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By Tiara Biswas

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State Reforms in Response to Terrorism: A Case Study of the LTTE

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Abstract- This paper is a case study of the state reforms put into place due to and after the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The LTTE is one of the most known organisations of recent times, indirectly but not solely responsible for the Tamil Diaspora witnessed during the 90s. This paper has reviewed and qualitatively analysed literature which examined the history of the LTTE, it's structures, the reforms made by it and the aftermath of its defeat. The research question looks at the state reforms put into place during the reign of the LTTE, and after its defeat.

I. Introduction

Terrorism is the violence or threat of violence against soft targets perpetrated by non-state actors in pursuit of political goals. Regardless of ideology or political alignment, acts of terrorism have always been conducted with political goals in mind. When identifying ideologies in relation to terror attacks, four groups have been identified - right wing, left wing, nationalist/separatist and single issue terrorism. Nationalist/separatist groups are ones that are driven by a pursuit for independence or greater autonomy from an existing territory. They usually conduct attacks which limit civilians casualties as their goal is to attract people to their cause. Attacks from these kinds of groups are usually more focused on targeting those with power in an attempt to make them withdraw or make concessions. For my paper, I want to focus on one such separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil being a separatist group, instead stating themselves as "fighting for self- determination and restoration of sovereignty in what it recognized as its homeland". While the LTTE does not identify as a separatist group, it has the characteristics of one as it clearly wanted to set up a separate state for the Tamils. This paper focuses on how the LTTE used means of terrorism to spread their political agenda and the state response they elicited during and after their reign.

The study is important as it seeks to examine the responses from a state when faced with terrorism. Terrorism is not a new concept, most of us are familiar with the reasons as to why and how it happens regardless of the variety of types of terrorisms. The paper studies the direct response to terrorism not only on a country's government, but on the citizens and international community as well. For the case chosen, the threat of terrorism comes from within the nation itself. Acts of terrorism are perpetrated from actors within the nation, not an external threat. This study, by focusing on the single case of the LTTE, aims to highlight the governmental response by looking at actors and outcomes of this particular case.

Author: Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts, India.
e-mail: tiara.biswas@ssla.edu.in

II. Literature Review

The empirical study conducted by Sarvananthan (2018) distinguishes the semantics between terrorism and liberation, using LTTE as a case study. The argument made by this paper is that the LTTE may have initially been a liberation movement, but due to the tactics and methods adopted by it, it soon escalated into a terrorist movement. Some of the characteristics that marks it as a terrorist movement are (i) armed struggle was based overwhelmingly on acts of violence, devoid of mass mobilisation, political agitations and popular participation, (ii) support of the masses was seeked out through persecution rather than persuasion, (iii) deliberate targeting of unarmed civilians, (iv) reliance on suicidal armed attacks, (v) recruitment and employment of children in combat and (vi) internecine war against members of its own community. After Prabhakaran assumed sole leadership of the LTTE in the early 1980s, he wanted to be the sole representative for the Tamil struggle and began prosecuting other Tamil Liberation groups. This caused a rapid decrease in the public support towards the LTTE. The central argument of this paper is that, based on the six criteria above, LTTE was a terrorist organisation,that initially started as a liberation movement. This study helps support my claims that the LTTE was indeed a terrorist organization, even though they did not choose to call themselves one.

In this paper (De Votta, 2009), the author studies the history and tension between the Sinhalese and Tamils of Sri Lanka, the birth of the LTTE and the Sinhalese government indirect role in the radicalisation of the Tamil youth. Up till the independence of Sri Lanka, Tamil elites had always viewed themselves ethnically equal to the Sinhalese. Due to their small numbers as well, the Tamils called for equal political representation between themselves and the Sinhalese. This unity was rocked in 1956 when Bandaranaike asked to make Sinhalese and Tamil the national languages of the country but instead embraced only Sinhalese last minute to win the elections. This was the beginning of the ethnic outbidding the Tamilian minorities would face.

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Incidents which would rule out the Tamil minorities became a trend, thus making the quest for a separate eelam (state) inevitable. The LTTE was established initially as the the Tamil New Tigers in 1972 but later on changing its name to the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam by 1976. Under President Jayawardene's government, the Tamil diaspora began. Tamil homes had been looted and destroyed and many Tamil women raped. Tamilians began seeking refuge in India and other countries. This diaspora further strengthened the need for an eelam. Rebel groups grew stronger in numbers. The LTTE, in particular, went from being the Tamilian's saviour to their cause of distress. The LTTE's need for control over all rebel groups was the start of their downfall. Along with this, they began enlisting children and women for their cause due to the quick decline of trust in them by the Tamilian minority.

The paper (Stokke, 2006) examines LTTE's idealized state structure and their political plans for reorganising the state. This paper was published before the downfall of the LTTE, thus putting issues in a different context. The eelam state planned to focus on three key areas : security, welfare and economic development. The Tamil Eelam judicial system had included district courts for civil and criminal cases as well as two high courts in Killinochi and Mullaitivu. The penalties were strict, from fines to to jail terms but also including capital punishment in rare cases. The other institution for maintaining law and order was the Tamil Eelam Police, formed in 1991. LTTE representatives said that the Tamil Eelam Police were responsible for the low crime rates in the northeast, however, it is argued that the low crime rate was a result of the authoritarian methods adopted by the LTTE. These authoritarian methods were the reason LTTE quickly began to lose support amongst the tamil population as they were extremely hard handed in nature. These methods were not well received by the tamilian population, and the tamils began questioning whether the LTTE's vision for an eelam was worth all the trouble.

The LTTE began to enlist women and children once they began losing the confidence of the masses. Many women were enlisted as suicide bombers, it was considered a position of honour as one was dying for their country and a great cause. This "elite squad" of suicide bombers were called the Black Tigers. It cannot, however be denied that the LTTE did propagate female empowerment and uplifting of the woman's status (Dissanayake, 2017) regardless of the agenda behind it. Prabhakaran regularly attributed the success of the movement to the women. Prabhakaran's pro-women comments also served strategic purposes, it encouraged existing female members to be more proactive and dedicated towards the cause and secondly, it allowed the LTTE to recruit more women while propagating gender equality.

The defeat of the LTTE has been the only relief the Sinhalese citizens have experienced in a long time. Even then, they struggle to relish it. Sri Lankan citizens who took part in the war still seem to be disappearing (Candela & Aldama, 2016). The following is one such incident, Thaya Malar's son returned home after the war ended. But one night, he disappeared. The mother believes that the Sri Lankan Army had something to do with it. She even wrote a letter to then President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, but received no response. After the war ended, nearly 300,000 Tamils who had been enlisted in the fighting by the LTTE, were detained by the state (Ganguly, 2016). As non-militant families began to return to their villages, many found that their homes had been destroyed or were part of military zones. Many became refugees due to this. Post war, signs of progress were everywhere. New roads were paved, bridges rebuilt. However, people despaired over the Sinhalese triumphalism that followed the defeat of the LTTE. Rather than aiming for national reconciliation, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his government behaved as if it was not the LTTE that was defeated, but the entire Tamil population (Ganguly, 2016).

> "The army set up numerous checkpoints in Tamil areas and instituted intrusive surveillance. Tamils lived with the constant threat of arbitrary arrest and abuse. They spoke of the ubiquitous white vans, civilian vehicles used by security forces to abduct suspected LTTE supporters, who were then brutally tortured in custody. Memorials to fallen LTTE fighters were reduced to rubble and commemorations were banned." Sri Lanka After the Tigers, (Ganguly, 2016).

The current President, Sirisena, has reversed a lot of these abusive practices. The once dominant culture of surveillance and censorship is being done away with, the violation of human rights have been acknowledged. Some constitutional reforms initiated by the new government is the establishment of constitutional council and restoring the independence of the judiciary, police and human right commissions. Sirisena's government is trying to be more accountable and proactive towards both sides of the parties who have suffered losses, that is, the Tamil minorities and the Sinhalese. However, there is still a lot of work to be done. Sirisena's government has taken a lot of strides towards state reform, but it has just touched the tip of the iceberg. (Ganguly, 2016).

The Sri Lankan government used various strategies to win the civil war. Some of the successful strategies are as follows. First of all, the strategy adopted had to be appropriate towards the cause. For the initial 22 years of the civil war, the government made use of military strategies. This strategy was not as successful as anticipated because the LTTE was at its peak. Negotiations were made with the LTTE five times,

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but no progress was made, leaving the LTTE in an even better position to defeat government forces. To succeed, the Sri Lankan government had to enlist a strategy well suited towards it adversary. This strategy had the following characteristics - (i) it combined diplomacy, economics, military actions and information operations, (ii) it considers the development of the capabilities the nation needs to succeed. The new government agreed upon discontinuing previous strategies that had failed their predecessors, adopting a whole - of - nation grand strategy to guide lower level activities. LTTE's principal problem was it's limited manpower base. Along with this, by 2005, LTTE's legitimacy was declining because of it's heavy handed methods such as the use of suicide bombers and attacking of soft targets. Keeping this all in mind, the government aimed to isolate the LTTE. The LTTE used to get 60% of its funding and military equipment from offshore. This succeeded over time and the group was banned in over 32 countries. Internally, the government set out to gain public support. By 2006, majority of the civilians were war weary and doubtful of the LTTE's vision. The government promoted this sentiments, along with gaining favour of the public. This was done through continuing development activities alongside financing for the war. Doing both simultaneously was difficult and the government enlisted a lot of foreign financial help. By continuing developmental activities, the government gave a sort of hope to the civilians that there was more to look forward to beyond the war. These activities addressed the poverty rampant in the nation through national schemes, for example, the poor farmer fertilizer subsidy scheme, These measures proved quite favourable. The increased budgets and popular support allowed th Sri Lankan forces to grow dramatically. Earlier, the army had difficulty recruiting 3,000 soldiers annually; by late 2008, the Army was recruiting 3,000 soldiers a month. (Layton, 2015)

These operations also proved successful because of the personnel used. These operations enlisted small, well-trained, highly mobile groups. These groups infiltrated behind the front lines attacking high-value targets, providing real-time intelligence and disrupting LTTE lines of resupply and communication. The combination of the government's direct offensives and this infiltration proved a deadly combination for the LTTE. The LTTE forces lost their freedom of maneuver, were pinned down and could be defeated in detail.

This small group of trained peoples was called the Special Infantry Operations Team (SIOT) operating closer. The SIOT was capable of attacking LTTE military leadership targets, removing experienced commander where they were most needed and causing considerable disruption to the inflexible hierarchical command system. When the Eelam War IV had begun there 1,500 trained SIOT troops, by 2008 there were more than 30,000. The army began training in complex jungle fighting operations, making the soldiers more capable and professional. The LTTE was one of the few insurgency groups that had a capable army. During Eelam IV, the Navy with the help of India and the U.S, used intelligence and innovative tactics to strike at the LTTE's transport ships. These ships were responsible for most of their military equipment. The adoption of the above mentioned strategies allowed the government to successfully overthrow the LTTE. These strategies mostly focused on having an optimised military, focusing on boosting morale of the civilians and going for the offence rather than waiting for the LTTE to. The government also succeeded as they began to change their strategies in response to what the LTTE was doing, whereas the LTTE stuck to their old tactics and methods. (Layton, 2015)

There was a mixed response to the LTTE's defeat in 2009 from the international community. Countries such as India, U.S, Japan, Germany and Britain were initially skeptical about the war's outcome when it peaked in 2006 (Uyangoda, 2010). Unlike the aforementioned countries, China, Pakistan and Iran were more consistent and reliable in terms of economic, political and military support towards Sri Lanka and its efforts against the LTTE. Besides defeating the LTTE, which was looking more and more possible with Sri Lanka's military offensive, the international actors were concerned with three issues they thought to be crucial. Firstly,early resettlement of of displaced Tamilians in and outside of refugee camps. Secondly, provisions for speedy humanitarian aid to civilians with international assistance, participation, and monitoring. Thirdly, implementation of devolution. The defeat of LTTE however, did not cease to put an end to the ethnic differences in Sri Lanka. The government is reluctant to relocate displaced Tamilians, and this disappointed the international community. The Sri Lankan government, rather than focusing on long term ethnic conflict resolution, is turning its eye towards concerns over national security. This is causing tensions between the West and Sri Lanka, as their priorities differ. While it is understandable as to why Sri Lanka would be excessively concerned over national security, ethnic tensions were one of the leading factors for the civil war. To prevent such a tragedy again, ethnic conflict resolution must be given a fair deal of attention.

III. Analysis

From the literature above, insight has been given as to how and why the LTTE did what they did and the government's response to it. For the longest period of time, the LTTE was just another insurgency group. However, they soon began indulging in characteristics which would label it as a terrorist organisation, such as the attacking of soft targets and enlistment of women and children in their ranks. The government has

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responded to the threat in various manners, during the various Eelam phases. Some have been successful, while some have drastically failed. Ultimately, with the defeat of the LTTE, government tactics and strategies alone cannot be given all the credit. By the end of Eelam IV, the legitimacy of the LTTE as a body had completely begun to be questioned.Once loyal supporters of the movement now did not agree with the LTTE's methods as they had strayed from the original vision. The LTTE's loss of support and the improvement of government tactics, is what, ultimately led to the victory of the Sri Lankan government.

LTTE considered itself a government and tried to operate as one. However, at the end of the day it was what is was, an illicit power structure in Sri Lanka. Its reign can be grouped into four phases., Eelam I (1983-87), Eelam II (1990-95), Eelam III (1995-2000) and Eelam IV (2006-09). Each Eelam phase involved a particular conflict and negotiation in response to the conflict. All phases of the Eelam also witnessed foreign involvement. LTTE's end, when it finally came after three decades of involvement could be attributed to a lot of variables. One of the causes was the LTTE being deserted and losing the favour of its foreign supports, in particular India (Marks and Pratap Singh Brar, 2016). What sets the LTTE case apart from other terrorists acts and organisations is the complexity of the case. Many countries and governments labelled the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. However, it initially started out as an insurgency and liberation movement rather than a terrorist one. Only when it began to use terrorism as it's main element rather than just a tool for recruitment, it duly earned the tag of being a terrorist organisation. At each phase of the Eelam, the Sri Lankan government failed to fully comprehend what it was involved it and thus couldn't counter strike effectively. Initially, it treated the movement as emerging terrorism, thus emphasizing on the response, rather than getting to the roots of the conflict. Later, having mastered counterinsurgency martial facets, it neglected the necessity of a holistic response, resulting in India's intervention. In the post-Indian context, the emergence of hybrid war—the blending of irregular and regular warfare with criminality and even (in its attempts to use chlorine gas in shells at one point) "WMD (weapons of mass destruction) warfare"—was mistaken for conventional conflict, resulting in devastating government defeats and LTTE's temporary victory. Finally, in the renewed 2006-9 fighting, a new civil-military team engaged in the functional equivalent of national mobilization and delivered a virtuoso display of integrating strategic, operational, and tactical levels of combat to deliver a knockout punch. This paper highlights how the government failed to see the LTTE for what it was, in some phases by overestimating it (such as in Eelam I) or underestimating it.

After two decades of fighting and four failed peace talks, a ceasefire was declared in December 2001. However, hostilities remounted by 2005, and war broke out again. The government wanted a permanent solution to the LTTE problem. They decided to take the offensive. However, the government did not always opt for this tactic. To understand how it ended up at this point, we will examine it's response towards the LTTE during all its Eelam phases.

Eelam War I (1983 - 1987)

Eelam war I was the initial stage of conflict between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil militant groups. The war officially started on July 23, 1983 when the LTTE launched a full blown attack on the Sri Lankan army in Jaffna. The Sri Lankan army fought back and this fighting continued till 1985. During 1985, the government tried to initiate talks of peace with the LTTE but they proved futile, and the fighting resumed. Due to Indian intervention, the Sri Lankan government was asked to put a halt on the offensive. India was supporting the LTTE at this point of time and was also responsible for shipping of materials. The Indian and Sri Lankan government convened to resolve this dispute. As a result of the negotiations, Sri Lankan troops withdrew from Jaffna and handed over the north of the country to Indian troops for peacekeeping. This brought an end to Eelam War I.

Eelam War II (1990 - 1995)

One of the indistinguishable characteristic of this phase was that it was incredibly brutal. In June 1990, the LTTE massacred 600 policemen after they had surrendered on promises of safe conduct. The government retaliated by bombing LTTE targets in the area. They also began to train and arm Home Guard Muslims units. The largest battle of the war happened in the following year, June 1991, when the LTTE surrounded the army's Elephant Pass base which gave them access to the Jaffna Peninsula. Both sides faced a lot of casualties and death, till the government arrived with more troops. This Eelam Phase wasn't a victory for the government. The LTTE managed to take out the Sri Lankan President, Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993. This, adding on to the various other soldier deaths deeply affected the morale of the Sri Lankan Army.

Eelam War III (1995 - 2002)

A new government was elected and Chandrika Kumaratunga became the President. The government, once again, tried for a cease fire which was violated by the LTTE. This led to the next phase of war, dubbed as Eelam War III. The new government then issued a "war for peace", determined to take control of the rebel Jaffna holdings. A lot of civilians were also caught in the crossfire during this phase.

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Violence continued in the north of Sri Lanka, LTTE suicide bombing were becoming more and more regular. The bombing of the Central Bank in Colombo, the bombing of the Sri Lankan World Trade center and the damaging of the Temple of the Tooth all led to the Sri Lankan government outlawing the LTTE. Governments over the world soon followed suit, and the LTTE was now considered a terrorist organisation rather than just an insurgent group. This law highly interfered with the LTTE's funding activities

Eelam War IV (2006 - 2009)

During this phase, the Sri Lankan government decided to pull of the cease fire with Tamil rebel groups, namely the LTTE.In the previous Eelam wars, the government attacked only when attacked, mostly striving for peace negotiations or a cease fire. During this phase the government decided to take the offensive, rather than waiting for the LTTE to attack. This phase would ultimately see the defeat of the LTTE and the long desired wait for peace.

All the phases, up until Eelam War IV had a recurring pattern, the government would only respond to attacks. They only attack when provoked. After the end of Eelam III, the LTTE was quickly losing support amongst masses due to the prevalence of violence and suicide bombing. This is when the government began to better their strategies and use the LTTE's weaknesses against them. They devised new tactics and focused on equipping their military with better training. Besides this, the government was also focusing on boosting the morale of it's civilians by focusing not only on the war, but also developmental activities.

Some of the successful strategies the Sri Lankan government shifted to are mentioned below. For the strategy to work, it had to be appropriate towards the cause. For the initial 22 years of the civil wars, the government heavily relied upon military strategies. However, this strategy was not as successful as one anticipated it to be. The Sri Lankan government followed this failure by trying to negotiate with the LTTE, but no progress was made on this front either. To succeed, the Sri Lankan government had to enlist a strategy well suited towards it adversary. For the first 22 years of the civil war, this was not the case. Eventually, by late 2005, a new government was elected which used strategies which played LTTE's weakness against them. LTTE's principal problem was it's limited manpower base. Along with this, by 2005, LTTE's legitimacy was declining. Keeping this all in mind, the government aimed to isolate the LTTE. This was done by controlling its funding which was done 60% from offshore. This succeeded over time and the group was banned in over 32 countries. Internally, the government set out to gain public support. By 2006, majority of the civilians were war weary and doubtful of the LTTE's vision. The government promoted this sentiments, along with gaining favour of the public. This was done through continuing development activities alongside financing for the war. Doing both simultaneously was difficult and the government enlisted a lot of foreign financial help. By continuing developmental activities, the government gave a sort of hope to the civilians that there was more to look forward to beyond the war. These measures proved quite favourable. Earlier, the army had difficulty recruiting 3,000 soldiers annually; by late 2008, the Army was recruiting 3,000 soldiers a month.

To carry out the strategy even further, the focus was on the weakness of the LTTE while negating its strengths. The LTTE's manpower was ever so limited, and could easily be overwhelmed with astute tactics. In this regard, the government had already won a major victory before the start of Eelam War IV which started in the mid 2006. In 2004, a senior military commander, Colonel Karuna, defected, bringing with him 6,000 LTTE cadres. The defectors provided intelligence which offered insights into the LTTE as a fighting organisation. For the first time, the government agencies had Lankan Tamilians willing to return to LTTE held areas, collect information and report back. This defection from the LTTE also highlighted that its legitimacy was being questioned.

At the start of Eelam War IV, the LTTE had access to operate throughout the country. This access was minimised by the government. The Sri Lankan government made use of its enlarged armed forces and police on internal tasks, and developed a Civil Defense Force of armed villagers. Operations were also conducted to discover and destroy LTTE operating cells within the capital and some large towns. This in depth defense neutralised the LTTE's leadership decapitation strikes and it's attacks on defenseless civilians.

The defensive measures taken in the south and west of the country enabled the Sri Lankan military strategy in the northern and eastern parts of the country to be more enemy-focused. The primary aim of this strategy was to attack the LTTE and force them onto the defensive rather than try to protect the population from the LTTE. The areas under LTTE control were accordingly attacked in multiple simultaneous operations to confuse, overload, tie down and thin out the defenders.

These operations also proved successful because of the personnel used. These operations enlisted small, well-trained, highly mobile groups. These groups infiltrated behind the front lines attacking high-value targets, providing real-time intelligence and disrupting LTTE lines of resupply and communication. The combination of the government's direct offensives and this infiltration proved a deadly combination for the LTTE. The LTTE forces lost their freedom of maneuver, were pinned down and could be defeated in detail.

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The Sri Lankan army was also trained in such a way that the end goal was the defeat of the LTTE. The army began training in complex jungle fighting operations, making the soldiers more capable and professional. The LTTE was one of the few insurgency groups that had a capable army. During Eelam IV, the Navy with the help of India and the U.S, used intelligence and innovative tactics to strike at the LTTE's transport ships. These ships were responsible for most of their military equipment. The adoption of the above mentioned strategies allowed the government to successfully overthrow the LTTE. These strategies mostly focused on having an optimised military, focusing on boosting morale of the civilians and going for the offence rather than waiting for the LTTE to. The government also succeeded as they began to change their strategies in response to what the LTTE was doing, whereas the LTTE stuck to their old tactics and methods. Thus, we can see, that by altering its strategies, the Sri Lankan government was able to defeat the LTTE. The LTTE stubborn approach to their once successful tactics also gave an edge to the Sri Lankan government.

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