



Journal of Contemporary Politics

Original Article

War Against the Tamil Tigers: How Did Sri Lanka Win?

M Mayilvaganan^{1,*}

¹Associate Professor, International Strategic and Security Studies Programme (ISSSP), National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28.02.2023

Revised 12.04.2023

Accepted 22.05.2023

Published 10.06.2023

* Corresponding author.

M Mayilvaganan

mayil@nias.res.in

[https://doi.org/](https://doi.org/10.53989/jcp.v2i2_7_Mayilvaganan)

10.53989/jcp.v2i2_7_Mayilvaganan



ABSTRACT

The final Eelam War that was fought during 2006 to 2009, the Sri Lankan State for the first time in the history witnessed the crystallisation of the trends in favour of it against the Tamil tigers or LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, also known as Tamil Tigers). With gradual liberation of north and eastern territory first that where under the clutches of LTTE for long and later dislodging Tigers' command control, in three years' timeline the Sri Lankan Armed Forces (SLAF) annihilated the Tigers entirely in May 2009. The victory of the SLAF brought three decade long armed conflict to an end that caused the death of over 100,000 and displacement of millions. While noticing the progress of the security forces and the way things unfolded, the pertinent questions that arise are: How did the Mahinda Rajapaksa government won the war? Was there a game plan with the government since the beginning of Eelam War IV? If so, what was that strategy? If not, how did they go ahead? Although there was no explicit publicly pronounced strategy by the Sri Lankan government for dislodging the Tigers but it appears their evolved game plan was broadly centered around ten points. They were: one, winning local constituency support; two, silence critics; three, build strong military, four, entice Karuna, five, shed conventional military methods; six, shrivel Tigers territories; seven, keep in loop but deter India; eight, diplomatic neutralise West; nine, curb Tigers's international network; and finally, liquidate Tigers' top leadership. The paper analyzes these aspects in details in this paper.

Keywords: Sri Lanka; LTTE; Tamil Tigers; Eelam; Rajapaksa

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka, by and large, was one of the countries that were in limelight often, thanks to the protracted conflict between ethnic minority Tamils and majority Sinhalese. Either the war between the parties or violence or peace talks or the migration of affected Tamil population to India and western countries as refugees had captured the headlines of the global media, which sustained the public interest on Sri Lanka.

The successive regimes at Colombo were adopting strategy of war and peace talks in dealing with the dominant Tamil group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The first phase of war, known as 'Eelam War I' was fought during 1983–1987, began with the LTTE's fatal assault on Sri Lanka army near Thirunelveli in Jaffna District, killing

13 army personnel in July 1983. Subsequently, there was a ceasefire with the intervention of India for the duration of 1987 to 1990. However, the change in Sri Lanka's domestic political landscape in the end of 1980s obligated India to withdraw its peacekeeping forces from the island. As a result, Eelam War II (1990–1995) broke out with the massacre of about 600 surrendered policemen by the LTTE in the Eastern Province on 11 June 1990. While the warring parties agreed for ceasefire in January 1995, the subsequent negotiations were unproductive, as a result, the Eelam War III (1995–2002) commenced with the LTTE blowing up two Navy gunboats, SLNS Sooraya and SLNS Ranasuru on 19 April 1995.

Later on 22 February 2002, the Sri Lankan Government under Ranil Wickremesinghe and the LTTE signed the



Ceasefire Agreement (CFA), which was facilitated by the Royal Norwegian Government. Part of it, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was worked out, which brought truce between the two parties. The Scandinavian countries monitored it. In addition, the Oslo Declaration was signed on 25 November 2002 by the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE in the presence of Mr. Richard Armitage, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Ms. Claire Short, UK Secretary of State, Mr. Yasuji Akashi, Japan Special Envoy and Mr. Jan Petersen, Norwegian Foreign Minister. Both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government agreed to explore a political solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking people, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka.¹

Meanwhile, in November 2005, Mahinda Rajapaksa won the Presidential election and with this there were fissures in CFA and peace talks between two sides. In line with his poll promises during the campaign that if he was elected to power, he will not recognise Tamil homeland or right to self-rule for Tamil areas as well will not agree to federal solution and continuing international mediation, Rajapaksa opted for war over negotiations when the LTTE seized Mavil Aru sluice gate. Thus, Eelam War IV started in 2006 and went on till 2009.

The paper focuses on the final phase war where much significant developments took place that necessitated detailed analysis. In fact, not only the observers but even the common public who are aware of the developments in Sri Lanka were pondering about: How does Sri Lanka under Rajapaksa dislodge the LTTE in 2009 whereas the previous regimes failed? Was there a game plan with the Sri Lankan government under Rajapaksa? If so, what was that strategy? What are the factors that contributed for the government's success against the LTTE?

THE BEGINNING — MAVIL ARU CRISIS

The approaches of the government at Colombo and the LTTE began hardened gradually after Mahinda Rajapaksa became President in November 2005. Incidentally, it became clear that the Rajapaksa government's main intent was to take on the LTTE militarily instead of continuing the peace talk that was facilitated by Norway between the earlier Ranil Wickremesinghe government and the Tamil Tigers. The Rajapaksa government's unwillingness to concede what the LTTE demanded in peace talks and the then President Rajapaksa electoral alliance with the hardline parties like JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) had apparently contributed for the government pro-war choice. [The LTTE has consistently demanded a separate Tamil homeland whereas the Sinhalese dominated governments were not even willing to devolve minimal powers to the Tamils. After the 2002 CFA the LTTE has shown willingness to accept autonomy in a notionally united Sri Lanka. Its

proposal for an Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) was summarily rejected by the political establishment].

Yet, it appears that there was no clear strategy with the then President Rajapaksa about how to go ahead militarily when CFA was in force. But, with the closure of Mavil Aru waterway sluice gate by Tigers in July 2006, the Rajapaksa regime had an opportunity to pursue military means. [The standoff over the Maavilaru waterway in Trincomalee district appears to begin with the closure of sluice gate by Tamils living in LTTE-controlled areas of Mutur East-Eechchilampattu on 22 July 2006 with the LTTE protesting against the reported insensitivity of the Sri Lankan government in addressing the drinking water problem of Tamils at Eachchilampattu. The blockade of the water canal stopped the flow of water to some 30,000 acres of ripe paddy fields and 60,000 people in nearby Sinhala settlements. The issue got aggravated when the Sri Lankan government began using military force to settle the issue]. Significantly, with the success at Mavil Aru, the government seems to have convinced itself of the efficacy of force in settling the issue instead of entering into negotiation with rebels amid the clandestine support from the breakaway Tiger group under Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan alias Colonel Karuna Amman or Karuna. Notably, with the adopted military approach rewarding the SLAF with the first success against the LTTE after CFA at Mavil Aru, thereafter, the government went ahead with its gradually drawn up multi-pronged game plan that was devised from time to time. The prominent strategies that evolved by the Mahinda Rajapaksa government which contributed for the military success against the Tigers are discussed in the subsequent sections.

DECODING SRI LANKAN STRATEGIES

Winning Local Constituency

The Rajapaksa government's foremost strategy was to win the local audience, especially Sinhalese and international community on its side to isolate and dislodge Tigers. Domestically Rajapaksa regime was successful in advancing and capitalising the national sentiments of the majority Sinhalese on its war against the LTTE. Rajapaksa's pro-Sinhala rural image and considerable support from the Sinhala hardliners — JVP, Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) — and Buddhist cleric helped him to win the majority Sinhalese. In fact, the LTTE's violent behaviour—the closing of Mavil Aru water way and air attacks on Colombo—gave a measure of credibility to the Rajapaksa government's justification for progressing with the war and gaining the local support. Significantly, a whopping 84% of the Sri Lankans had then approved the war strategy of the government, according to the opinion poll conducted by National Peace Council. [The National Peace Council (NPC) along with the MARGA Institute in Sri Lanka conducted the poll]. The public disillusionment of LTTE's suicide attacks on



senior Sri Lankan officials, including the defence secretary and places like Katunayake airport too provided credibility to the government's justification for military approach.²

Further, the then President Rajapaksa went ahead with agenda of gaining popular Sinhalese support through launching large scale recruitment for security forces apart from hiking pay for public sector and government employees. About 40 percent of top jobs that were filled had gone to the rural Sinhala segment of the population.³ These measures consolidated his support base where the benefitted southern Sinhalese stood loyal to his government's military approaches. Also, to demonstrate to the local constituency that he is keen on bringing development, Rajapaksa went ahead with the signing of deals with China on mega development projects like Hambantota Port and Hambantota Airport.

Politically, he created a jumbo cabinet by bringing in all the parties and independent members through either splitting the opposition parties or wooing many. This helped to ensure political stability. Mahinda Rajapaksa's determination as a political leader and the head of the security forces to go on with the battle till the military objectives were completely attained aided the defence forces' nuanced planning and war tactics. For instance, even after facing debacle like the Muhamalai where 120 soldiers were killed by the LTTE in just one day on 23 April 2008, he went ahead with bold decisions to pursue military means. Reportedly, he was part of the entire decision-making by personally attending all the security related council meetings every Wednesday. He posted his brothers and other family members in key positions, particularly, Gotabaya Rajapaksa as defence secretary; Basil Rajapaksa as political trouble-shooter, which helped to withstand enormous political pressure.

Silence Critics

While focused on winning the Sinhala population's support, the Rajapaksa made every effort to silence the critics and opposition parties who were against his policy through various means including adopting intimidation. This to an extent contributed for the government's uninterrupted 'peace through war strategy'.⁴ Particularly, he nudged the local media to cease the flood of negative reporting on the military operation and civilian casualties. Further, 'white van syndrome,' what is popularly called for a series of abductions and murders of critics such as media persons that allegedly includes Sunday Leader Editor Lasantha Wickrematunge that took place during the Eelam War IV are the case in point. Colombo Telegraph cites Amnesty International and reports that at least 15 journalists and media workers have been killed and 30 seriously injured since January 2006 to 2012.⁵ Apparently, white van without number plates' would come and then people vanish afterwards without mostly any tracing. Report states that it

was carried out in accordance with the orders of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the former Secretary of the Ministry of Defence.⁶ In fact, Gotabaya Rajapaksa in his interview to Daily Mirror acknowledges prevalence of white vans to "take in" suspects by the intelligence agencies.⁷

Also, Rajapaksa regime used all means to silence the voice of civil society groups by imposing new regulations⁸ in an effort to monitor and block any outflow of information of local condition to the outside world through them. The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that operated in the North and East of Sri Lanka was asked to leave or downgrade its staffs.⁹ The Sri Lankan Government's increased scrutiny and regulation on the humanitarian agencies through the established Parliamentary Select Committee and Presidential Task Force such as inquire into the activities of the NGOs and visa issuance for the foreigners were some cases in point.¹⁰

Build Strong Military

With gradual success in the military operations from Mavil Aru, the Rajapaksa regime understandably realised they need to increase the force strength to overpower the Tigers who were facing shortages of youth recruits in the Eastern Province. Consequently, his government made vigorous recruitment drives during the Eelam War IV; targeting 'patriotic' Sinhalese bachelors in Southern Sri Lanka aged 18-26. For instance, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence sent out campaign message such as, "young patriots — come join with our armed forces and be a part of a winning team."¹¹ Incidentally, in order to facilitate the rapid recruitment process, the qualification requirements were tweaked so that even with the lowest possible level one can join the army. Special walk-in interviews too were exclusively conducted in Sinhalese areas.

This was essential as the Sri Lankan military had an authorised strength of 120,000 personnel in 2005,¹² but losses in combat and desertion¹³ has kept operational strength much lesser than the above, according to news reports. To meet the LTTE's challenge, the Sri Lankan Army rapidly bolstered its strength up to 200,000 in 2009 with the Light Infantry, Sinha, Gemunu, Gajaba, Vijayaba units and the Sri Lanka National Guard absorbing most of the fresh recruits.¹⁴ The armoury and artillery, too, were boosted; this gave an unprecedented firepower for the SLAF. The Mechanized Infantry Brigade, Special Presidential Guard and Civil Defence Force (a new paramilitary unit from the East) were created newly within the army. Similarly, with the alleged Sri Lankan Muslims who speak Tamil were enrolled in the Army's special unit¹⁵ for surveillance activities. On 13 January 2009, Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka, the then Army Commander declared that "today the Army is strong with 180,000 personnel, whereas a few years ago, we had just 116,000 people. We elevated ourselves not just with man power but with well trained, sharp and skilled



professionals.”¹⁶

Ultimately, Rajapaksa regime strengthens its firepower by going for vigorous arms procurement.¹⁷ Tamil Net report dated 22 January 2005 claimed that the Sri Lankan Government had a defence deal with Iran through its USD 150 million credit line.¹⁸ Similarly, the Sri Lanka had several defence agreements with China including those for the supply of modern radar and large quantities of ammunition.¹⁹ As per Jane's Defence Weekly, Sri Lanka signed a confidential amount of about USD 37.6 million deals with China's Poly Technologies in April 2007 for ammunition and ordnance for the Army and Navy such as 120 mm mortar shells (70,000 rounds priced at USD10.4 million), 152 mm artillery shells (68,000 worth USD 20 million) and 81 mm high-explosive mortar bombs (50,000 priced USD 3.7 million), 14.5 mm cartridges (100,000 nos.), and RPG-7 rockets (2,000 nos.). Similarly, China National Electronics Import Export Corp provided JY11 3D radar for USD 5 million.

Pakistan too reportedly supplied a range of hardware, including the multi-barrel rocket launchers, Heckler and Koch G3 rifle (manufactured under license by POF) and 120mm heavy mortars.²⁰ The military hardware was also allegedly procured from Ukraine and Israel for the SLAF to considerably improve its operations.

These procured arms and India, China and Pakistan's special military training assistance had tremendous impact on the SLAF and its military victory against LTTE as it not only contributed for the modernisation of security forces but also helped to progress with the war with superior firepower.

Entice Karuna

While engaged in winning Sinhalese population in the South, the Rajapaksa's administration focused on enticing Karuna faction to secure their support in the Eastern Province primarily and the Northern Province subsequently. Apparently, the Sri Lankan Government's reading is that the former LTTE commander Karuna could be won as he had to protect himself against the LTTE and its chief Prabhakaran for breaking the organisation. As anticipated, Karuna switched his loyalty to the Rajapaksa government for his endurance protection and this certainly added value to government's goal.²¹ Incidentally, Karuna's allegiance to the Rajapaksa government not only gave the government safeguard but also in gaining political status where he was permitted to maintain his armed group's forces and subsequently his political faction Tamil Makal Viduthalai Pulihal (TVMP) become an alliance partner of ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) of Rajapaksa in the Eastern Province.²² In short, Karuna's TVMP ensured that the LTTE weekend with no substantially recruitment from the Eastern Province apart from sharing precise intelligence on the former boss and his strategies.

Shed Conventional Military Methods

The Rajapaksa regime through the Army Commander Gen. Fonseka conceived the military strategy that abandoned the conventional military tactics to match the Tigers' guerrilla tactics and strategies. Foremost, getting rid of the traditional war strategies gave a benefit for military to fight the LTTE on a multiple frontline. Second, Sri Lankan Police Special Task Force (PSTF) and a small Deep Penetrating Units (DPU) were deployed along with the Army in conflict zones. Three, Naval and Air Forces personnel were entirely deployed in support of the ground operations at the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

A small Tamil speaking Eastern Tamils of Karuna group and Muslims who are familiar with the terrain and landscape were apparently used to their advantage in their attacks. The increased numerical strength and fire power of the SLAF aided in launching surprise ambushes and raids and sabotage of a vulnerable target.

Interestingly, the Sri Lankan Army espoused an offensive approach, whereas, the LTTE adopted defensive approach owing to significant challenges of new recruitments and earlier huge losses in the 2004 Tsunami. Evidently, even before the beginning of final phase of war in 2006, the then President Chandrika Kumaratunga's on 30 December 2004 said "the threat of war is remoter (sic) than on December 25 (the day before the Tsunami) because the LTTE has suffered heavy casualties, if not anything else."²³ In her assessment the LTTE had lost almost all its main naval bases on the North-eastern coastal belt and elucidate that the casualties in LTTE as "very high."

Also, the breakup of eastern commanding faction by the Karuna and subsequent dearth of new recruitments for the Tigers had put it in defensive mode. Evidently the validation of above assertion was confirmed by the reclusive Colonel Karuna in his interview to the BBC's Colombo correspondent Roland Buerk where he candidly stated "by leaving the LTTE, they have lost 70% of their fighting capacity."²⁴

Shrivel Tigers holdings

The Sri Lankan government's priority under Rajapaksa as president was to win militarily first, then to talk about political question later on its own terms. Hence, the then President Rajapaksa was keen to shrivel territory's that were under Tigers control in order to force the political solution on his own term after major battle gain. In line, the Rajapaksa government moved forward with military option when Tigers blocked the Mavil Aru water canal near Muttur on 21 July 2006. The Tigers' misconstrue provided opportunity for the government to move ahead with its plan to test its capability against the LTTE. With the triumph in Mavil Aru, government designed plan to liberate the Eastern Province first from the clutches of the LTTE, thereby, weakening its



ability to operate and regroup in the eastern part of the island.

In accordance, the security forces carried out a pre-emptive assault and captured Muttur on 5 August 2006, Sampur on 4 September 2006, [Another reason for launching offensive at Sampur was that the Sri Lankan government concern about the strategically crucial navy base in Trincomalee which was reportedly under grave threat from LTTE's Sampur base, induced to launch offensive and captured it. This was the first ever territorial change in Sri Lanka after the 2002 CFA] Vaharai on 19 January 2007 and Thoppigala—the last pocket of influence of the Tigers in the East—on 11 July 2007. In accomplishing this, the government adeptly roped in the Karuna faction; indeed, the military victories in the East are largely credited to the inputs provided by the Karuna faction about LTTE tactics.

As the government achieved its objective in the East, in early 2008 it devised a chart to bring about a democratic set up before moving to northern front. This move becomes necessary for the government to effectively nullify the international community criticism and pacify the local Tamils. Accordingly, a democratic administration headed by Chief Minister Sivanesanathurai Chanthirakanthan alias Pillaiyan of TMVP was set up. The TMVP was rewarded in keeping with government's concern to ward off Tigers' regrouping as well to instil and draw Eastern Tamils confidence on Rajapaksa government. A former terrorist group leader giving up arms and successfully entering the mainstream politics and embracing democracy in a meaningful way in Eastern Province was demonstrated as a good example to the domestic and international audience.

With victory in the East, SLAF under Rajapaksa formulated its ensuing military strategies on the Northern front. Accordingly, few important stratagems that were adopted are:

- Clear A9 Highway
- Operations from West to East - deny access to western sea
- Operate Navy and Air Force concurrently

Clear A9 highway

After liberating the East, the government set its focus on clearing A9 highway. The strategy was to get land access to Jaffna that can facilitate troop's movement as well as to cut off the comfort of Tigers' funds generation through tax and their movement. In consistent with the above plan, Sri Lankan government closed A9 highway at Muhamalai in August 2006.²⁵ The closing of A9 highway was the biggest loss for the LTTE as the revenue that it got through toll tax reduced considerably that was one of the important source of domestic finance for sustaining the Tigers. Incidentally, while the sealing off A9 highway affected the population and essential service movement, government continued the blockade.

Operations from West to East

As far as the north is concerned, the SLAF military tactics was that it will move from the West of the island i.e. Mannar, Vavuniya, & Jaffna towards the Eastern areas of Mullaitivu and Killinochchi which was evident through the operations took place from 2007 to 2009. The two most important objectives of this tactics was to deny the western sea access to the LTTE and thereby averting their escape to Tamil Nadu and next, also, can prevent the fleeing of affected Tamils to India as refugees, which could flare up political momentum in Tamil Nadu against Colombo.

The 57th Division of the Sri Lankan Army on March 2007 marched from Vavuniya to Killinochchi, while 58th Division launched its operations from the Silavathura area in Mannar to Killinochchi through the annexed Poonaryn. Equally, the 53rd and 55th Divisions of the Army consolidated Elephant Pass and Chalai and moved towards Killinochchi.²⁶ On 2nd January 2009, Killinochchi, the de-facto administrative and political capital of the LTTE was captured by Sri Lanka Army. It was a big blow to the Tigers' mobility. Contrary, the occupation of Killinochchi enabled the government to re-establish its control over a vital highway linking the northern Jaffna peninsula with the rest of the country.²⁷ The LTTE was left out with small territory of Mullaitivu, where they retreated along the northeastern coastal district.

Operate Navy and Air Force concurrently

The triumphed government determined to continue its operation as per the devised strategy through using Navy and Air Force to deny access to the Tigers and in inflicting damage to the LTTE strong base Mullaitivu while the military's DPU permeated into Forward Defence Lines (FDL) in Mullaitivu. Sri Lankan Government on 25th January 2009 made it publicly that its troops had entered Mullaitivu, the last major rebel bastion. With this the LTTE was confined to a small area, between Vishwamadhu and Puthukkudiyiruppu. Finally, on 18 May 2009 the Sri Lankan Government declared that the LTTE was defeated at Vellamullivaikal, near Nanthikadal lagoon and its chief Prabhakaran was killed. This brought Eelam War IV in particular and protracted armed conflict in general to an end.

Keep in loop but deter India

Sri Lanka quiet sure that while focused on domestic factors it is the India factor that could make influence in the course of battle outcome for the Colombo's efforts. In line, the Rajapaksa Government even as kept engaging New Delhi, it deterred proactive approaches of India by bringing in China card strategically. In a sense, Sri Lanka listen to India's concern on war and proposed ceasefire options and even received Indian delegation and engaged at top political leadership level but continued its arms procurement and engagement with China, Pakistan and other countries. By



means of placing higher demand for lethal weapons to New Delhi, Sri Lanka also put India on back foot as the latter can't cater to the Colombo's need and hence, advocated their need for approaching China and Pakistan. It was like 'give us the weapons that we need or please keep away, we can find help elsewhere.'

The long-standing Indian policy of ensuring welfare of minority Sri Lankan Tamil community along with the reminder of assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the alleged LTTE members kept India in catch-22 situation. The Rajapaksa regime skilfully used this predicament of India to their favour. It was because Rajapaksas realized that keeping India aligned to Colombo's military objectives in its battle against the LTTE was important and doesn't want any sort of repetition of 1987 episode. As expected, tactful India who cannot supply everything that Colombo asked but provided some weapons, training and intelligence sharing and kept away from engaging the LTTE messengers.

In fact, it was the India's tactful support that contributed for the Sri Lanka's success against the LTTE.²⁸ While there was uneasiness between New Delhi and Colombo on various issues time to time such as Sri Lanka's military cooperation with Pakistan and China to human rights, it was the India's silence and diplomatic approval of the Sri Lanka's stratagem that aided the SLAF advancement in dislodging the LTTE leadership.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa acknowledged this in this statement "the manner in which President Rajapaksa tackled India was a key factor of our military success. We knew that only India influences us militarily. India is a huge power in our neighbourhood and our proximity to Tamil Nadu with 60 million Tamils sensitive to what's going on in Sri Lanka made the situation extremely complex for us. We knew that while other countries could or would resort to economic sanctions, only India had the power to militarily influence the course of our war operations. So it is to the credit of President Rajapaksa that he was successful in keeping New Delhi aligned with Colombo's military objectives."²⁹

Managing Tamil Nadu Factor

The Colombo was aware of New Delhi's sensitive to the concerns of Tamil Nadu government and its coalition partner, the DMK's regard to civilian casualties in war, hence, then President Rajapaksa regime ensured that they will always resemble amenable to the New Delhi's view while on ground it could differ. For instance, on 27 April 2009 when the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) went on a sudden fast at the Anna Memorial in Chennai demanding ending of the Sri Lankan offensive in the North, the Rajapaksa regime immediately announced that it is ceasing the combat operations and shelling. As a result, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister ended his fast in six hours' time.³⁰ This was a classic

example of Rajapaksa regime diplomatic tactics with India and towards Tamil Nadu.

Neutralize West

While kept India in loop, the Rajapaksa regime disengaged the service of Norway and other western powers in Sri Lanka by making it clear that they are not interested in progressing with peace talks. Sri Lanka also indicted that Norway and the EU were supporting the Tigers through CFA and peace talks³¹ as a reason for snubbing the mediators.

Sri Lanka was successful in advocating the danger of giving breathing space to the Tigers who had generally used it only for regrouping and continuing the conflict, which the Western government began acknowledging with the silence of India, close neighbour. Brian Stewart states that "there was consensus that anything that ended Sri Lanka's brutal, on-and-off-again civil war would be far better than letting the conflict continue,"³² which produced hundreds of thousands of refugees so far.

Curb Tigers' International Network

The Sri Lankan government put its energy and effort relentlessly to get LTTE proscribed internationally by taking the fight against LTTE as part of the global war on terrorism. In fact, the Rajapaksa government successfully used the 'terrorism' card effectively in the changed global scenario after 2001 September attack at New York. The narration of 'Tigers' that they are freedom fighters who are fighting for the liberation against Sinhalese oppressive domestic regimes didn't succeed much in 2005 afterwards as the world has increasingly tightened their approach towards groups that employed terrorist means. Sri Lanka believed that there is a necessity to counter LTTE propaganda and activities internationally to achieve its strategy locally.

The LTTE that was proscribed over the years by countries like India (1992) and the U.S. (1997) with the list of assassination of two heads of state straightforwardly fitted into the Colombo's narration in appealing the Western countries. As a result, the Sri Lankan government under Rajapaksa was able to curb the Tigers' international network that was deemed as lifeline of rebels. The LTTE's network from Canada to Australia that engaged in fund-raising, weapons purchase, narcotics dealing, and credit card frauds, etc. were brought under the surveillance and gradually confiscation of the money and materials by various countries. The U.S.,³³ Canada,³⁴ UK,³⁵ France, Italy and many others have arrested and prosecuted LTTE agents. Consequently, the Tigers funding and activities had suffered tremendously. As a result, the Sri Lanka succeeded in isolating the LTTE diplomatically and financially and thereby curtailed its \$200 million per year fund-raising network.³⁶ The draining of funding and global diplomatic support eroded its combat potential.



Mission Mullaitivu - Liquidate LTTE leadership

The Sri Lankan government's decision to pursue military strategies was clear since 2006 but apparently the Rajapaksa government didn't have a plan of eliminating the LTTE leadership at first. This objective was stepped-up with the pace of the triumph by Sri Lanka Army. While the LTTE's principal negotiator, S.P. Tamilselvan, was killed on November 2007 in an air raid, the fall of Killinochchi and then Mullaitivu boosted the Rajapaksa's buoyancy that they can certainly liquidate the LTTE chief Prabhakaran. That's why Sri Lankan Government didn't agree for ceasefire demand of the LTTE or of India that came from Tamil Nadu in 2008-2009 periods. In the end, the LTTE chief was announced as dead by the Sri Lankan government on 18 May 2009³⁷ through its operation.

INFERENCE

The decoding of Sri Lankan Government's strategy against the LTTE, the pertinent question that arises is, was there a clear strategy when Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected in 2005? Simple straight answer looks, 'No.' But, apparently, the Army got a green signal to plan its future battle approach by looking into its past battle experiences. As a result, Sri Lankan Army studied all its previous war operations such as Eelam War I (1976-1987), Vadamarachchi Operation, Eelam War II (1990-1995), Operation Sea Breeze, Operation Thrividha Balaya, Operation Balavegaya I, II, Eelam War III (1995-2002), Operation Riviresa, Operation Jayasikurui, Operation Rivibala, Operation Ranagosa, Operation Rivikirana, and Operation Kinihira I, II, III/IV, V/VI, VII, VIII, IX. This exercise aided the Army to arrive at conclusive reasons for their previous failures and helped in identifying the 'slip-up'.

The constant defensive military approaches, meagre military personnel, vast desertion of soldiers, inadequate firepower (arms and ammunition), and dearth of human intelligence (scarcity of Tamil informers) are some of the supposed finding of the study. The lack of strong political backing too could be one of the identified judgments it appears that.

Consequently, the Sri Lankan Army must have gone ahead with drawing up a multi-pronged approach for combating Tiger when it received strong political backing from Mahinda Rajapaksa. As a reason even when the Sri Lankan Government came under criticism of disregarding Tamil civilian and employed military force "bluntly and brutally," the Army was not called back from its operations. The Rajapaksa regime's conviction was that military victory should have achieved before looking up at peace talk or political solution. Their diplomatic tactics of keeping India in loop but deter it and employing LTTE's 'terrorism' card with Western nations paved way for navigating the geopolitical dimension successfully.

In short, the Rajapaksa regime got the strategy right from the time of Mavil Aru to the Mullaitivu operation, which

is today hailed as the best counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism strategy by them.

REFERENCES

1. Sambandan VS. Hopes and hard facts. 2003. Available from: <https://frontline.thehindu.com/world-affairs/article30214880.ece>.
2. NGO poll: 84% approve Sri Lankan government's war strategy. 2007. Available from: <http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2007/9/19054.html>.
3. Defeating Terrorism – Why the Tamil Tigers Lost Eelam; And How Sri Lanka Won the War. 2011. Available from: https://jinsa.org/archive_post/defeating-terrorism-why-the-tamil-tigers-lost-eelam-and-how-sri-lanka-won-the-war/.
4. Peace through war in Sri Lanka. 2007. Available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2007/6/1/peace-through-war-in-sri-lanka>.
5. Senewiratne B. Psychiatric Disorder: An Analysis of Gotabaya Rajapaksa. 2012. Available from: <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/psychiatric-disorder-an-analysis-of-gotabaya-rajapaksa/>.
6. Sriyantha R, Fernando L. White van driver, victim recall abductions, mystery of LTTE gold. 2019. Available from: <https://www.dailynews.lk/2019/11/11/local/202545/white-van-driver-victim-recall-abductions-mystery-ltte-gold>.
7. Bandara K. How can there be freedom without discipline? - Gotabaya. 2019. Available from: <https://www.dailymirror.lk/article/How-can-there-be-freedom-without-discipline-Gotabaya-162220.html>.
8. Colombage D. Sri Lanka accused of trying to gag NGOs. 2014. Available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2014/9/22/sri-lanka-accused-of-trying-to-gag-ngos>.
9. Sri Lanka Asks Foreign NGOs to Leave. 2009. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/en/sri-lanka-asks-foreign-ngos-to-leave/a-5211959>.
10. Harris S. Humanitarianism in Sri Lanka: Lessons Learned?. 2010. Available from: <https://fic.tufts.edu/assets/Sri-Lanka-Briefing-Paper.pdf>.
11. Chopra A. Sri Lanka: Death and desertion. . Available from: <https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/93198>.
12. Layton P. How Sri Lanka Won the War: Lessons in strategy from an overlooked victory. 2015. Available from: <https://thedi diplomat.com/2015/04/how-sri-lanka-won-the-war/>.
13. Sri Lanka: Whether military service is compulsory and if so, for how long; whether there are contractual arrangements made in the military for determined periods of time; penalties faced by deserters if they are caught; whether there is a public list of deserters; whether the army issues arrest warrants against deserters (2002-2007). 2007. Available from: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/47d6546028.html>.
14. Singh AK. Endgame in Sri Lanka. 2011. Available from: <https://satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume20/Article%206.pdf>.
15. Ferdinando S. How the war was won. 2009. Available from: <https://island.lk/2009/04/05/defence1.html>.
16. Tigers cornered. 2009. Available from: <https://www.dailynews.lk/2009/01/14/sec01.asp>.
17. No more hiding. 2009. Available from: <http://www.cassindia.com/fullarticle.asp?recno=191>.
18. Equitable aid distribution, focus of Pirapaharan, Norway meet. 2005. Available from: <http://tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=14046>.
19. Chinese arms, radar for Sri Lanka military. 2007. Available from: <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?artid=22366&catid=13>.
20. Sahni A. Reluctant Hegemon. *South Asia Intelligence Review*. 2007;5(48). Available from: http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/5_48.htm.
21. Reddy BM. Fall of Vaharai. 2007. Available from: <https://frontline.thehindu.com/world-affairs/article30190219.ece>.
22. Bandara K. Pillayan sworn-in as CM: Hizbullah threatens rebellion. 2008. Available from: https://web.archive.org/web/20080517073507/http://www.dailymirror.lk/DM_BLOG/Sections/frmNewsDetailView.aspx?ARTID=15072.
23. Doughty L. Stories of the Tsunami. 2005. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/mar/26/featuresreviews>.



- guardianreview1.
24. A date with a renegade rebel Tiger. 2007. Available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6524869.stm.
 25. Reddy BM. Undeclared war. 2007. Available from: <https://frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/article30191462.ece>.
 26. Shashikumar VK. Lessons from Sri Lanka's War. *Indian Defence Review*. 2009;24(3). Available from: <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/lessons-from-the-war-in-sri-lanka/>.
 27. Wickramasinghe N. Sri Lanka in 2008: Waging War for Peace. *Asian Survey*. 2009;49(1):59–65. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2009.49.1.59>.
 28. India behind Lanka's victory over LTTE: Book. 2009. Available from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-behind-lankas-victory-over-ltte-book/articleshow/4924585.cms>.
 29. Shashikumar VK. Nine Decisions that Helped Lanka Beat LTTE. 2009. Available from: <https://sangam.org/nine-decisions-that-helped-lanka-beat-ltte/>.
 30. Gunasekaran M. Karuna goes on sudden fast, ends it even faster. 2009. Available from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/karuna-goes-on-sudden-fast-ends-it-even-faster/articleshow/4453257.cms>.
 31. Hull CB. Sri Lanka says Norway out of peace talks after attack. 2009. Available from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-39022420090413>.
 32. Stewart B. Why the West ignored the Tamils' pleas. 2009. Available from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/why-the-west-ignored-the-tamils-pleas-1.788333>.
 33. Taming the Tamil Tigers. 2008. Available from: https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/stories/2008/january/tamil_tigers011008.
 34. Jeyaraj DBS. Trouble overseas. 2007. Available from: <https://frontline.thehindu.com/world-affairs/article30192215.ece>.
 35. Orr J. Police arrest three in Tamil Tigers inquiry. 2008. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/apr/29/ukcrime.uksecurity>.
 36. Apps P. S. Lanka Tigers run multi-million dollar empire – report. 2007. Available from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-28618620070723>.
 37. Weaver M, Chamberlain G. Sri Lanka declares end to war with Tamil Tigers. 2009. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/may/18/tamil-tigers-killed-sri-lanka>.

