talk about the LTTE,” said Rajendra. LTTE has lost complete legitimacy in the minds of the Tamil people. But the fear of remnant LTTE cadres prowling around anonymously in the refugee camps is still large in their minds. “I don’t want to tell anything because I don’t know whether the LTTE cadres are here and they might harm me. I fear them,” said Iyanan Gatewali. About 80 persons who held ranks of “Colonel” and “Lieutenant Colonel” in the LTTE had been arrested by the security in IDP camps so far. Officials from the Ministry of Defence officials said: “The arrested suspects had thrown away their weapons, uniforms and cyanide capsules and crossed over to the government controlled areas along with other civilians during the last phase of the war.”

But the Tamil Diaspora is not giving up and the Overseas Affairs Office of the LTTE continues to function secretly. “The end of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) simply marks the beginning of a new phase in their struggle for independence,” announced the Canadian Tamil Congress. David Poopalapillai, the spokesperson of this Tamil diaspora outfit, one of the numerous LTTE fronts said, “Mark my words, this Monday (May 18, 2009) marks the beginning of the third phase of our struggle for independence. In the first 35 years since Sri Lanka became independent 60 years ago, we waged a peaceful, Gandhian struggle but achieved nothing. In phase two, the LTTE waged an armed struggle for 25 years and succeeded in globalizing our mission. This Monday marks the beginning of the third and final phase of our struggle to achieve independence.” Several LTTE front organizations in Europe and America are coordinating a campaign to force the United Nations to investigate the alleged war crimes of the Sri Lankan forces. Bruce Fein, a former associate deputy attorney general, representing a LTTE front in the US, Tamils Against Genocide, has filed a 1,000-page report with the US attorney general’s office detailing alleged war crimes, charges of genocide and torture against President Mahinda Rajapakse and General Sarath Fonseka. The objective of diaspora Tamils who continue to support the objectives of the LTTE is to win a legal ruling denying Rajapakse and Fonseka “US visas and freeze their assets” and indict them under the Geneva Genocide Convention of 1949.

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Selvarasa Pathmanathan, also known as KP, head of LTTE’s Office of Overseas Purchases has taken over as the new chief of the LTTE. The overseas office of the LTTE, nicknamed by intelligence agencies as the ‘KP Department’ has promised to take LTTE’s separatist struggle off-shore. He released a statement from an unknown location (possibly from a Nordic country) announcing the formation of “provisional transnational government–tamil eelam” (PTB–TE) to pursue the goal of “an autonomous homeland for the Tamil population.” This shows the Tamil Diaspora has taken over the separatist movement. In any case the international support architecture of the LTTE is intact and continues to function. According to a Jane’s Intelligence Review report released in July 2007, the ‘KP Department’ complemented by the dreaded intelligence gathering network, the Aiyanna Group control the international financial and procurement operations of the LTTE. The group has a presence in 44 countries and has established a structured presence in 12 countries, which contribute the funds to sustain the LTTE. The KP Department along with Aiyanna Group earn an annual profit margin of \$200 to \$300 million USD through financial and procurement operations around the globe, according to the Janes Intelligence Review report.

It is in this context that Sri Lanka has appealed to the international community to support the dismantling of the LTTE's global network. "It is important for the international community to take all measures to assist the government of Sri Lanka, to track down the global network of the LTTE," Foreign minister Rohitha Bogollagama stated at the 8th Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore recently. "The elimination of the LTTE from Sri Lanka as a terror organization would prevent other facets of terrorism, such as money laundering, narcotics trafficking and human smuggling, arms smuggling." At this security forum he met Lt Gen Ma Xiaotian, Deputy Chief of General Staff, People's Liberation Army (PLA), China and thanked him for assisting Colombo "during the demanding times".

In its fight against the LTTE, Colombo made new friends and the friendship is now being publicly felicitated through bill boards that have sprung up across the island nation thanking China, Russia and Pakistan for providing weapons, fighter jets and multi-barrel rocket launchers. "Sri Lanka is one of those rare cases where terrorism has been comprehensively defeated despite all the advice, reservation and fears. Instead of succumbing to these pressures, the government sought assistance from non-traditional allies," said Palitha Kohona, the foreign affairs secretary. "This effort paid handsome dividends. Iran, for example, pledges over \$1.9 billion in development assistance to Sri Lanka. China's share of development assistance topped \$1 billion."

Meanwhile, Sri Lankan troops continue to recover weapons abandoned and hidden by the LTTE. The key finds include 152 mm artillery guns, underwater submersible vehicles (USV) including an indigenized USV construction and assembly line at Udayarkattukulam area in Mullaitivu, satellite communication equipment, surface-to-air missiles, improvised Multi Barrel Rocket Launchers, anti-aircraft guns and battle tanks. Claymore mines, 9 mm and T-56 ammunition, light aircraft, radars and large caches of assault rifles and multi-purpose machine gun have also been recovered. In Colombo, two LTTE officials, Velaudhan Dayanidi alias Daya Master (spokesperson) and Velupillai Kumar Pancharathnam alias George Master (translator) are providing detailed insights on the 30 year reign of the LTTE and its operations.

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There is enough evidence to prove that the top LTTE leadership, including Prabhakaran, had planned an escape by the sea route. But the Sri Lankan armed forces foiled the escape plan. A fully operational LTTE underwater submersible vehicle was recovered from the sea, off the coast of Vellamullivaikkal. It was found underwater and close to the location of 'Farah 3', a ship that was kept in readiness to evacuate the LTTE leadership to safety. But the speed with which the Sri Lankan forces advanced ensured that the terror outfit did not survive to renew its violent campaign.