

The LTTE in brief

Inception

-**Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam** (LTTE), commonly known as the **Tamil Tigers**, is a militant organization that has been waging a violent secessionist campaign against the Sri Lankan government since the 1970s in order to create a separate Tamil state in the north and east of Sri Lanka.



Velupillai Prabhakaran

-Founded in 1975, the LTTE attracted many supporters amongst disenchanted Tamil youth, who were dissatisfied with policies followed by successive Sri Lankan governments towards solving various concerns of the country's Tamil community.

LTTE and other Tamil militant groups

-Initially the LTTE operated in cooperation with other Tamil militant groups but later broke away from them and hunted them down. The reasons for the LTTE's internecine attacks on other Tamil groups are much debated. Among other reasons, it has also been suggested that they believed the struggle would only be effective if the other groups, who were much more willing to compromise on a settlement to the conflict, were not operational. The effect of the attacks was that the LTTE consolidated the position as the main military group fighting for the cause of Tamil Eelam, with no credible rivals.

Structure

-The LTTE is organized into two main divisions namely, a military wing¹ and a subordinate political wing. A central governing body oversees both of those divisions, which is headed by the LTTE founder and supreme leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

LTTE & politics

-The LTTE also has a political wing, but despite the ceasefire it has not tried to formally create a political party. Instead, in the 2004 parliamentary elections, it openly supported the Tamil National Alliance, which won over 90% of votes in the electoral district of Jaffna, in the Northern Province, although just 47% the total population cast their votes. The LTTE's commitment to multi-party democracy has also been questioned. In an interview in 1986, Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE, said that a future state of Tamil Eelam would be a one-party state rather than a multi-party democracy, because that would help it develop faster.

¹ Consisted of Sea Tigers (an amphibious warfare unit focusing on utilization of naval firepower and logistics, mainly consisting lightweight boats), Air Tigers (an airborne group, known to be the world's first air force owned & controlled by a organization proscribed as terrorists. It consists several lightweight aircrafts), Black Tigers (a suicide commando unit, responsible for large scale suicide bomb attacks against political, economic and military targets. It launched its first suicide attack in 1987 against a Sri Lanka Army camp, killing 40 soldiers), an elite fighting unit and a highly enigmatic intelligence unit which is operated internationally.

Hardly more than a military power

-Though the LTTE claims to carry out a number of civilian functions in the north of the island, especially the regions lying around the cities of Kilinochchi and Mulathivu, it is still the Sri Lankan government which supplies commodities to the LTTE held areas and pays many civil servants working there.

Recruitments

-Recruits in the LTTE are instructed to be prepared to die for the cause, and are issued with a cyanide capsule to be swallowed in the case of capture.

* Child soldiers

-The LTTE's use of children as front-line troops was proved when 25 front-line troops between the ages of 13 and 17 surrendered en masse to the Sri Lankan Forces. Amid international pressure, LTTE announced in July 2003 that it would stop conscripting child soldiers, but both UNICEF and Human Rights Watch have accused it of renegeing on its promises, and of conscripting Tamil children orphaned by the tsunami. Civilians have also complained that the LTTE is continuing to abduct children, including some in their early teens, for use as soldiers. Moreover UNICEF states that the LTTE has recruited 315 child soldiers between April and December 2006. According to UNICEF, the LTTE is known to be the world's worst perpetrator of child soldier recruitment and has recruited, since 2001, a total number of 5,794 child soldiers.



LTTE Child Soldiers

* Women



LTTE Women Soldiers

-The LTTE has a large number of female recruits. Female members are believed to make up between 20 to 30 percent of the LTTE's fighting cadre. An estimated 4000 women cadres have been killed since 1987, including over a hundred in 'Black Tiger' suicide squads. The assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi, the attempt on President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the 2006 attempt on the Sri Lanka

Army commander are notable instances where female LTTE cadres launched suicide attacks.

Dissention

-Prabhakaran is known to be a ruthless leader who does not tolerate dissention. He openly suppresses those who oppose his ideas, be it his closest allies (i.e. in 1994, he killed Mahattaya, a one time deputy leader of the LTTE), his own people (cf. p.5 for a list of Tamil intellectuals killed) or his enemies. In the biggest show of dissent from within the organization, a senior LTTE commander named Colonel Karuna broke away from the LTTE in March 2004 and formed the Tamil Eelam Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal amid allegations that the northern commanders were overlooking the needs of the eastern Tamils.

Links to other terrorist organizations

International experts have long suspected the existence of connections between the LTTE and other internationally designated terrorist organizations including al-Qaeda and the Taliban. These connections came under more detailed scrutiny as a result of 11th September 2001 attacks on the United States. Some of the incidents cited to prove these suspicions include:

** The similarities between previous LTTE attacks against Sri Lanka Navy ships and the al-Qaeda attack on the USS Cole which killed 17 US Navy sailors.*

** Evidence that the LTTE provided forged passports to Ramzi Yousef, the man who carried out the first attack against the World Trade Center in New York in 1993.*

** The smuggling of weapons by the LTTE from Islamics in Pakistan to their counterparts in the Philippines.*

** Allegations that the LTTE stole Norwegian passports and sold them to the al-Qaeda organization to earn money to fund their arms purchases.*

** Increasing intelligence reports that the LTTE was smuggling arms to various terrorist organizations using their covert smuggling networks, and findings by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies that they were building commercial links with al-Qaeda and other militants in Afghanistan.*

-Other security experts including Glen Jenvey, a specialist on international terrorism, have also claimed that al-Qaeda has copied most of its terror tactics from the LTTE. He highlighted the LTTE as the mastermind that sets the pattern for organizations like al-Qaeda to pursue. Some of the comparisons he used to draw his conclusions are:

** The LTTE invented the modern suicide bomber and deployed it against political, military, and civilian targets. Islamic groups copied the LTTE by carrying out similar suicide attacks.*

** The LTTE attack on the World Trade Centre in Sri Lanka was followed by attacks by al-Qaeda on the World Trade Center in New York.*

** The LTTE's use of a women's section has being copied by al-Qaeda and Chechen terrorists, for example the "Black Widows" who played a role in the Moscow theater hostage crisis and have carried out suicide bombings.*

** Attacks on civilians in buses and trains in Sri Lanka are similar to the al-Qaeda attacks on public civilian transport during the July 2005 bombings in London.*

Human rights and terrorism issues

The LTTE is labeled as a terrorist organization as part of a broader allegation that it does not have respect for human rights and that it does not adhere to the standards of conduct expected of a resistance movement or what might be called "freedom fighters". The accusation of terrorism is based in part on claims that the LTTE kills innocent civilians, recruits child soldiers, has been responsible for assassination of political figures and non-military officials, and extensively uses suicide bombers.

Attacks on civilians

-The LTTE has attacked non-military targets including commuter trains and buses, farming villages, temples and mosques resulting in large numbers of civilian deaths.

-Some of the major attacks resulting in dozens of civilian deaths include the Kebithigollewa massacre, the Gonagala massacre (54 dead), the Anuradhapura massacre (146 dead), the Dehiwala train bombing (56 dead), the Palliyagodella massacre (166 dead) and the bombing of Sri Lanka's Central Bank (102 dead). The LTTE claims that its attacks on purely civilian targets are collateral damage.



Kebithigollewa massacre



Even after the signing of the Ceasefire agreement in 2002, the LTTE has continued to carry out attacks against civilians. They murdered 6 Sinhalese farmers on 23rd April 2006 and killed a further 13 laborers on 29th May. In one of the deadliest attacks against civilians, a claymore antipersonnel mine attack by the LTTE on 15th June 2006 on a bus carrying 140 civilians killed 68 people including 15 children, and injured 60 others.

-On 14th August 2006, a convoy carrying the Pakistani High Commissioner Bashir Wali Mohamed, was attacked by another LTTE Claymore type directional mine concealed within a rickshaw, killing seven people and injuring seventeen. The high commissioner escaped unharmed.

Attempted attacks on civilians

-Heavy vehicles carrying large quantities of high explosives were caught at various check points throughout the nation during various times. The LTTE uses specially engineered secret compartments in lorries, tractors, vans and buses to hide the explosives. The following are the most recent attempted attacks on civilian targets:

* A lorry coming from Kilinochchi area was apprehended at Nikeveratiya with a deadly cargo of over 1000kg of C4 high explosives. The police claims that it is the single largest detection of explosives in history. The lorry was heading towards urban areas of Colombo. Compared to the 50kg bomb explosion at Central Bank (killed at least 91 and injured over 1,500 civilians), the explosive lorry was over 20 times more devastating.

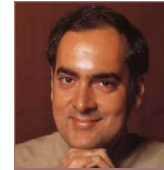
* The second high explosive laden vehicle was arrested on 30th June 2007 at Trincomalee. Over 1000kgs of C-4 explosives were hidden inside a freezer and were set to explode as soon as it is opened.

* Claymore mines were discovered at various points throughout the Island. Most mines were discovered due to the vigilance of locals, and were neutralized by Sri Lankan Army before they take their death toll. Some of those bombs were synchronized, i.e. planted at separate locations throughout the city but set to explode simultaneously. Despite of the Tamil nationalistic ideology of LTTE, those lethal bombs would have killed thousands of innocent civilians, both Tamil and Sinhalese.

Assassinations committed by the LTTE

The LTTE has long been accused of carrying assassinations of political rivals and opponents. These include:

- * Alfred Duraiappah, mayor of Jaffna (1975)
- * Rajeev Gandhi, Prime Minister of India (1991)
- * Ranjan Wijeratne, Sri Lankan cabinet minister and former general (1991)
- * Ranasinghe Premadasa, President of Sri Lanka (1993)
- * Gamini Dissanayake, Sri Lankan presidential candidate (1994)
- * Lakshman Kadirgamar, Sri Lankan foreign minister, lawyer and international humanitarian (2005)
- * Major Gen. Parami Kulatunga, third-highest ranking officer in the Sri Lankan Army (2006)
- * Nadaraja Raviraj, Tamil National Alliance parliamentarian (2006)
- * Chandrika Kumaratunga, President of Sri Lanka (failed attempt-2006)
- * Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka, Sri Lanka army chief of staff (failed attempt-2006)
- * Gotabhaya Rajapakse, Secretary of the Sri Lanka defense ministry (failed attempt- 2006)



Rajeev Gandhi



Nadaraja Raviraj

Indian courts have issued international warrants to arrest both Velupillai Prabhakaran and its intelligence chief Pottu Amman in connection with the killing of Rajeev Gandhi. The LTTE at first denied any involvement, but later issued a statement in June 2006 acknowledging it and calling the event a "monumental tragedy."

The LTTE's alleged victims have included unarmed Tamil politicians and civilian moderates who sought a peaceful solution to the Sri Lankan crisis. A few among them are:

- * Appapillai Amirthalingam, leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF-1989)
- * Vettivelu Yogeswaran, TULF politician (1989)
- * Sarojini Yogeswaran, mayor of Jaffna (1998)
- * Pon Sivapalan, mayor of Jaffna (1998)
- * Neelan Thiruchelvam, academic and TULF politician (1999)
- * Kethesh Loganathan, political activist and second chief of Sri Lanka Peace Secretariat (2006)
- * Selliah Parameswaran Kurukkal a Hindu priest (2007)



Sarojini Yogeswaran



Pon Sivapalan

Suicide bombing

-The LTTE has frequently used suicide bombers as a tactic. They pioneered the use of concealed suicide bomb vests, which are now used by many other organizations worldwide. The tactic of deploying suicide bombers was used to assassinate Rajeev Gandhi, who was killed in 1991 using a prototype suicide vest, and Ranasinghe Premadasa, assassinated in 1993.

-According to Jane's Information Group, between 1980 and 2000 LTTE had carried out a total of 168 suicide attacks on civilians and military targets. The number of suicide attacks easily exceeded the combined total of Hezbollah and Hamas suicide attacks conducted out during the same period.

Ethnic cleansing

-The LTTE has been blamed for forcibly removing (or "ethnically cleansing") Sinhalese and Muslim inhabitants from areas under its control, including the use of violence against those who refuse to leave. Most notably, the LTTE forcibly expelled the entire Muslim population of Jaffna with two hours notice in 1990. The LTTE are also accused of organizing massacres of Sinhala villagers who settled in the north-east under the dry lands policy.

Execution of POWs

-The LTTE have executed prisoners of war in spite of a declaration by the LTTE in 1988 that it would abide by the Geneva Conventions. Notably, the LTTE massacred most of the 400 to 600 police officers captured after their surrender to the LTTE in 1990. The LTTE also executed 200 Sri Lankan soldiers captured during an attack on the Pooneryn army camp, and hundreds of soldiers who had surrendered during the attack on the Mullaitivu army camp.

Extortion

-LTTE's need for resources is mostly fulfilled by the Tamils who reside outside Sri Lanka. There are charges that the LTTE coerces Tamil expatriates to give it money, by threatening the safety of their relatives or property in areas of Sri Lanka under its control. This involves pressurizing them to directly give it money, or to indirectly fund its activities by patronizing businesses connected with it (La 2004). In 1995, when the LTTE lost Jaffna, their international operatives were ordered to increase, by a massive 50%, the amount raised from Tamils outside of the island.

-During raids by the RCMP in Canada, the World Tamil Movement (an LTTE front organization) was found coordinating a number of illegal activities in order to control the Tamil diaspora in Canada. A report by Human Rights Watch outlines the intimidation and extortion Tamil expatriates experience from the LTTE.

"Ninety percent of people, even if they don't support the LTTE, they are scared. The killing doesn't just happen back home in Sri Lanka. It happens in Paris, in Canada. They burnt the library, they broke the legs of DBS Jeyaraj. They tried to stop CTBT radio from organizing. A journalist was killed in Paris. The threat is not only for Sri Lanka. It's everywhere, all over the world".

***Tamil community activist, Toronto,
January 2006***

"Some people also provide funds because they have family or property in Sri Lanka and fear negative repercussions against family members or even confiscation of their property if they do not give (...) I have a brother there[Sri Lanka]. I don't want him to get hurt. I'm going to do whatever they ask."

***A Toronto woman asked for funds by
the LTTE***

***Cf. Funding the "Final War" -LTTE
Intimidation and Extortion in the Tamil
Diaspora - Report by Human Rights
Watch, March 2006***

Criminal activities

-One factor that has benefited the LTTE greatly has been its sophisticated international support network. A significant portion of the funding obtained by the LTTE is obtained through criminal activities, involving sea piracy, human smuggling, drug trafficking and gunrunning.

*** Sea piracy**

-The LTTE are reported to hijack ships and boats of all sizes, and it is common practice for them to kidnap and kill the crew members on board the hijacked vessels.

-The LTTE has been accused of hijacking several vessels in waters outside Sri Lanka including the *Irish Mona* (in August 1995), *Princess Wave* (in August 1996), *Athena* (in May 1997), *Misen* (in July 1997), *Morong Bong* (in July 1997), *MV Cordiality* (in Sept 1997), *Princess Kash* (in August 1998) and *MV Farah III* (2007). When the LTTE captured the *MV Cordiality* near the port of Trincomalee, they killed all five Chinese crew members on board. The *MV Sik Yang*, a 2,818-ton Malaysian-flag cargo ship which sailed from Tuticorin, India on 25th May 1999 was reported missing in waters near Sri Lanka. The fate of the ship's crew of 15 is unknown. It is suspected that the vessel was hijacked by the LTTE and is now been used as a phantom vessel. A report published on 30th June 1999 confirmed that the vessel had been hijacked by the LTTE.

*** Human smuggling**

-Most of the smuggling of Tamil people to Western countries is done under the permission of the LTTE. The LTTE benefits greatly from smuggling of Tamil people for example, to Canada. It usually costs between \$10,000 and \$40,000 for a Sri Lankan Tamil to be smuggled to Canada illegally, with the usual cost running around \$20-25,000 dollars. Also, the people who are leaving Sri Lanka from Tamil Tigers controlled areas are ordered to pay a few hundred dollars for an "exit visa" by the LTTE. In addition to this, people with special skills or a greater wealth than ordinary Tamils may have to pay thousands of dollars to be entitled to leave.

*** Passport forgery**

-A passport forgery scheme uncovered in Canada in 1990 which was the first one to result in a Canadian conviction has also been linked to the LTTE. The perpetrators were Canadian Tamils who produced around 1,000 doctored travel documents before being caught. Another forger was uncovered in 1991, and was proven to have dealt with the LTTE after the phone number of Ontario's World Tamil Movement was found to be listed under -LTTE in his date book.

*** Drug trafficking**

-A number of international organizations and intelligence agencies have accused the LTTE of involvement in drug trafficking, and its history of drug smuggling that runs back to 1970s when Tamil smugglers (a group from which the leader of the LTTE and some of his key lieutenants originally emerged) started carrying heroin from India to Sri Lanka. When the traditional smuggling routes used by many Afghan/Pakistani opium and heroin producers became severely disrupted due to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Fundamentalist revolution in Iran, the Sri Lankan Tamils soon provided a new way of getting their drugs to markets elsewhere in the world.

-In addition to this, Tamils also started selling drugs in the Western Europe by 1984. Many Tamil heroin smuggling activities have been reported in many countries in the Europe including Italy, Switzerland, Poland, and France. One LTTE operative who was jailed in France for two years for heroin smuggling has later become the chief of their international operations.

-At the end of 1990s when the volume of heroin from south-east Asia was increasing, the Tamil Tigers again took advantage of this source too. The LTTE set up a naval base for their use on the Island of Twante, off Burma, the world's leading source for heroin from that part of the world. The LTTE have reportedly used their very own merchant ships from the shipping line that they own, to smuggle heroin into Europe.

* **Arms smuggling**

-Another one of LTTE's most secretive International operations is the smuggling of weapons, explosives, and "dual use" technologies to keep up with the military operations. The part of the LTTE responsible for these activities is given the nickname "*KP Branch*", taking the initials of its highest level operative, Kumaran Padmanathan. The workers for the *KP Branch* are outsiders from the fighting wing of the LTTE, since the identities of the those fighters are recorded and available to law enforcement and counter-intelligence agencies by India's RAW, who had helped train many Tiger cadres in the early 1980s. The *KP Branch* operates extremely secretly by having the minimum connection possible with the LTTE's other sections for further security. It finally hands over the arms shipments to a highly trusted team of the sea Tigers to deliver them to the LTTE dominated areas.

-In order to carryout the activities of International arms trafficking, the LTTE operates it own fleet of ocean-going vessels. These vessels only operate a certain period of time for the LTTE and in the remaining time they transport legitimate goods and raise hard cash for the purchase of weapons. The LTTE initially operated a shipping base in Myanmar, but they were forced to leave due to diplomatic pressure. To overcome the loss of this, a new base has been set up on Phuket Island, in Thailand.

Other crimes

-LTTE has also been accused of committing credit card fraud in a number of countries including India and the United Kingdom. In April 2007, the Sri Lankan High Commission in London, accused the LTTE of being behind a credit card scam. Similar crimes including organized crime, social security fraud, counterfeit currency trading, and satellite piracy are also associated with the name of the Tigers.

* **Pilferage of tsunami donations**

-The LTTE operates within two separate levels in their activities in the North America and Europe. The Tiger operatives are engaged in propaganda and lobbying aspects, as well as coordinating a myriad of fronts and charities to raise cash for the war. The Western countries are the main territory for fund raising activities of the LTTE. The money raised from donations and criminal enterprises are transferred into bank accounts of the Tigers and from there to the accounts of a weapons broker, or, the money is taken by KP operatives themselves.

-In May 2007, two Tamils with connections to the LTTE were arrested in Australia for raising thousands of dollars in Australia under the pretense of being for charities and aid for those affected by the 2004 Asian Tsunami, which killed 35,000 people in Sri Lanka, but instead using the money to fund the LTTE.

Proscription as a terrorist group

At least 32 countries have listed the LTTE as a terrorist organization. As of May 2007, these include:



- * *India* (since 1992)
- * *The United States of America* (since 1997)
- * *Malaysia*
- * *The United Kingdom* (since 2000)
- * *The European Union* (since 2006; representing 27 countries)
- * *Canada* (since 2006)

The UN has also passed Resolution 1373, asking member countries to identify and limit activities of any organization that carries out terrorist activities. The UN has not published its own list of terrorist groups, and has left their identification to the discretion of member countries. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also suggested that the LTTE should face travel curbs and other penalties if they keep using children as soldiers. In a 2006 report to the Security Council, Annan also recommended other sanctions such as arms embargoes and financial restrictions against the LTTE. Australia and other countries have listed the LTTE as a terrorist group in accordance with Resolution 1373. Canada does not grant residency to LTTE members on the grounds that they have participated in crimes against humanity.

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