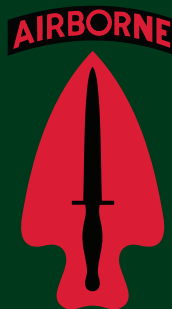


Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies

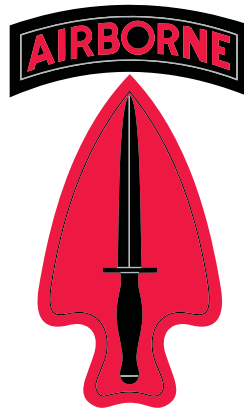
**CASE STUDIES IN INSURGENCY
AND REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE—
SRI LANKA (1976–2009)**



United States Army Special Operations Command

Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies

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AND REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE—
SRI LANKA (1976–2009)**



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The Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies (ARIS) series consists of a set of case studies and research conducted for the US Army Special Operations Command by the National Security Analysis Department of The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory.

The purpose of the ARIS series is to produce a collection of academically rigorous yet operationally relevant research materials to develop and illustrate a common understanding of insurgency and revolution. This research, intended to form a bedrock body of knowledge for members of the Special Forces, will allow users to distill vast amounts of material from a wide array of campaigns and extract relevant lessons, thereby enabling the development of future doctrine, professional education, and training.

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The purpose of the Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies (ARIS) series is to produce academically rigorous yet operationally relevant research to expand on and update the body of knowledge on insurgency and revolution for members of the US Special Forces. We began this work with a rigorous assessment of all known insurgent or revolutionary activities from 1962 through the present day. To conduct this assessment, we agreed on a basic definition of revolution or insurgency.^a For the purpose of this research, a revolution is defined as:

An attempt to modify the existing political system at least partially through unconstitutional or illegal use of force or protest.²

Next we developed a taxonomy to establish a standard structure for analysis and to facilitate discussion of similarities and differences. We classified events and activities according to the most evident cause of the revolt. The causes or bases of revolution were categorized as follows:

- Those motivated by a desire to greatly **modify the type of government**
- Those motivated by **identity or ethnic issues**
- Those motivated by a desire to **drive out a foreign power**
- Those motivated by **religious fundamentalism**
- Those motivated by issues of **modernization or reform**

After applying this taxonomy, we selected twenty-three cases, across the five categories above, to be researched for inclusion in the *Casebook on Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare Volume II: 1962–2009*.³ For each of the twenty-three revolutions or insurgencies, the casebook includes a summary case study that focuses on the organization and activities of the insurgent group.

Subsequently, we selected several of the cases for a more detailed treatment that would apply a broader and more holistic analytical perspective, considering factors such as the social, economic, historical, and political context. Within the ARIS research series, these studies are

^a The terms *insurgency* and revolution or *revolutionary warfare* are used interchangeably in the ARIS series. We adopted the term revolution to maintain consistency with the Special Operations Research Office (SORO) studies conducted during the 1960s, which also used the term. Many social scientists use an arbitrary threshold of battle deaths to delineate civil war from other acts of armed violence. Our definition relied on Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow's definition of contentious politics, activity that "involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties."¹

referred to as “ARIS Tier 1 Insurgency Case Studies.” This case study on Sri Lanka is one of these works.

PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study presents a detailed account of revolutionary and insurgent activities in Sri Lanka during the period from 1976 until 2009. It is specifically intended to provide a foundation for Special Forces personnel to understand the circumstances, environment, and catalysts for revolution; the organization of resistance or insurgent organizations and their development, modes of operation, external support, and successes and failures; the counterinsurgents’ organization, modes of operation, and external support, as well as their effects on the resistance; and the outcomes and long-term ramifications of the revolutionary/insurgent activities. This foundation will allow readers to distill vast amounts of material from a wide array of campaigns and extract relevant lessons, thereby enabling the development of future doctrine, professional education, and training.

Like all products in the ARIS series, this study examines revolutions and insurgencies for the purpose of identifying emerging trends in operational designs and patterns, including elements that can serve as catalysts and indicators of success or failure. Building on an understanding of the general characteristics of revolutionary movements and insurgencies, this study examines ways that organizations or groups adapt to overcome various environmental and contextual challenges.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

ARIS Tier 1 Insurgency Case Studies are organized in five major sections:

1. Introduction and Summary
2. Context and Catalysts of the Insurgency
3. Structure and Dynamics of the Insurgency
4. Government Countermeasures
5. Conclusion

This *Introduction and Summary* presents an introduction to the ARIS series and a brief description of how the content in each particular case is presented and ends with a synopsis of the case study on Colombia. Refer to the *Technical Appendix* for a discussion of the types of sources and methods that were used to gather and analyze the data, as well as any methodological limitations encountered in the research.

The section on *Context and Catalysts of the Insurgency* is divided into four chapters that address various aspects of the context within which the insurgency takes place. This section looks at the following elements:

- Physical environment
- Historical context
- Socioeconomic conditions
- Government and politics

The organization and inner workings of each of the primary insurgent groups are analyzed in the *Structure and Dynamics of the Insurgency* section. Each insurgent group or organization is discussed separately in this section, providing details on the various aspects of each group. This analysis considers various characteristics including the following:

- Leadership and organization
- Ideology
- Legitimacy
- Motivation and behavior
- Operations
- External actors and transnational influences
- Finances, logistics, and sustainment

The *Government Countermeasures* chapter examines the political, military, informational, and/or economic actions taken by the government and by external forces in support of the government to counter the efforts of the insurgency. This chapter is presented chronologically, broken down by separate political administrations or by significant counterinsurgency campaigns or initiatives.

The final chapter, *Conclusion*, provides observations about the aftermath of the revolution, considering questions such as the following: Did any of the revolutionary or insurgent groups succeed in changing any political, economic, or social conditions as attempted? What changes took place over the time frame of the study—to the government itself as well as to the movement (e.g., did the insurgent group disappear, become the ruling government, become a legitimate political party, etc.)? This chapter includes a discussion about which objectives or goals of the opposing sides were met and which were not and what compromises or concessions, if any, were made by either side.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

During the late 1980s, Sri Lanka was bedeviled by two vicious insurgencies, one of which nearly succeeded in overthrowing the ruling

government and destroying the political system, the other threatening the territorial integrity of the unitary state. The first insurgency was orchestrated by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front, or JVP), a communist movement that first threatened the state with an uprising in 1971 and then in the late 1980s unleashed a campaign of terror that nearly toppled the central government. A cell-based movement, the group relied on hit-and-run tactics, assassinations of key political and security officials, and economic sabotage carried out by undercover operatives in key economic institutions to wreak havoc throughout the island. Yet in an act of desperation in August 1989, the group miscalculated by issuing death threats against the family members of personnel in the armed forces, as it anticipated that such a measure would undermine the only institution preventing the disintegration of the central government. The response was swift and deadly, as the government stepped up a preexisting unconventional campaign using paramilitary forces to decimate the leadership and the rank and file of the group within a few months.

The second insurgency was led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), one of the most deadly and fanatical insurgent movements in recent memory. The late 1980s was truly a testing time for the Sri Lankan government, as it had to contend with both the JVP and the LTTE, and it also had to manage the extreme unpopularity among the Sinhalese masses of the presence of foreign troops in the form of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF), which was deployed to the island by virtue of a signed accord between Sri Lanka and India designed to end the ethnic conflict between Tamils and the central government. Yet the ethnic conflict had its origins in the early twentieth century as Ceylon (as the island was then known) was slowly shepherded toward self-rule by its British rulers. A series of pivotal decisions in 1956 and the early 1970s led to Tamil alienation over fears of economic disenfranchisement and fed the perception of a state-led campaign to obliterate Tamil culture. Path dependency eventually set in, as government concessions later in the conflict that may have earlier satisfied Tamil concerns (if fully implemented) failed to satisfy Tamil militants once the war for independence was under way and had acquired its own momentum. Twenty-six long years of conflict between the LTTE and the central government led to the deaths of thousands and the internal and external displacement of many more, and the final denouement in 2009 entailed a brutal and tragic military campaign that resulted in the death of the LTTE leader along with many noncombatants.

In the modern era, Sri Lanka's physical environment did not play as determinative a role in affecting events on the island as it did during the colonial era. The first two colonial interlopers, the Portuguese and

the Dutch, controlled the littoral areas of the island but were never able to subdue the mountainous Kandy region in the interior of the island. The Kandyan, adept at irregular warfare, used unconventional techniques to keep the forces of these two European powers at bay. It was the British in the early nineteenth century who conquered the entire island, yet initially the interior was won not through superior firepower and tactics but rather through guile and alliances with local notables who rebelled against an unpopular ruler.

Like the Kandyan, the LTTE also relied on irregular techniques to fight the forces of an outside power, this time in the form of Indian troops deployed to the island in the late 1980s. The latter embarked on a two-and-a-half-year counterinsurgency campaign that ultimately failed, despite the overwhelming number of Indian troops deployed, to subdue the much smaller and outgunned Tamil militant group. Yet terrain also played a more indirect role in the conflict. The port of Trincomalee on the east coast of the island features one of the finest natural harbors in all of Asia. During the British era, colonial planners in India feared that a hostile power would use the port to station naval forces to attack the Raj or disrupt sea-based communications between the east and west coasts of India. The strategic thinking of planners in independent India was similar, as they feared that the naval forces of an outside power (i.e., the United States) would be given access to the port, which in turn would limit India's diplomatic and military room for maneuver in a region it considered its "backyard."

Hence, in 1977, India became suspicious once a newly elected government in Colombo reoriented the country's foreign policy toward the west, and one of India's motives for supporting the LTTE and other militant Tamil groups during the 1980s was to punish Sri Lanka for its foreign policy reorientation, which, at a fundamental level, didn't sufficiently recognize India's heft in the region.

Given the path dependency exhibited by the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, any credible accounting of the conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese needs to account for the key historical precedents leading up to the outbreak of violence in the early 1980s. The political system that was ultimately bequeathed to Sri Lanka by the British did not feature an electoral system based on the principle of "communal representation," under which Tamils and other minorities would be guaranteed a set number of seats within the legislature in excess of their percentage of the total population. Disenchanted with this oversight, Tamils looked on in horror in 1956 as a new populist government, swept into power by a Sinhalese-Buddhist majority population overcome with messianic fervor associated with the 2,500-year anniversary of the Buddha's death, passed language legislation designating Sinhala as the sole

official language of the country. In the ensuing years, this legislation contributed to the de-Tamilization of the civil service, which had traditionally employed Tamils in percentages that had noticeably exceeded that group's representation in the total population.

The final break with the central government occurred in the early 1970s, as a new government adopted a new constitution that enshrined Sinhala as the sole official language and essentially elevated Buddhism to the status of a state religion. Additionally, the government revised entrance requirements into the science, engineering, and medical faculties of the nation's universities to boost the representation of rural Sinhalese in these departments, which came at the expense of hopeful Tamils seeking places in departments that offered promising futures. This change was in response to the 1971 JVP insurrection, which was led by unemployed high school and college graduates of Sinhalese-Buddhist descent, whose poor prospects were due in no small part to the lack of adequate facilities and teachers for imparting a science education in rural high schools. This policy led to the demoralization of Tamil youth who, in conjunction with language regulations that closed off opportunities for working in the civil service, began to view their situation within the unitary state as a hopeless one. This group formed the vanguard of the effort to detach the Tamil regions of the country to form a new state, and once the independence movement was invigorated in July 1983 after deadly anti-Tamil riots throughout the country, government concessions that would have granted some local autonomy to the Tamil regions did not satisfy the LTTE, who pressed ahead for full independence.

As suggested above, economic concerns played an important role in motivating the LTTE and JVP insurgencies (similar economic considerations also motivated the JVP insurgency in the late 1980s). Yet sociocultural factors also played an important role in motivating and shaping the insurgency waged by the LTTE and other Tamil groups. The constitutional enshrinement of Buddhism and the Sinhala language led Tamils to conclude that the state did not view Tamils as citizens of equal status to the Sinhalese, and in fact sought to obliterate Tamil culture throughout the island. Yet Tamils themselves are not culturally monolithic. Caste demarcations and regulations were more rigid and oppressive among Tamils than they were among the Sinhalese, and caste differences also overlapped with regional differences between northern and eastern Tamils in Sri Lanka. These differences were determinative, as they likely played an important role in the defection of a group of eastern Tamils from the LTTE in 2004, which paved the way for the downfall of the group in 2009.

The importance of sociocultural factors and their role in generating antagonistic Sinhalese and Tamil identities goes a long way toward answering a riddle that observers of Sri Lanka's government and politics have sometimes raised: how is it that a country that, under gradual (and initially reluctant) British tutelage toward self-government, was endowed with the enlightened institutions necessary for representative government could descend into the horrors of ethnic conflict in the decades following its independence? The emergence of virulent sectarianism is certainly a necessary component to any answer to this question but by itself is not sufficient. Additionally, one must consider the nature of the electoral system in the country in the first few decades following independence. This system tended to reward Sinhalese politicians who promoted chauvinistic anti-Tamil policies to win the support of Sinhalese-Buddhist voters, who constituted an overwhelming majority of the electorate. Efforts by the government to reach an accommodation with the Tamils in the 1950s and 1960s failed as opposition politicians hypocritically played the ethnic card by claiming that government efforts to appease the Tamils represented a sellout and would ultimately lead to the partition of the country along ethnic lines. In 1978, a new electoral system was adopted that forced Sinhalese politicians to attach greater importance to the Tamil vote, which in turn held out the promise of promoting a more consociational political system. But these reforms were too little and too late, as the momentum had shifted in favor of independence.

Lastly, any accounting of the LTTE and JVP insurgencies needs to factor in the importance of India in directly (LTTE) and indirectly (JVP) fostering these two rebellions. Without India's material assistance and intervention the LTTE would likely have been crushed by the Sri Lankan government in 1987. There are several reasons behind India's support to Tamil militant groups and its decision to force the Indo-Lanka Accord, which entailed the deployment of Indian troops to Sri Lanka, on Colombo in July 1987. As previously noted, strategic considerations led to Indian concerns with Sri Lanka's foreign policy reorientation in the late 1970s toward the West. Additionally, India has its own large Tamil population in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, which contained fifty to sixty million Tamils throughout most of the conflict, and this population sympathized with their ethnic brethren in Sri Lanka and demanded a response from New Delhi after atrocities against Sri Lankan Tamils or whenever Colombo appeared on the verge of defeating the Tamil separatist movement.

Hence, public pressure demanded Indian action in times of crisis during the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, yet India's position was complicated by separatist tensions within India itself, including within Tamil

Nadu. Latent desires for a separate Tamil state on the subcontinent were a factor at this time despite a 1963 constitutional amendment that outlawed separatism. India also faced other separatist movements, specifically in Kashmir, Assam, and among Sikhs, who sought to establish the independent state of Khalistan. As a consequence, India could not support the LTTE’s goal of Tamil Eelam, or an independent Tamil state, as such a move would encourage the various separatist movements in India itself to declare independence.

India, therefore, had to tread carefully, and it ultimately came to support a solution that called for autonomy for the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka but stopped short of outright independence. Its stance was opposed by the LTTE, who would settle only for independence, and so it was inevitable that the group would wind up fighting the deployed Indian troops sent to enforce the July 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord. Tragically, the accord also had the effect of invigorating the JVP who, despite their communist orientation, could not resist the temptation to rely on the “false consciousness” of patriotic sentiment against the accord to mobilize the Sinhalese in an antigovernment campaign whose ultimate purpose was to institute a long-cherished social, political, and economic revolution throughout Sri Lanka. The result was an unmitigated disaster for the country, as thousands perished during the JVP uprising in the late 1980s. Yet unfortunately, this campaign was only the opening act, as thousands more would succumb over the next two decades in the fight between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE.

Timeline

1948	Ceylon independence from British rule is established by cooperation of Sinhalese and Tamil elites.
1956	Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) wins national election on the basis of “Sinhalese Only” platform. Sinhala Only Act of 1956 sparked the first anti-Tamil riots.
1958	Riots and protests against proposals of Tamil self-rule.
1961	Sri Lankan army is stationed in northeast Sri Lanka to suppress peaceful Tamil protests against discrimination.
1965, 1967	Initial discussions are held on formation of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).
Mid-1969	JVP Central Committee is formed.
September 1970	JVP politburo holds its first meeting.

March 1971	Rohana Wijeweera is imprisoned after months during which he and the group made threats of revolutionary violence.
April 1971	JVP mounts an insurrection against the Sri Lankan government. Although initially taken by surprise, the government eventually crushes the rebellion. Many top JVP leaders are imprisoned.
1972	Anti-Tamil policies are formally incorporated into the constitution. The Tamil New Tigers (TNT) are established in 1972.
May 1972	The Criminal Justice Commission is established to try the perpetrators of the April 1971 uprising.
January 1974	Police attack the Fourth International Tamil Conference in Jaffna, killing eleven Tamils.
December 1974	Wijeweera and thirty-one others are found guilty by the Criminal Justice Commission and are imprisoned.
1976	LTTE is formed from the TNT under Velupillai Prabhakaran.
November 1977	Rohana Wijeweera is released from prison and embarks on reconstituting the JVP as an electoral organization.
1981	Burning of the Jaffna Library, which housed 90,000 Tamil books and manuscripts.
June 1981	JVP participates in District Development Council elections.
October 1982	Rohana Wijeweera runs for president and places third.
July 1983	LTTE ambush a Sri Lankan army convoy, killing thirteen soldiers and sparking riots that kill 2,500 Tamils. JVP is banned after anti-Tamil riots.
Late 1986/early 1987	JVP decides to launch another uprising against the government.
1987	LTTE employs first noted suicide bombing of a Sri Lankan army camp followed by conventional tactics.
June 1987	The JVP successfully raids the General Sir John Kotalawala Defense Academy and the Katunayake air force base for weapons.
July 1987	India and the Sri Lankan government sign the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord; India deploys military forces to Sri Lanka.
August 1987	JVP launches a grenade attack on a meeting in parliament that featured the president and prime minister. Both survived, but one parliamentarian was killed.

October 1987	JVP attack the Counter Subversive Unit, killing the police commissioner.
December 1987	JVP assassinates the chairman of the United National Party.
May 1988	JVP issues death threats against all parliamentarians, ministers, and officials of the United National Party.
	JVP assassinates the general secretary of the United National Party.
November 1988	JVP declares a national day of mourning on November 3 after the deaths of a JVP student leader and politburo member. Streets are deserted, commercial establishments and government institutions are closed, and transport grinds to a halt.
	To protest the holding of presidential elections in December, the JVP orchestrates a work stoppage throughout the country, paralyzing the economy.
Late 1988	JVP's center of power shifts from the Southern Province to the Central Province.
April 1989	President Premadasa calls for both LTTE and JVP to enter the political mainstream and invites both for talks. LTTE agrees, but JVP refuses.
May 1989	Wijeweera issues an order calling on Sri Lankans to boycott Indian goods and cease all commercial activity with India.
June 1989	The JVP politburo decides to make a final push to overthrow the government in July.
Summer 1989	To force the collapse of the government, the JVP orchestrates strikes by port and railway workers, as well as telecommunications and postal workers. Banks, markets, and stores close, and the navy is called on to run the Port of Colombo.
July 1989	Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves dwindle and are able to cover only a few days of imports.
	JVP organizes a <i>hartal</i> to commemorate the second anniversary of the Indo-Lanka Accord. Shops close and people are forced to hoist black flags in protest.
August 1989	JVP issues death threats against family members of armed forces personnel. In response, paramilitary groups go on a rampage and decimate JVP over the next few months.
November 1989	Wijeweera is captured by government forces and subsequently killed.
March 1990	India withdraws forces from Sri Lanka.
May 1991	LTTE employs a suicide bomber to assassinate Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

May 1993	LTTE employs a female Black Tiger to assassinate Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa.
October 1997	LTTE is placed on the US State Department list of foreign terrorist organizations.
2002	Norway brokers cease-fire agreement between LTTE and the Sri Lankan government.
March 2004	Colonel Karuna splits LTTE Eastern command away from Prabhakaran-led Northern command.
December 2004	A tsunami hits Sri Lanka and causes 40,000 deaths.
2005	The Sri Lankan government incorporates a national military draft system that substantially increases the size of the Sri Lankan army.
May 2005	LTTE assassinates Sri Lankan government Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar.
November 2005	Anti-LTTE hard-liner Mahinda Rajapaksa wins national elections.
2006	Colonel Karuna founds the <i>Tamil Makkal Viduthalaai Pulikal</i> (TMVP) in opposition to the LTTE.
	The Sri Lankan government begins a military campaign against LTTE and the Tamil population with support of anti-LTTE Tamils.
2007	LTTE Air Tiger attack against the Colombo airport.
July 2007	The Sri Lankan army controls Eastern Sri Lanka.
December 2007	The US government suspends military aid to Sri Lanka because of the Sri Lankan government's human rights violations.
January 2008	The Sri Lankan government formally withdraws from the cease-fire and Norwegian monitors depart Sri Lanka.
2009	250,000 civilians are displaced because of fighting in northern Sri Lanka.
May 2009	The Sri Lankan government claims victory over LTTE after a large military operation.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 4.
- ² Chuck Crossett, ed. *Casebook on Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare Volume II: 1962–2009* (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army Special Operations Command, 2012), xvi.
- ³ *Ibid.*, xii–xiii.

PART I.

**CONTEXT AND CATALYSTS OF
THE INSURGENCY**

CHAPTER 2.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Sri Lanka is a pear-shaped island located in the Indian Ocean. The country sits a mere twenty miles from the southern tip of India and is separated from the subcontinental mainland by the Palk Strait (see Figure 2-1).



Figure 2-1. Map of South Asia.

The island is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal to its northeast and the Indian Ocean on its eastern, western, and southern shores. At its longest, Sri Lanka is approximately 273 miles, and its maximum width is about 137 miles. The island comprises just more than 25,000 square miles, making it slightly larger than the state of West Virginia (see Figure 2-2).¹



Figure 2-2. Map of Sri Lanka.

Standard road distances between three key cities are listed in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1. Road distances in miles (kilometers)

From	To	Distance
Colombo	Jaffna	225 (363)
Colombo	Trincomalee	164 (264)
Jaffna	Trincomalee	147 (237)

Sri Lanka has a tropical climate, but temperatures are moderated by ocean winds from the island's 800 miles of coastline. The coastal region is notable not only for its marshes and lagoons but also for its "sandbars, dunes, coral reefs, and 113 islands."² The country's terrain is mostly flat, with jungle in the north-central region and mountains in the south-central region (see Figure 2-3). The central southwestern region of the island's landmass is distinguished by highlands that are the result of a central massif.^a

These highlands partly determine the amounts of rainfall different areas of the country receive from the region's semiannual monsoons.^b The differing levels of rainfall result in the island's division into two ecological halves. The wet zone covers the southwest third of the island, and the dry zone encompasses the remainder (see Figure 2-4). The single rainy season in the dry zone generally lasts from November to January and is followed by long droughts.

Regarding the human terrain, the Sinhalese are the largest ethnic group, constituting approximately seventy-five percent of the population. They are located primarily in the coastal regions of the south and west as well as in the interior Kandyan region (see Figure 2-5). Sri Lankan Tamils constitute approximately eleven percent of the population, and they reside in the ethnically homogenous north of the country, as well as in the more ethnically mixed east of the island, where they share the territory with Sinhalese and with the island's Muslim community. The center of the island also contains a sizeable population of Indian Tamils who are of more recent vintage than their Sri Lankan counterparts. Indian Tamils were brought to the island by the British in the nineteenth century from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu to work on agricultural plantations in the interior of the island.

^a A massif is a large mountain mass or a group of compactly connected mountains that form an independent part of a range. It is notable for being bounded or demarcated by faults and flexures but remaining internally unchanged.

^b The southwest monsoon period lasts from late May to late September and brings substantial rainfall to the southwestern region of the island. The northeastern monsoon period lasts from November to January and covers much of the island.³



Figure 2-3. Sri Lankan terrain.



Figure 2-4. Wet and dry zones.

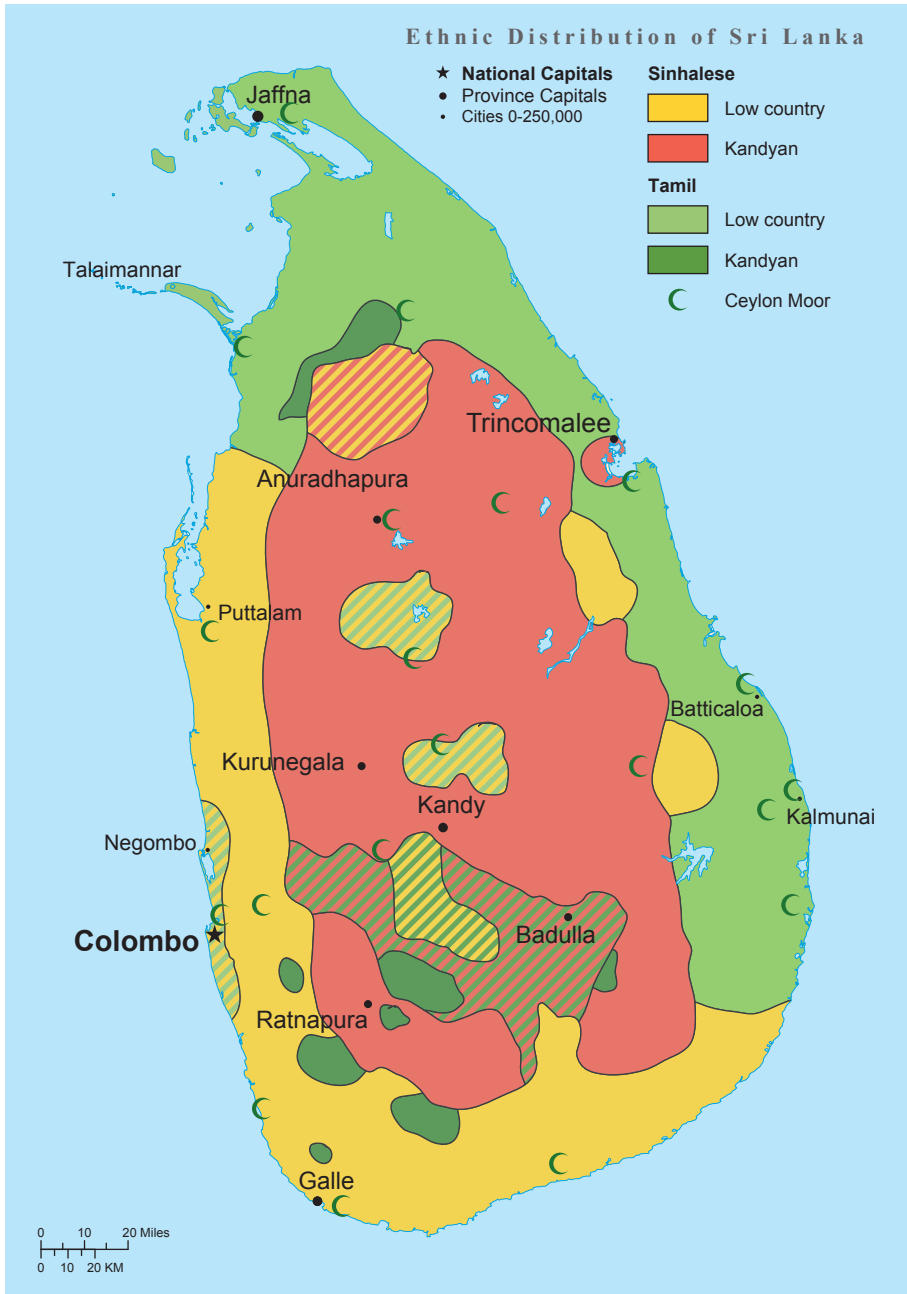


Figure 2-5. Sri Lankan ethnic distribution.

THE GENERAL IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The tactical advantages or disadvantages that a physical environment can present for both insurgents and those practicing counterinsurgency have been recognized for millennia; Sun Tzu discusses the use of terrain (a part of the physical environment) in his *Art of War*, written more than 2,000 years ago. In a more recent example, in 2013, the Associated Press discovered a document left behind by Al Qaeda forces in Timbuktu, Mali. The document, a tip sheet on how to avoid drones, was full of suggestions, many of which involve the use and exploitation of the physical environment (for example, the use of trees for cover). The tactical and strategic importance of the physical environment is critical to an insurgency.

In the past few decades, scholars of social science have studied how the physical environment plays a more general role in the dynamics of conflict.^c Specifically, these scholars have explored the role that the physical environment plays in the onset of conflict, as well as in the duration, intensity, and termination of conflict.^{4,5,6,7} Much of this research has examined the contributing role that terrain plays in a conflict,^d and findings suggest that there is a relationship between mountainous terrain and civil war.^{8,9,10} Some scholars have examined foliage and jungle cover but have not located a statistically significant relationship between insurgency and forest.¹¹ Much of this research indicates that certain terrain types are conducive to insurgent activity and that these physical characteristics have negative effects on a state's capacity to counter insurgencies. These negative effects may include limitations on a state's ability to exercise power and control, as well as a hindered ability to operate in certain types of terrain. While the findings and methods of this research remain matters of scholarly debate, physical environment undoubtedly plays a role in conflicts.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN SRI LANKA

The physical environment specific to Sri Lanka has shaped the conflict in important ways. To better understand this role, we briefly

^c See the *Physical Environment* section of *Appendix D. Technical Appendix* for an overview of some of this literature.

^d In political science literature, "terrain" is typically used as an umbrella concept for various features of a physical environment. These features typically include slope elevation, the degree and amount of mountainous area, and size of rural countryside.

examine the relationship between Sri Lanka's physical environment and its key actors.

Like those of most places, Sri Lanka's early settlement patterns were influenced by topography, climate, and geographic location. The island's close proximity to India ensured a degree of Indian influence, and findings from archeological excavations in the mid-twentieth century led scholars to infer that south Indian megalithic culture had a strong presence in Sri Lanka.¹² Yet there was an early north Indian presence on the island as well. Given that the dry zone constitutes two-thirds of the island, early Indo-Aryan (i.e., north Indian) peoples settled in this zone, later spreading south. During Sri Lanka's precolonial period through the thirteenth century, the island's dry zone—made habitable by a vast and technologically sophisticated irrigation system that included tanks, channels, and canals—was one of the world's leading hydraulic civilizations. The Sinhalese people's ability to irrigate the dry zone was not only a marvel of technological achievement, but it also led to thriving kingdoms that experienced centuries of relative prosperity punctuated by periods of decline and recovery.

By the thirteenth century, the dry zone and the irrigation system supporting it were in decline. Under increasing attack by invaders from south India, the Sinhalese moved their kingdom's capital farther and farther south.^e As de Silva reports, the "Sinhalese power shifted to the central mountains" and, later, "further to the south, a region which had never in the past been well-developed or highly populated or a centre of civilization."¹³ This frequent movement, coupled with bureaucratic over-centralization and the arrival of malaria (likely due to the hydraulic system the Sinhalese had constructed over the fifteen centuries prior), led to a collapse of the hydraulic society.^f A Tamil kingdom emerged in the north of the island by the thirteenth century, around the time that the Sinhalese people began their exodus of the dry zone.¹⁷

Ultimately, at the end of the thirteenth century, Sri Lanka was characterized by significant political fragmentation.¹⁸ This fragmentation subdivided the island into distinct political entities, each within its own geographic region. During this period, Sri Lanka comprised three kingdoms: a Tamil kingdom (in the Jaffna peninsula in the north), a Sinhalese kingdom (along the southwest coast in Kotte), and a second

^e This movement resulted in the concentration of Sinhalese in central and southern portions of the island. This historical fact would later prove important as the Sinhalese began to resettle in areas that had been predominantly inhabited by Tamils.

^f This collapse, and the dry zone's subsequent abandonment, would prove pivotal in the later ethnic tensions that contributed to the island's insurgencies, as various political administrations would press policies of repopulation of the zone. For a discussion of these various resettlement schemes, see Amerasinghe.¹⁴ For a discussion of the tension these resettlement schemes produced, see Peebles.¹⁵ Also see Kearney.¹⁶

Sinhalese kingdom in the island's central highlands at Kandy.^g These divisions and locations were important for two reasons. First, they helped shape the geographic division of the Tamils and the Sinhalese, which would become critical as both groups would later appeal to geographic and ethnic divisions—an appeal that acted as a catalyst for the Tamil's insurgency. Second, the island's political fragmentation, and the geographic separation of the respective kingdoms, allowed the Kandyans to effectively resist outside rule for a period of time. In part because the other kingdoms lacked the topographical advantage of a mountain base, they would fall under European control.

Just as Sri Lanka's physical environment played a key role in helping shape the early political geography of the island, it also played a key role during the colonial period beginning in the sixteenth century.^h The colonial activities of the Portuguese throughout Asia and Africa were typically not aimed at full territorial conquest.ⁱ Instead, the Portuguese were interested primarily in total control of commerce and industry, achieved through domination and submission of their colonial subjects.²⁰ With respect to Sri Lanka, the Portuguese were particularly interested in the island's cinnamon trade, littoral access, and control of maritime routes and commerce; it was these interests that drew the Portuguese into Sri Lankan politics. This involvement was met with considerable resistance and hostility, partly spurred by the Portuguese's imposition of Catholicism. In the mid-1600s, Sri Lankan powers negotiated with the Dutch, who agreed to help oust the Portuguese, a venture in which they were successful.

The Dutch's interest resided in their desire for total control of Sri Lanka's cinnamon, a lucrative export. But, like the Portuguese, the Dutch failed to extend their control to the entire island. This lack of complete geographic control provided the Kandyans with the opportunity to pursue outside powers that they hoped would provide them with more favorable terms of colonial rule. In a fashion similar to the Dutch strategy of exploiting the weaknesses of the Portuguese, the Kandyan king negotiated with the British, who successfully helped oust the Dutch in 1796.

^g The southward movement of the Sinhalese, together with the concentration of Tamils in the Jaffna peninsula and the enduring collapse of the irrigation systems in the dry zone, contributed to what would later become the modern Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic and geographic divisions.

^h Sri Lanka was subjected to the rule of three colonial powers: the Portuguese, 1505–1658; the Dutch, 1658–1796; and the British, 1796–1948. For more information on colonial rule in Sri Lanka, see *Chapter 3. Historical Context* and *Chapter 5. Government and Politics*.

ⁱ On this point, see de Silva.¹⁹

It is important to note that, despite their best attempts, the early colonial powers were never able to fully conquer the mountainous regions. Given the central location of the island's highlands, this meant that neither the Portuguese nor the Dutch were able to extend their authority to the whole island, and that their areas of rule and influence generally extended to only the island's periphery—the coastal areas.²¹ The result of this limitation was that the common tool of colonial empires—brute force and subjugation through violence—was still routinely practiced but remained far less effective in the Kandyan kingdom. The early colonial actors were forced to engage in a brand of diplomacy where incentives were offered, but there was no effective means to ensure compliance and reduce defection from agreements. This situation permitted a relatively high degree of Kandyan autonomy, which contributed to the weakening of colonial control because it gave freedom to the Kandyan leaders to pursue policies that varied from those of the colonists.^j

Like the Portuguese and the Dutch, the British were interested in the island's natural resources. But perhaps more important to the British, at least in their early involvement, was Sri Lanka's favorable geographic location.^k Of paramount importance was the deepwater port of Trincomalee (see Figure 2-2 for location), which the Dutch had been permitting the British to use to refit and shelter their vessels. Trincomalee provided shelter to the British boats during India's rough monsoon season and facilitated communications between the west and east coasts of India. Additionally, once the British consolidated their rule in India, they developed an interest in ensuring that the port of Trincomalee would not be used by a hostile power to amass naval forces to attack the British Raj. Thus, the importance of Trincomalee made the port—and Sri Lanka more generally—of significant strategic interest to the British.

The mountains provided the Kandyans with the advantage of a strategic retreat in the heart of Sri Lanka that was defensible against the Portuguese and the Dutch. Specifically, the mountainous terrain enabled the Kandyans to use guerrilla warfare tactics to keep these two European powers at bay.²² However, the Kandyans would succumb to

^j Of course, Sri Lankans had little reason to negotiate in good faith with the colonizers. Colonial involvement in Sri Lanka was predicated on a desire to exploit the Sri Lankans and their natural resources while fulfilling geostrategic interests.

^k This interest was partly driven by the British concern over the rise of France, which, under the Jacobins (the revolutionary regime), had occupied continental Dutch territory in 1795. This concern led to British fear that Dutch colonies may be inspired to launch similar insurrections spurred by France's revolutionary ideology, thus jeopardizing British access to key land and sea routes that were essential to British economic and security interests.

colonial rule once the British arrived on the scene. As de Silva noted, “the traditional Kandyan policy of seeking foreign assistance to oust the European power established in the maritime regions had on this occasion led to the substitution of a very powerful neighbor [the British] for a weak one [the Dutch].” de Silva goes on to conclude that the British “had the resources . . . to subjugate that kingdom.”²³ In 1818, after a long battle, the British defeated an uprising initiated by the Kandyans and controlled the whole island. For the first time since the fifteenth century, all of Sri Lanka was under the rule of a single unitary power. The British effectively ended the ability of Sri Lanka’s native population to exploit the island’s physical geography to resist colonial rule.

The implications of this development were significant. Perhaps most important was that the British could now use technology to overcome the physical environment. The British were able to develop a significant road system, granting military access to the interior Kandyan regions, thereby extending their military dominance. In addition, now that the interior of the island was under British control, communication lines extended throughout the highlands and outer reaches of the island.

These developments, in turn, helped the British consolidate their rule and create countrywide political administrations and institutions. This rule extended to the Tamil-dominated Jaffna peninsula. Because the British now controlled the Jaffna region, they consigned newly arrived US missionaries to the peninsula (particularly where agriculture was difficult).²⁴ Both British and American missionaries established a number of well-regarded schools that imparted English-language education on the local populace. Tamils residing in the Jaffna peninsula became well trained in English. Given the high rate of internal migration from the area (due to the scarcity of economic opportunities), the Tamils came to hold numerous positions in the British colonial government, an outcome that led to considerable resentment among the Sinhalese.

With infrastructure and systems of political administration now extending through the once nearly impenetrable mountains, the British were able to more easily exploit Sri Lanka’s natural resources for economic gain.¹ This new capability resulted in the growth of the agriculture sector (coffee, tea, rubber, and coconuts were commonly grown) and the number of plantations.²⁶ The rise of Sri Lanka’s plantation economy also signaled an attempt to revive the dry zone’s irrigation systems.²⁷ This revival was born out of a desire to address the

¹ It should be noted that, as de Silva points out, the centralization and island-wide expansion of communications and political administration were still incomplete in the early part of the nineteenth century, owing to “peculiarities of the island’s physical features.”²⁵

concentrated population in the wet zone, as the dry zone remained inhospitable to agricultural development.^m

Although British land policies had started shifting members of the Sinhalese population to the dry zone, by the time of independence, Sri Lankan politicians accelerated these policies.²⁸ “The principal stream of internal migration has involved the movement of settlers, mostly Sinhalese, from the heavily populated ‘Wet Zone’ of the south-west to the sparsely populated north-central, northeastern, and eastern ‘Dry Zone’ regions.”²⁹ This effort to “colonize” the dry zone was met with considerable resistance by the Tamils. Kearney insightfully notes how such colonization contributed to the Tamils’ resentment:

The lightly inhabited areas of the Dry Zone had once served as a broad belt of demarcation between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lanka Tamils. The progressive additions of population to the Dry Zone have served to blur the boundary between Sinhalese and Tamil settlements, bringing into stark relief the competition for territory. The movement of Sinhalese migrants into northern and eastern territories considered to be within the traditional Tamil homeland (in part with government sponsorship and facilitation) has been viewed by Tamil political leaders as a threat to the survival of their community. Among the Tamil grievances that contributed to the development of a Tamil separatist movement was the accusation that government-sponsored Sinhalese colonization was deliberately encroaching on and undermining the distinctively Tamil territories, thus threatening the extinction of the traditional Tamil homeland.³⁰

Kearney’s assessment demonstrates the hostility that the colonization programs produced among the Tamil populations. This sentiment was evident in many of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) communiqués. For example, a 1983 statement asserted the group’s position on such settlement schemes:

The most vicious form of oppression calculated to destroy the national identity of the Tamils was the state aided aggressive colonisation which began soon after “independence” and now swallowed nearly three thousand square miles of Tamil Eelam (the Tamil

^m Most of the dry zone remained inhospitable to agricultural development, except the traditionally Tamil Jaffna peninsula, which had dependable water resources because of its limestone.

homeland). This planned occupation of Tamil lands by hundreds of thousands of Sinhala people aided and abetted by the state was aimed to annihilate the geographical entity of the Tamil nation.³¹

The colonization program became a source of grievance for the island's Tamils, and later, the LTTE. This program contributed to the LTTE's narrative of the Tamils as a population of ethnically distinct minority inhabitants who were beleaguered by the policies and practices of the majority Sinhalese and who had a historic homeland in need of protection.ⁿ The importance of physical environment on the island's political composition was a theme that extended through the period of Sri Lanka's colonial powers and continues to endure today.

Finally, the physical environment also had a significant impact on the tactics of both the government and the Tamils in the government's war with the LTTE. The war took place in three distinct physical environments: the jungle, urban locations, and the sea. Because Sri Lanka is an island, the LTTE, unlike insurgencies that operate in regions with land borders, had limited ability to use artificial political boundaries to its advantage. However, the group was able to seek refuge and plan operations in Tamil Nadu, the Indian state immediately across the Palk Strait. Nevertheless, the inability to exploit foreign boundaries within Sri Lanka itself put a greater premium on relying on jungle, sea, and urban environments within the island for shelter and protection.

Sri Lanka's physical environment led the LTTE to develop both land and sea forces. The LTTE's maritime combat unit, the Sea Tigers, included some of the most effective fighting units in the conflict, "capable of operating in lagoons, territorial as well as international waters."³³ The LTTE placed emphasis on the development of its maritime attack capabilities, and it is reported that the LTTE's sea forces constituted the most "formidable, nonstate 'navy' in the world."³⁴ The Sea Tigers

ⁿ As discussed later in this study, Tamil politicians, and later militants, typically referred to the Northern and Eastern Provinces as the "traditional homeland" of the Tamils. Yet this claim is not without its critics. As Sri Lankan historian K. M. de Silva noted: "A Tamil kingdom did exist from the 13th century to the early part of the 17th, but except during the brief heyday of its power it seldom controlled anything more than the Jaffna peninsula, and some adjacent regions on the coast and some parts of the interior. Set against a history stretching over 2500 years the independent existence of this kingdom covered a very brief period, and even during that period its status and influence varied so dramatically; at times a very powerful kingdom; at others a satellite of expanding Dravidian states across the Palk Straits, and at times subjugated by the [Sinhalese] Kotte kingdom, and generally acknowledging its suzerainty. There is little or no evidence to support the claim made in the Vaddukoddai resolution [which called for a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka] and the [Tamil United Liberation Front] manifesto of 1977 that there was either an unbroken 'national' consciousness or a continuing tradition of independent statehood."³²

exploited the jungle terrain bordering the littoral areas, permitting the insurgent forces to stay concealed until they were ready to attack the Sri Lankan naval forces. This, in turn, meant that the Sri Lankan navy had to “maintain 24-hour surveillance and remain prepared to intercept any movement.”³⁵ In response, the LTTE dictated when and where the engagements would occur by innovatively using the various dimensions of Sri Lanka’s physical environment to its advantage. The Sea Tigers used the sea to launch naval attacks and operations, and once these maritime operations were complete, the Sea Tigers retreated to the jungle, vessels and all. In such operations, the LTTE used trailers to carry their boats out of the jungle to be deployed. Once the operation concluded, they hauled the boats back into the cover of the jungle, concealing their location from the Sri Lankan air force.³⁶

The Sri Lankan navy responded to this strategy by increasing its combat personnel training and updating its combat fleet to include faster, nimbler boats with upgraded firepower. This “small boats concept” “effectively copied the Sea Tigers’ asymmetric tactics, but on a much larger scale.”³⁷ The small boats concept permitted the navy to more effectively combat the Sea Tigers by copying the Tiger’s tactics of significantly outnumbering and overwhelming the enemy with a swarm of numerous small boats.

Sri Lanka’s island geography and lack of overland supply routes meant that the LTTE had to rely on maritime transportation for overseas supplies. This led the group to develop a merchant maritime wing that was separate from the Sea Tigers.³⁸ While the navy’s small boats concept allowed them to effectively combat the Sea Tigers along the coastline, through their merchant vessels the LTTE was still able to supply its fighters for battle on the mainland.^o When the Sri Lankan navy turned its attention to staunching the flow of supplies from overseas, the LTTE began to more fully develop its sea-based suicide cadres, the Black Sea Tigers. As Fair reports, the Black Sea Tigers were developed as a way to “counter the success of the Sri Lankan and Indian navies in denying sea-based supply routes to the LTTE.” Fair also noted that the Black Sea Tigers endeavored to use individuals who had been maimed in combat, in order to optimize their human resources.⁴⁰

In addition to exploiting both the jungle and the sea, the LTTE was also adept at operating in urban environments, with what one analyst calls its “remarkable adaptability.”⁴¹ Particularly notable was the group’s

^o Part of this supply strategy included “floating warehouses,” an “ocean-going fleet of eight ships that were used as floating warehouses on the high seas. These ships were used to stow all types of illegally acquired items such as aircraft, artillery pieces and ammunition, diving equipment, electro-optical devices, night-vision equipment, radar, torpedoes and underwater vehicles.”³⁹

ability to penetrate the capital Colombo, located in the southwest and outside the traditional area of Tamil support. Unlike in the north and northeast, in the southwest the LTTE could not face the Sri Lankan army's conventional forces. Instead, the LTTE focused on asymmetric tactics, engaging in the exploitation of urban terrain and population.

Hallmarks of this asymmetric activity were suicide attacks by the Black Tigers (the LTTE's suicide cadres). As Fair notes, "the LTTE can very easily slip Black Tiger cadres into the thickly populated city of Colombo and attack virtually at will."⁴² By 2007, the group was able to infiltrate 150 suicide bombers thought to be "sleeping" in Colombo.⁴³ Attacks by this group exploited not only the immediate tactical advantages of operating in Colombo's urban environment but also the psychological significance of the capital. As Kulandaswamy notes, "life in the south . . . was largely unaffected by the northern casualties. There was a clear distancing from the battlefield, not only in geographical terms but also in mental terms."⁴⁴ Because the war was generally regarded as occurring in the north, once the LTTE proved that Colombo could be targeted, the stakes were raised.

In the end, the Sri Lankan military was able to capitalize on the Tamil's concentration in the north. Once the LTTE's naval capacity was degraded, leaving little option for escape by sea, government forces were able to push the LTTE's fighters (and Tamil civilians) into a small geographic area that was initially set up as a no-fire zone for civilians. The area measured roughly eight square miles in the Mullaitivu District (in the far northeast) and was eventually reduced by about half. The Sri Lankan military was ultimately able to use the island's physical environment to contribute to the defeat of the LTTE.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF INSURGENCY

This study provides a detailed analysis of two insurgent movements that wreaked havoc on Sri Lanka. The LTTE waged a twenty-six-year campaign against the government to establish an independent Tamil state in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the country. At its peak in 2000, the amount of territory controlled by the group amounted to seventy-six percent of the combined area of these two provinces,⁴⁵ which are populated by significant numbers of Sri Lankan Tamils. Districts form subprovincial units of government in Sri Lanka, and Figure 2-6 shows the districts where the LTTE exhibited strong and moderate influence.

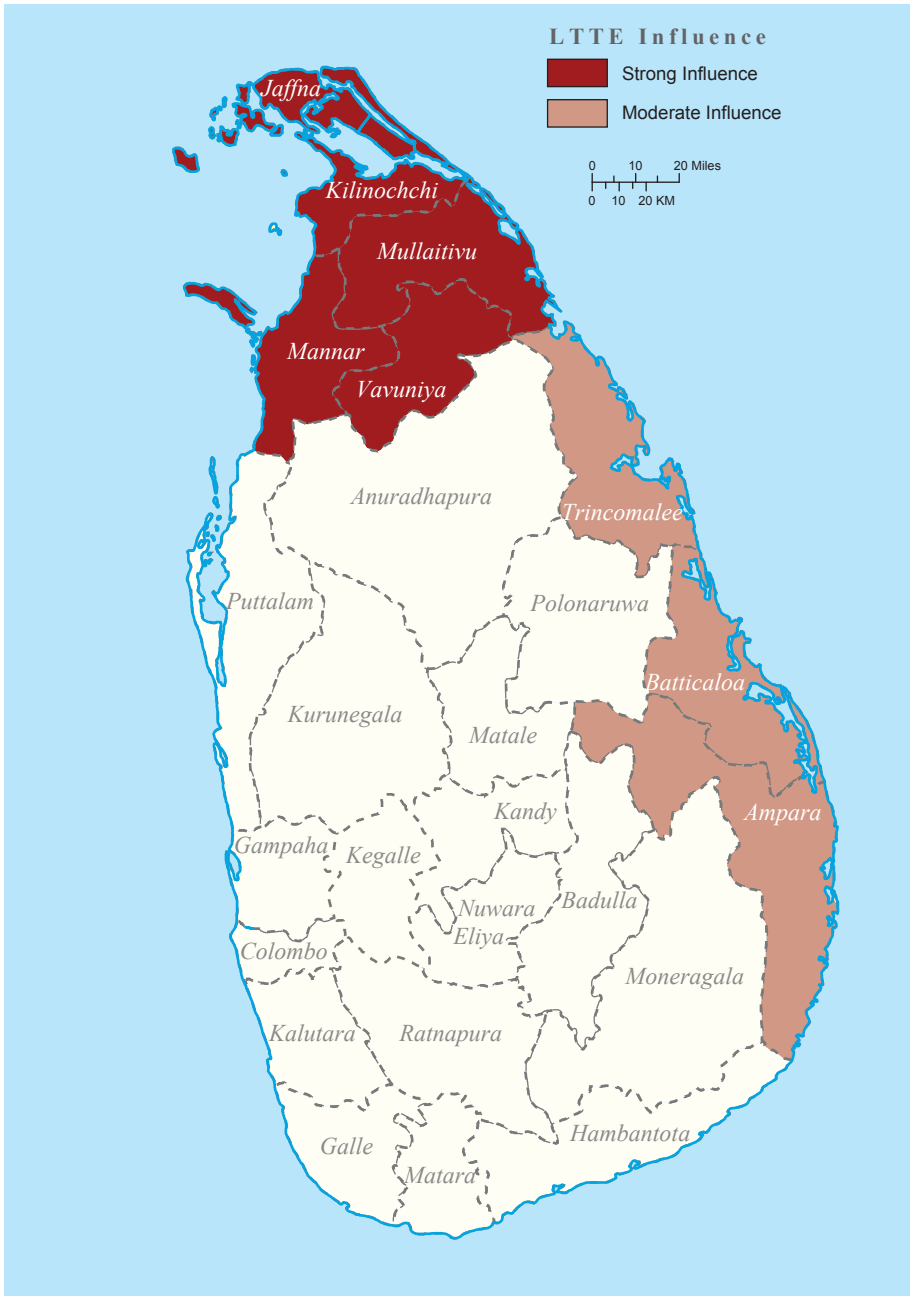


Figure 2-6. LTTE areas of influence.

Until its final defeat in 2009, the LTTE maintained a strong presence in the north of Sri Lanka, and especially within the Jaffna peninsula, which is the northernmost area of the country and represents the cradle of Tamil civilization on the island. Owing to regional and caste differences between northern and eastern Tamils, the group had relatively less influence in the east, and in fact it was a defection of eastern cadres in 2004 that ultimately paved the way for the group's downfall five years later.

The second insurgent group covered by this study is the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front, or JVP), a Sinhalese Marxist group that led a failed insurrection in April 1971 as well as a broad-based antigovernment campaign that came perilously close to overthrowing the political system in the late 1980s. Unlike the LTTE, the JVP never developed conventional units that held territory, nor did it establish governing institutions that sought to administer to the needs of the population in the areas in which it was active. Yet as shown in Figure 2-7, the group's underground cells were active throughout most of the country, in particular in areas that were not closed off to the group by the LTTE.

Gunaratna noted that the group established district committees in all districts except those in the north and east, and in late 1988 its center of power shifted from the Southern Province (which contains the districts of Galle, Matara, and Hambantota) to the Central Province (which contains the districts of Matale, Kandy, and Nuwara Eliya).^{46,p} The group largely operated underground, and on several occasions it orchestrated nationwide *hartals*, or general work stoppages, that paralyzed the country and brought the economy to a halt. It was also successful in bringing the fight to Colombo, the capital, and in August 1987 it nearly delivered a decapitating blow, as it launched a grenade attack on parliament that nearly killed the country's top leadership.

^p See also Chandraprema for a list of the group's district leaders throughout Sri Lanka.⁴⁷

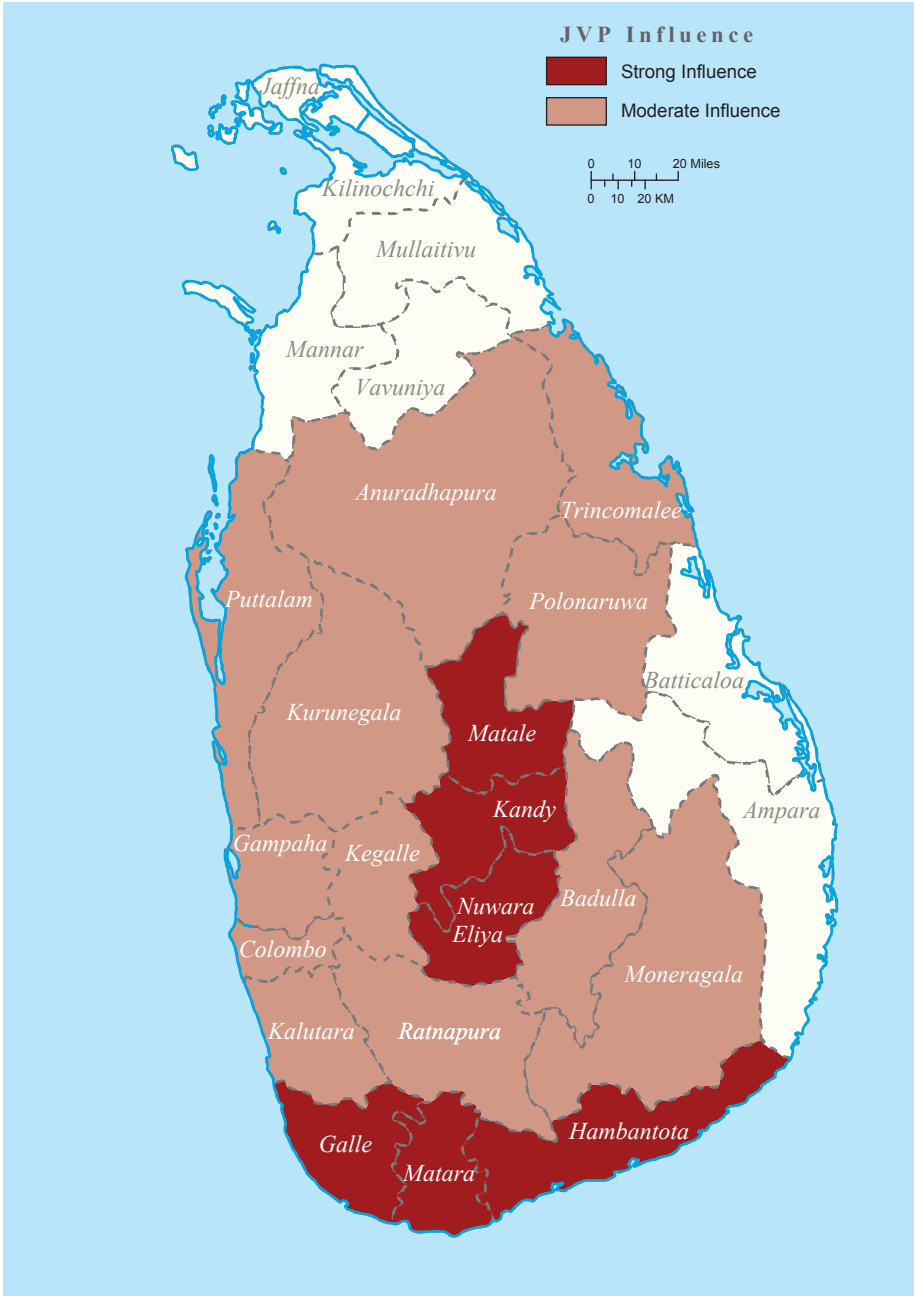


Figure 2-7. JVP areas of influence.

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CHAPTER 3.
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

PRECOLONIAL HISTORY

In about the fifth or sixth century BCE, the first of the Sinhalese, an Indo-Aryan group from northern India, began to arrive in Sri Lanka, displacing the original inhabitants, the Veddahs. According to the Sinhalese historical chronicle the *Mahavamsa*, Vijaya, the son of the north Indian king Sinhabahu, and a group of 700 followers reached the island near Puttalam on the west coast after their exile for assault and robbery, and they settled in the interior near Anuradhapura.^{1,a} By the fourth century BCE, the Sinhalese rulers had established the city-state kingdom of Anuradhapura, which controlled the adjacent coast and villages.

In the third century BCE, the Indian Emperor Ashoka sent missionaries led by his son Mahinda to the island, and they were able to convert the Anuradhapura King Devanampiya Tissa to Buddhism. By the second century BCE, most Sinhalese had adopted the Buddhist religion, which thereafter constituted the foundation of Sinhalese identity and unity. In 371 CE, the Buddhists acquired what was believed to be a tooth of the Buddha. Over time, this relic became not only a religious symbol for the Buddhists but also a symbol of sovereignty and legitimacy for the Sinhalese in general. Possession of the tooth conferred the right to rule. Consequently, protection of the relic, housed at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy, became a critical responsibility of political leaders, and this responsibility continues to the current day.

During the seventh century CE, conflicts between the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and the Southern Indian states of Chola, Pallava, and Pandya became fairly common. However, the Tamil presence on the island was generally limited to individual merchant groups and mercenary troops imported to assist one side or another in inter-Sinhalese squabbles.² In 993, the Cholas sacked Anuradhapura and occupied and annexed the north-central area of Sri Lanka as a province of the Chola kingdom. This was followed by the Cholas' conquest of the southern area of Ruhuna in 1017. In 1070, the Cholas were ousted and Sinhalese authority was restored to the island. However, from this point onward, the

^a The *Mahavamsa* was written in Pali verse by Buddhist Monks in the sixth century AD and subsequently updated, and it provides a history of Sri Lanka from the time of the Buddha in the fifth century BC to the fourth century AD. Together with the earlier chronicle, the *Dipavamsa*, and the later chronicle, the *Culavamsa* (which updated the *Mahavamsa* to the unification of the island by the British in 1815), the *Mahavamsa* is central to the Sinhalese and Buddhist contention that they are the true historical claimants to Sri Lanka and that the Tamil are later interlopers. Indeed, it is very difficult to describe the island's early history, especially prior to the sixteenth century, but even later, because the sources were more often written for myth-making or political purposes rather than for historical accuracy.

Sinhalese lived in fear of losing their independence to foreign invaders from south India.

During their time in Ceylon the Cholas had established their capital in Polonnaruwa, which offered a more defensible location than Anuradhapura to hold off potential invaders from Ruhuna. Once Sinhalese ruler Vijayabahu I evicted the Chola from the island in 1070 he decided to rule from Polonnaruwa given its more militarily defensible location. However, because of mismanagement and regal extravagances, as well as a series of weak rulers, Polonnaruwa declined and was abandoned after about two centuries. The Sinhalese kingdom at Polonnaruwa and Sinhalese states throughout the island were frequently under attack by Malaysians and southern Indians. Unable to defend themselves effectively, the Sinhalese rulers were continually on the move southward, establishing five different capitals between 1250 and 1400.

During this period of decline in the Sinhalese kingdom of Polonnaruwa, the Kalingas of southern India invaded and conquered the island, establishing a reign of terror that lasted until 1255. The Arya Chakaravartis, a southern Indian dynasty, seized control of the northern area of the island and by the beginning of the fourteenth century the dynasty established the first Tamil kingdom on the Jaffna peninsula. Although it was sometimes controlled by different south Indian powers, Jaffna usually had enough autonomy to become a thriving trade and cultural center in its own right.

Significant for future events, the Sinhalese move toward the south resulted in the creation of a jungle buffer zone below the Jaffna peninsula, known as the Vanni, between the Sinhalese to the south and the Tamils to the north, with some mixed Sinhalese-Tamil settlements in the middle.

COLONIAL HISTORY

Sri Lanka experienced three waves of colonial rule: the Portuguese, 1505–1658; the Dutch, 1658–1796; and the British, 1796–1948. The first two can be described as incomplete, as Portuguese and Dutch authority was generally restricted to the coastal areas, while the kingdom of Kandy in the central highlands was usually independent. In the third period, the British established total control over the island only in 1815, but the Tamil kingdom in Jaffna retained a separate existence and a separate identity under British rule.

At the onset of the sixteenth century, Sri Lanka was generally divided among three kingdoms: the Tamil kingdom based in the Jaffna peninsula in the north, a Sinhalese kingdom along the southwest coast in Kotte, and another Sinhalese kingdom in the island interior at

Kandy. The Portuguese, the first of the European colonizers, established a foothold on the island through a treaty with the kingdom of Kotte. Despite this benign beginning, conflicts among the Sinhalese leadership factions enabled the Portuguese to take control and subjugate the surrounding areas. The Tamils, on the other hand, chose the course of resistance. Angered by Portuguese efforts to convert the Tamils to Catholicism, the Tamil king Sangily massacred the Portuguese missionaries and their converts. However, Tamil resistance proved ineffective, and in 1619, the Portuguese gained control of the kingdom of Jaffna along with the island's entire coastline, leaving only Kandy as a Sinhalese stronghold and refuge in the central highlands.

To counter the Portuguese, the king of Kandy sought assistance and protection from the Netherlands through the Kandyan Treaty of 1638. The Dutch were able to oust the Portuguese from their forts and take possession of the former Portuguese territories along the island's coastal periphery. When the Kandyans then sought assistance from the French to offset Dutch expansionism, the Dutch ousted the French and further expanded their control to all of the island's maritime provinces.

After a successful coup against the Kandyan king by the joint effort of Sinhalese and Tamil chieftains, the British seized control and annexed the island to the British Crown. The Kandyan Convention of 1815, signed by the Ceylonese^b and British, confirmed British rule and unified the island under one power (which last occurred 400 years prior under Parākramabāhu VI, who was the king of the Sinhalese kingdom of Kotte). However, the tooth relic remained under the protection of Buddhist monks, and, as a consequence, the British were never accepted as legitimate sovereigns with a right to rule Sri Lanka and the Sinhalese. Further, the Sinhalese refused to work on British-owned plantations, which the British began to establish within the central interior of the country in the 1830s and 1840s (especially for coffee, but later in 1870 for tea, rubber, and coconut once a leaf disease began to destroy the coffee crop³). During this time, the British abolished the *rajakariya*, the system of service tenure under which Sinhalese peasants had labored, but the Sinhalese looked unfavorably on wage employment,⁴ forcing the British to import significant numbers of Tamils from southern India (these Tamils were subsequently referred to as “Indian Tamils”). Soon, the Kandyans launched the unsuccessful Uva Rebellion against the British.

The British attitude toward the traditional elite, especially in the Kandyan regions in the interior of the country, evolved during this period. The British had cooperated with the Kandyan aristocracy in

^b Prior to 1972 the island was known as Ceylon. With the introduction of a new constitution in that year, the name of the island changed to Sri Lanka.

deposing the last Kandyan king, Sri Vikrama Rajasimha, in 1815, and so when the region fell under English rule, the British decided not to disturb the existing institutions and social system of the region in order to maintain the support of the traditional elite. However, although the elite cooperated with the British to depose an unpopular local ruler, they did not expect the establishment of foreign rule over the region, and so the local elite supported the failed Uva Rebellion of 1817–1818 against British authority.

Not surprisingly, after the suppression of the rebellion, the British became suspicious of the elite and sought to diminish their status and authority. Specifically, they sought to transform this group into a class of stipend earners subordinate to and under direct British supervision and charged with carrying out the orders of the government.⁵ But beginning in the mid to late nineteenth century, the British pursued a policy of aristocratic resuscitation of the traditional elite, as both groups became suspicious of an emerging educated Sinhalese elite living in the maritime regions and seeking greater political authority.^{6,c} This relationship eventually flourished, as the British held *durbars*, or ceremonial gatherings, with local chiefs. In the early twentieth century, these gatherings were championed by Sir Henry MacCallum, the governor, who brought to Ceylon his experience with similar gatherings of local notables in Malaya, Nigeria, and Natal. The *durbars* held by MacCallum were patterned on the *indabas* held in Natal, where local chiefs discussed key issues with the governor and his officials.⁸

Because Sri Lanka was under full British control, arriving American missionaries were relegated to the agriculturally inhospitable area of Jaffna—the center of Sri Lanka’s Tamil population. English and American missionaries proved adept at building and operating English-language schools, which created a reserve of well-trained, English-speaking Tamils. Because of their language skills and a high level of migration from Jaffna’s nonarable territory, Tamils were disproportionately represented in both the British colonial administration and commercial industry.⁹ This unbalanced representation predictably led to perceptions, both real and imagined, of Tamil cooperation with the

^c Additionally, the demands of day-to-day governing necessitated a strong relationship with the traditional elite. The British simply did not have the personnel or the resources to pay them (if they could be found) to carry out administrative duties at the district level and below. Instead, many of these posts, which did not entail remuneration, were outsourced to local chiefs and were held on a hereditary basis.⁷

British colonial government.^d In a development common to many cases of ethnic rivalry, demands from the Sinhalese for equality with the Tamils eventually gave way to demands for preferential treatment.¹¹

Aided by the introduction of the printing press and rising literacy rates, Sinhalese scholarship and social commentary on ancient Tamil invasions led to a climate wherein all Tamils, even those who could trace their Sri Lankan heritage back for centuries, were considered *kallathoni*—illegal Indian immigrants.¹² In the discourse of Sinhalese nationalism, Tamils were merely the first of many waves of invaders that included European colonists and other foreign capitalists. In addition, a particularly active and militant Buddhist clergy created myths and legends to explain away generations of mixing between Sinhalese and Tamils, further exacerbating religious tensions.^c

Conversely, until the nineteenth century, the Tamils generally did not look south to the Sinhalese for their cultural heritage and identity but instead looked north to southern India, which contained a substantial Tamil population. This is not to say that the Tamils never interacted with the Sinhalese. Clearly, as inhabitants of the same small island, they did interact. Still, by geography and ethnicity, the Tamils were drawn to south India and, because of the almost impenetrable jungle in the north-central region, away from the Sinhalese south.¹⁴

Yet, the Tamils eventually began to see themselves politically as part of the island rather than as an adjunct of south India. The development of an island-based identity began gradually with the early eighteenth-century publication of the chronicle *Yalppana Vaipava Malai* (*The Garland of Jaffna Events*), one of the first modern attempts to construct a Tamil history in Ceylon.^f While *The Garland*, frequently known by its Tamil initials YVM, depicted the Sinhalese as the main foes of the Tamils, the

^d Gallege Punyawardana, secretary of the Federation of Buddhist Organizations, evidenced this common impression when he blamed the British for a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attack on a Buddhist shrine, commenting that the Tamils “fought along with their English masters against the Sri Lankans. They are the originators of our problem.” The kingdom of Kandy, the center of Sinhalese/Buddhist power and culture in Sri Lanka, was also the last province to fall to British tutelage, further contributing to this perception.¹⁰

^e One such legend concerns the adoption of Tamil (Hindu) gods by Sinhalese (Buddhist) worshippers, a common occurrence in religiously diverse societies. In the Sinhalese narrative, the god Kandeswami abandons his Tamil worshippers in favor of the Sinhalese when the latter agree to carry him across a river after this responsibility is shirked by a passing band of Tamils.¹³

^f Mayilvakana Pulavar was the author of *The Garland of Jaffna Events*. He was a native of Jaffna and was asked by the Dutch governor, Klaas Isaacs, to write and translate a chronicle of history of Jaffna. *The Garland of Jaffna Events* was compiled from palm leaf manuscripts of unknown date, oral traditions, and “lost works” preserved only in memory.¹⁵

Tamils were still more interested in intra-Tamil squabbles than Sinhalese-Tamil conflicts. This changed significantly in the 1920s, when the British introduced the Manning reforms. Between 1921 and 1924, Governor William Manning introduced a series of constitutional reforms that opened communal representation in the Legislative Council for those recognized as “legitimate interest groups” by the British.^{16,g} To prevent their marginalization, it became necessary for the Tamils, especially Tamil politicians with national ambitions, to establish their standing as an important community worthy of representation.

Overall, the legacy of socioeconomic advantages established by the Tamils under the British colonial government led to decades of reactionary Sinhalese nationalist policies that effectively barred Tamil access to civil service employment and reduced their presence within the university system; recognized the Sinhala language and religion (Buddhism) as those of the state; and resettled Sinhalese peasants on Tamil land.

The Road to Independence, 1931–1948

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Sinhalese political leadership looked to join with their Tamil counterparts to campaign for independence. This inter-elite cooperation was enhanced with the 1911 election of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan as the first “Educated Ceylonese” unofficial member to the Legislative Council.^h It reached its peak when Sinhalese and Tamil organizations united to form the Ceylon National Congress (CNC), with Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam (brother of Ramanathan) as its first president, in 1919. By joint effort, the CNC members sought constitutional reforms that would shift political authority away from the British and in favor of the Ceylonese. One key reform proposal was the popular election of a majority of the seats to the Legislative Council. In 1919, the Legislative Council consisted of twenty-three members: eleven were “official members” who

^g For more information on the evolution of Sri Lanka’s political system under British rule, see *Chapter 5. Government and Politics*.

^h In the early twentieth century, Sri Lanka was ruled by a governor who represented the Crown’s authority on the island. In 1833, a Legislative Council was established, consisting primarily of colonial officials. It also contained a few “unofficial” members representing the local European population, as well as representatives appointed by the governor from the Sinhalese, Tamil, and Burgher communities. In 1912, the British introduced the elective principle into the Council, and so the Council gained another Ceylonese member that was elected by the local population, albeit under a restricted franchise. This seat on the Council was known as the “Educated Ceylonese” seat, because electors had to meet certain professional, educational, or income qualifications. For more information on the evolution of Sri Lanka’s political system under British rule, see *Chapter 5. Government and Politics*.

were predominantly English citizens nominated by the (British) governor, and the remaining twelve were “unofficial” members consisting primarily of Ceylonese and local Europeans and Burghers.ⁱ Of these twelve, only four were elected, with the rest nominated by the governor. Moreover, the Sinhalese and Tamil political leaders within the CNC agreed to a consociational arrangement in which the Tamils would be assured “a fair share” of legislative seats under any system of reform.^{17,j}

In 1921, a new constitution was adopted, and in 1924, it was amended to provide for an elected legislative majority, an increase in territorially elected members, and the election of communal members.^k Subsequently, the Sinhalese increased pressures for more extensive territorial representation and less communal representation, which favored the Sinhalese in any such election (because they constituted approximately three-quarters of the population), eroded the prospects for Tamil representation by election, and undermined the informal assurances of a fair share of seats by consociational agreement. As a general rule of thumb, it can be said that, from the 1920s, there was an inverse relationship between the Ceylonese movement toward independence and Sinhalese-Tamil political cooperation and ethnic friendship. Ultimately, the attainment of independence led to the initiation of violent conflict.

The Donoughmore Constitution, named for the special constitutional commission chaired by the British earl of Donoughmore, replaced the existing constitution in April 1931. The new constitution outlined a considerable devolution of power and responsibility from the British to the Ceylonese, with self-government as the ultimate goal. At the government apex were the British governor and the Ceylon State Council. The Ceylon State Council, which replaced the Legislative Council, was elected by territorial constituencies through universal adult suffrage and combined executive and legislative powers. However, in the hope of encouraging the development of national political parties and reducing racial divisions, the new constitution abolished communal elections and representation.¹⁸ Later that year, the Jaffna Youth

ⁱ Burghers are mixed-race Ceylonese who can claim European ancestors on their father’s side.

^j In a political context, a consociational arrangement is an agreement between two or more groups to share power in accordance with a mutually acceptable formula. In Ceylon, this was to be a fair share of seats in parliament. In other countries, such as Nigeria or pre-civil war Lebanon, the arrangement takes the form of alternating the office of president and vice president by the dominant political groups.

^k Within a communal election, an election is held for an electorate that consists entirely of members from a particular community (e.g., Ceylonese Muslims), who will typically return a member from their community to represent them in the Legislative Council. Within a territorial election, all eligible voters within a given territory, regardless of which ethnic or racial group they belong to, can participate in electing a representative.

Congress boycotted the first general election in Jaffna constituencies to protest limited Tamil self-representation. Their goal was *purana swaraj* or complete self-government. Within two years, however, the Jaffa Youth Congress protest movement had exhausted itself, and the Tamils were left without direct representation in the government.¹⁹

In the 1930s, sensing the gradual evolution toward greater self-rule, the Tamils pressed for greater political representation for the Tamil community and the establishment of an equal political footing vis-à-vis the Sinhalese. G. G. Ponnambalam, a Tamil member of the State Council, “spearheaded the demand for balanced representation of the minority communities” within a unified Ceylon. Specifically, he pushed for a “fifty-fifty solution,” namely, a communally based legislature with half of the seats allocated for all the minorities—Ceylon Tamils, Indian Tamils, Muslims, Malays, Burghers and Europeans—and the other half for the Sinhalese.²⁰ Not all minority groups supported the initiative, and in 1938 Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott refused to endorse it. For S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, another prominent Tamil politician, the goal was as follows:

The unity of the Tamil people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces and of all the Tamil-speaking peoples in Ceylon, in particular the Tamil-speaking Muslims of the Eastern Province and the Indian Tamil plantation workers (whom he referred to as “hill country Tamils,” thus avoiding the designation “Indian”), but including also all the other Ceylon Tamils scattered throughout the seven Sinhala provinces.²¹

Several years later in 1944, during the midst of World War II, the British formed the Soulbury Commission on Constitutional Reform to explore the possibility of further devolution of authority to Ceylonese political institutions. That same year, G. G. Ponnambalam formed the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), with Chelvanayakam¹ as its deputy leader, after realizing the need for a political organization capable of formulating and articulating the Tamils’ demands to the commission.²³

Meanwhile, Ponnambalam was experiencing difficulties within the government. He found himself unable to produce acceptable resolutions to Tamil concerns relating to citizenship rights for Indian Tamil plantation workers or equal status for the Sinhala and Tamil languages. In addition, Ponnambalam was unable to end state-sanctioned

¹ As recently described on *TamilNet*, “Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, founder of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchchi (ITAK) and fondly called by Tamils as “Thanthai” (father) . . . Till his death on April 26th in 1977, Mr. Chelvanayakam was the acknowledged leader of the Tamil people. He was the only statesman to be returned in five general elections in a row and to remain a hero and a father figure to his people for thirty-three years.”²²

colonization of Tamil areas by Sinhalese colonists.²⁴ Despite these difficulties, Ponnambalam continued to believe that Tamil concerns could be addressed through the government, a remnant of the cross-communal elitist ethos of the late nineteenth century. Many within the Tamil leadership at this juncture believed that the British presence would continue and that Ceylon would be granted restricted self-government rather than complete independence. The situation changed rapidly when Britain transferred power to India and Pakistan in 1947.

The Soulbury Commission Report, published in September 1945, recommended a significant revision of the governmental structure. The centerpiece of the new structure was a Cabinet of Ministers, with a prime minister appointed by the British governor-general and a bicameral legislature. The First Chamber would consist of ninety-five elected members and six governor-general nominees. The Second Chamber would consist of thirty members, half elected by the First Chamber and half chosen by the governor-general. The British governor-general would maintain control over external affairs, defense, and currency, as well as several major institutions, such as the Supreme Court. The report also proposed to retain universal suffrage.²⁵ In October, the British government announced its intention to support constitutional reform in Ceylon on the basis of the Soulbury Report recommendations. Subsequently, the Ceylon State Council voted by fifty-three to three to accept the report's proposals. G. G. Ponnambalam presented the case for balanced representation (i.e., the fifty-fifty solution) to the Soulbury Commission, but the proposal was not accepted by the commission. This left Ponnambalam disappointed with the passage of the reform proposals and upset at Tamil members in the State Council who had voted for the reform package. Chelvanayakam, one of the other top officials within the ACTC, preferred a more federalized political system that devolved greater authority to Sri Lanka's regions than that entailed in the Soulbury Report, but in the end he voted for the Soulbury reforms.

In the political campaigns preceding the 1947 general election, the competing parties emphasized political differences rather than communal issues. The victorious United National Party (UNP) won forty-two seats in the First Chamber, and Don Stephen Senanayake became the first prime minister of Ceylon. The main opposition groups were three Marxist parties: the Trotskyite Lanka Sama Samaj (ten seats), the Bolshevik-Leninist Party (five seats), and the Communist Party (Stalinist) (five seats). The Ceylon Tamil Congress secured seven seats, and the Ceylon Indian Congress had six seats.²⁶ In September, the UNP co-opted ACTC founder G. G. Ponnambalam, who joined the cabinet despite major objections within his own party.

In June 1947, the British government announced its intention to seek a further revision of the Ceylon Constitution, which would confer “full responsible status within the British Commonwealth.” On the basis of bilateral agreements, the Ceylonese were to assume authority over defense and external affairs, but the British governor-general would retain considerable authority over appointments to the government, including appointments to the office of the prime minister and the cabinet.²⁷ The Ceylonese Independence Bill was approved by the British in December 1947.

However, the Ceylonese parties were divided. Whereas the UNP supported the bill, the three Marxist parties, the Tamil Congress, and the Indian Congress were all opposed. The Tamil and Indian Congresses countered that the Independence Bill did not provide sufficient safeguards for minorities.²⁸ In the view of the Tamil Congress, put forth on several occasions since the end of World War II, the First Chamber should be divided on a communal basis in a so-called fifty-fifty arrangement, with the Sinhalese having half the seats and the remaining minorities the other half.

POST-INDEPENDENCE HISTORY, 1948–1972

1948–1956

In the mid-1940s, the prospects for an independent dominion of Ceylon seemed very high. The island was a relatively prosperous, peaceful, multiethnic state with a British-educated class poised to assume leadership. In the British view, an independent Ceylon was destined to become a model for other newly independent states.²⁹ However, this British expectation proved elusive.

In February 1948, a new constitution went into effect. The governor-general still held considerable power. The legislature was divided into two houses: first a thirty-seat Senate with half elected by the lower house and half appointed by the governor-general and second a 101-seat House of Representatives with ninety-five members elected in several voting districts and up to six members appointed by the governor-general.³⁰ Interestingly, the new constitution contained no statement of national principles in a preamble, nor, even more significant in light of future events, a bill of rights that might have protected the rights of minorities.³¹

Within a year, the government headed by the UNP, in conjunction with northern Tamil politicians and parties, took steps to deprive the Indian Tamils of their citizenship and right to vote. Subsequently, about half of the Indian Tamils were forcibly repatriated to the Indian state

of Tamil Nadu, primarily to give Sinhalese candidates in the tea-estate area of central Ceylon easier electoral victories.³²

In the immediate post-independence period, Sri Lanka's parliamentary system awarded seats on the basis of election by plurality in largely homogenous, ethnic regions of the country. This led to the election of candidates who appealed to the most extreme elements of their ethnic constituencies, as the candidates had no reason to accommodate appeals from other ethnic groups whose members were not present in any electorally meaningful numbers within their districts. Likewise, candidates running for national office had much more to gain from appealing to nationalist Sinhalese voters than to moderate Tamil voters because of the overall majority number of Sinhalese. As a result, the parliament was eventually dominated by two main Sinhalese parties (the UNP and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, or SLFP), although it also included some smaller third parties that represented other groups, including Sri Lankan Tamils, Muslims, and Indian Tamils.^m

The sheer numerical superiority of the Sinhalese electorate meant that, even if a party aspired to gain ruling status, it need not appeal to any of the state's ethnic minorities. This was clearly demonstrated on numerous occasions when Sinhalese-led governments attempted to implement policies to accommodate Tamil grievances but invariably mobilized such powerful opposition from Sinhalese nationalists that the issue of Tamil autonomy determined the political fortunes of the major Sinhalese parties. If one party supported the proposal, the opposition party would oppose it and leech supporters away from the more "accommodationist" politicians.³³

Sri Lanka's post-independence governing environment has been characterized by cycles of accommodation and obstruction of Tamil rights, all within an atmosphere of increasing ethnic polarization. Upon gaining independence in 1948, the UNP portrayed itself as a multiethnic party, albeit one with Sinhalese leadership, and made electoral appeals to all ethnic groups. The UNP owed its early success to the relatively high level of integration between the Sinhalese and Tamil elite, with many attending the same schools and having struggled side by side in the independence movement.ⁿ However, as the memory of

^m Indian Tamils are also known as "up-country" Tamils because of their residence on the tea plantations of the central highlands where their ancestors were brought to work by the British.

ⁿ This partially explains the British failure to predict the coming tide of ethnic conflict. Because the very uppermost echelons of the elite were relatively well integrated, the British mistook this condition as representative of the entire population. Indeed, most of the attempts at accommodation have occurred under the UNP, whose leadership has been drawn primarily from among these colonial-era elites and their descendants.

British imperialism receded, so too did this brief experiment in non-identity-based politics.

In the 1952 national election, the UNP and the Tamil Congress, though recent opponents, were closely allied. The central issues of the election were the domestic Marxist challenge to religion and the fear that the Marxists and the Ceylon Indian Congress, which largely represented the Indian Tamil community, would join forces to “flood the country with Indians.”³⁴ As a result, the UNP was again victorious, increasing its seats in the House of Representatives from forty-two to fifty-four (see Table 3-1).

Table 3-1. 1952 election results

Group	Before Election	After Election
Government		
UNP	42	54
Independents	10	15
Tamil Congress	6	4
Labor	1	1
Other		
Sri Lanka Freedom Party	9	9
Three Marxist parties	20	13
Ceylon Indian Congress	7	0
Republican Party	2	1
Federalists	2	2
Independent	1	1

Adapted from W. Ivor Jennings, “Politics in Ceylon,” *Far Eastern Survey* 21, no. 17 (1952): 179.

The year 1956 was a time of great expectation among the Sinhalese Buddhists. It marked the 2,500-year anniversary of the death of the Buddha and the landing of Vijaya and his followers on the island.³⁵ The year was also a watershed in Sri Lankan politics. On a tide of Sinhalese nationalism, which demanded that the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority should have its “rightful” share of economic and employment benefits,³⁶ the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People’s United Front) coalition—which included the radical socialist SLFP, under Solomon West Ridgeway Dias (S. W. R. D.) Bandaranaike, and the Viplavakari Lanka Samaja Party, under Philip Gunawardens—swept to victory. From this point forward, political success in Sri Lanka would rest largely on the commitment of leaders to the parochial interests of their co-ethnic constituents, amounting to a situation where interethnic clashes are

frequently precipitated by intraethnic political competition in which the most hard-line ethnic politicians garner the support of their constituents.³⁷

In the 1956 electoral campaign, for example, Bandaranaike made strong appeals to Sinhalese chauvinism and Buddhist revivalism. As a key element of his campaign, Bandaranaike argued that the Sinhalese race, religion, and culture would “vanish” without a Sinhala-only language policy.

However, in the Sri Lankan context, a policy in favor of the Sinhala language not only had significant positive implications for the Sinhalese but also considerable negative consequences for all minorities. Since the era of British colonization, English was the official language of the state; therefore, English competency was the basis for political and economic advancement. Yet, in 1956, only about six to eight percent of the population was proficient in English, and the majority of this percentage was Tamil.³⁸ Rather than compete with the Tamils where the Tamils had the advantage, Bandaranaike and his followers proposed to replace English with Sinhala as the official language. In this way, they believed, the Sinhalese would acquire greater access to political influence and employment opportunities at the Tamil’s expense.

As prime minister, Bandaranaike quickly introduced the Official Language Act of 1956, otherwise known as the Sinhala-only Act, which designated Sinhala as “the one official language of Ceylon,”^{39,°} replacing English in political and educational institutions. The draft bill contained several provisions to protect Tamil rights, but these provisions were generally limited to the northern areas in which the Tamils were the local majority. However, many Sinhalese- and Buddhist-dominated groups objected to these concessions and mounted organized protests, accusing the government of “placating” the Tamils.⁴⁰ Under such pressures, the Bandaranaike government crumbled and eliminated the Tamil safeguards. It did, though, make an effort to conciliate Tamil opinion with the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958, which dealt with the use of the Tamil language for educational instruction, for administrative purposes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and for test-taking purposes for admittance into the civil service. However, subsequent legislation needed for the implementation of this act was not submitted for parliamentary approval until 1966, when a UNP government under Dudley Senanayake returned to power.⁴¹

° An Act to Prescribe the Sinhala Language of Ceylon and to Enable Certain Transitory Provisions to Be Made. The Act is often shortened to Official Language Act.

1956–1972

As the primary target of the Sinhala-only language policy, the Sri Lankan Tamils mounted large protests and riots, demanding not only language protection but also a constitutional modification instituting a federal system of government and granting a measure of autonomy for the Tamil regions.⁴² In addition, Chelvanayakam, the leader of the Tamil Federal Party, threatened a countrywide peaceful resistance campaign. The more extremist Tamils threatened to separate the northern territory from Sri Lankan government control and seek unity with kindred Tamil areas in south India.⁴³

Under these tense conditions, the Sinhalese and Tamil leaders reached a compromise. In the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam (B-C) Pact of July 26, 1957, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and Chelvanayakam agreed to a plan that would have granted language protections and a degree of administrative self-rule in the form of regional councils in the north and east.^p Describing the discussions, the text of the pact stated the following:

Regarding the language issue, the [Tamil] Federal Party reiterated its stand for parity but in view of the position of the Prime Minister in this matter they came to an agreement by way of adjustment. They pointed out that it was important for them there would be a recognition of Tamil as a national language and that the administration of the Northern and the Eastern Provinces should be done in Tamil.

The Prime Minister stated that it was not possible for him to take any steps that would abrogate the Official Language Act.

After discussion it was agreed that the proposed legislation should contain recognition of Tamil as the language of the national minority of Ceylon and that the four points mentioned by Prime Minister should include provision that, without infringing on the position of the Official Language as such, the language of administration of the Northern and Eastern Provinces be Tamil, and that any necessary provision be made

^p A significant effect of such devolution would have been linguistic autonomy and the return of Tamil civil servants, company clerks, and traders to Tamil-dominated areas. This would have reversed the flow of migration of educated and wealthy Tamils back to Jaffna and away from the capital Colombo, a move that would have strengthened Sinhalese economic prospects.⁴⁴

for the non-Tamil speaking minorities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.⁴⁵

However, sustained opposition from the UNP (now in opposition), *bhikkus* (monks), and Sinhalese nationalists, exacerbated by the bus riots,⁹ forced Bandaranaike to abrogate the pact in April 1958.

When communal tensions further intensified, the government was forced in May 1958 to request and receive a state of emergency proclamation from the governor-general. Members of the Tamil Federal Party and extremist groups on both sides were placed under house arrest from June to September. Subsequently, the government passed several half-hearted legislative measures on language rights for the Tamils, but it was too little and too late, especially because the new legislation did not enact the regional councils or the modicum of administrative autonomy originally envisioned in the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact.

In 1959, events culminated with the assassination of Prime Minister Bandaranaike, who was succeeded by his wife Sirimavo Bandaranaike as prime minister and SLFP leader. Under Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the SLFP instituted radical socialist economic policies such as nationalization and land reform, as well as blatantly pro-Sinhalese educational and employment policies.

By the early 1960s, the Ceylonese economy began to stagnate, as earnings from Ceylon's major exports, tea and rubber, significantly decreased and led to the largest budget deficits in Ceylon's history.⁴⁶ As a consequence, the increasing cost of government social services and consumer subsidies produced a steady rise in the cost of living and unemployment.⁴⁷ Combined with one of the highest rates of population growth in the world at the time, the economy stagnated.

In January 1962, the government was successful in forestalling a planned coup d'état by a group of military and police officers. Eventually, the government arrested twenty-four people, mostly upper-class elites, including several members of prominent and wealthy Christian families in Colombo.⁴⁸ These actions provoked a stern foreign response, including a discontinuation of US aid and an oil boycott, and led to an increasing economic crisis.

In 1965, the UNP under Dudley Shelton Senanayake returned to power with the support of the Tamil Federal Party. The new prime

⁹ Under its nationalized transport system, the Sri Lankan government allocated new buses to the Tamil areas. However, markings on the buses were in the Sinhala language. The Tamils took this as a major affront, and protests ensued. In response, Sinhalese rioters attacked Tamil shops and shopkeepers in Colombo, while the Sri Lankan police made little effort to intervene. More than 200 Buddhist monks carried out a sit-down protest in front of Bandaranaike's residence. Many Tamils lost their homes in Sinhalese regions and were evacuated to Jaffna.

minister and Chelvanayakam reached agreement on a new effort to devolve authority to the Tamil areas in the form of the Senanayake-Chelvanayakam (S-C) Pact, which was negotiated in an effort to accommodate Tamil grievances. According to the text of the agreement:

Mr. Senanayake agreed that action on the following lines would be taken by him to ensure a stable government:

(1) Action will be taken early under the Tamil Language Special Provisions Act to make provision of the Tamil Language of Administration and of Record in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Mr. Senanayake explained that it was the policy of his party that a Tamil-speaking person should be entitled to transact business in Tamil throughout the island.

(2) Mr. Senanayake stated that it was the policy of his party to amend the Languages of Courts Act to provide for legal proceedings in the Northern and Eastern Provinces to be conducted and recorded in Tamil.

(3) Action will be taken to establish district councils in Ceylon vested with powers over subjects to be mutually agreed upon between two leaders. It was agreed, however, that the government should have power under the law to give directions to such councils under the national interest.

(4) The Land Development Ordinance will be amended to provide that citizens of Ceylon be entitled to the allotment of land under the Ordinance.

Mr. Senanayake further agreed that in the granting of land under colonization schemes the following priorities be observed in the Northern and Eastern Provinces:

(a) Land in the Northern and Eastern Provinces should in the first instance be granted to landless persons in the district.

(b) Second, to Tamil-speaking persons resident in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

(c) Third, to other citizens in Ceylon, preference being given to Tamil citizens in the rest of the island.⁴⁹

Tamil politicians were briefly included in a coalition government from 1965 to 1968, but the S-C agreement was again abrogated in the face of virulent Sinhalese opposition, this time led by the opposition SLFP despite their earlier stance supporting a devolution of authority through the B-C Pact.[†]

As a consequence of Sinhalese efforts and policies, Sinhala speakers became more and more numerically preponderant in the civil service. From 1956 to 1970, the proportions of Tamils employed by the state fell from sixty to ten percent in the professions, from thirty to five percent in the administrative service, from fifty to five percent in the clerical service, and from forty to one percent in the armed forces.⁵⁰ In the period from February 1962 to February 1963, for example, 1,157 Tamils recruited before 1956 were compelled to leave public service on the grounds that they were unable to work in Sinhalese.⁵¹

In May 1970, the United Front coalition, led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike of the SLFP and also consisting of the Trotskyite Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Ceylon Equal Society Party, or LSSP) and the Communist Party (Moscow Wing), swept into power. By securing a two-thirds majority in the legislature, the coalition did not need to rely on Tamil parties for support. Yet despite the presence of a leftist government, the Marxist JVP attempted to overthrow the Sirimavo Bandaranaike regime during an insurrection in April 1971. Despite being initially taken by surprise, the government was able to largely suppress the insurrection within a few weeks.

In 1972, Ceylon adopted a new constitution, and the name of the country was changed to Sri Lanka.⁵² The constitution's preamble indicated that the state was to have a unitary form of government and was pledged to achieve a "socialist democracy," including full employment of all working-age citizens, equal distribution of the social product, and collective forms of property.^{53,54}

Emergence of Violence, 1972–1983

Although the two decades after independence saw an oscillation of intercommunal violence and formal attempts at reconciliation, the events of the 1970s eventually set the two rival ethnic groups on a collision course. In 1971, legislation was passed that led to higher university

[†] The Tamil Federal Party (FP) members of parliament supported Sinhalese leaders at various points when those leaders made pacts with Tamil leaders or agreed to implement certain legislation. However, at times there was a steep price to pay for reaching across the ethnic divide to reach an accommodation. One of the motivations for the assassination of Prime Minister Bandaranaike by an extremist Buddhist monk was unhappiness over Bandaranaike's efforts to appease Tamils.

exam requirements for Tamil speakers, whose representation at the university level at that time exceeded their percentage of the total population. Moreover, the introduction of a district quota system meant that many well-educated Tamils from Jaffna and Colombo (the historic education centers of the country) could not gain entrance to university because spaces were reserved for lower-scoring students from less affluent rural districts. With almost no opportunities for employment in agriculture or industry, which were negligible in the north, and reduced opportunities in the public sector as a result of the Sinhala-only legislation, this closing of the door to university access eliminated one of the few remaining avenues for upward mobility, wealth, and status for Tamil youths.⁵⁵

The next year, in 1972, the government formalized a number of preexisting anti-Tamil policies by incorporating them into the constitution. Buddhism was accorded “the foremost place,” with the state directed “to protect and foster” it, and Sinhala was made the sole official language of the country, with Tamil permissible by statute.⁵⁶ By this point, the Official Language Act of 1956 had led to the de-Tamilization of the civil service, and, as stated previously, policies in the early 1970s made it more difficult for Tamils to gain entrance into the country’s universities. These factors led to the radicalization of Tamil youth and prompted a proliferation of separatist organizations. Two days after the new constitution’s adoption, three Tamil parties joined in forming the Tamil United Front (TUF). Soon, as many as thirty-six explicitly militant groups were in operation, including the Tamil New Tigers (TNT).^{57,s} In January 1974, when Sri Lankan police attacked the Fourth International Tamil Conference in Jaffna, killing eleven Tamils, the mood among the Tamils, especially the youth, turned from alienation and protest to overt defiance and militant action.

Open advocacy of violent acts against the state led to the arrest of many Tamil leaders.⁵⁸ As a consequence, even the less extremist organizations that were actively engaged in the political system began to change in nature and methods. For example, the TUF changed its name to the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) to emphasize a more radical approach,⁵⁹ and the TNT would soon give rise to the LTTE.

The TULF included not only the Federal Party of the Sri Lankan Tamils but also the Ceylon Workers’ Congress (CWC) of the Indian Tamils, thus uniting the two major Tamil groups under one umbrella for the first time. At its first national convention in May 1976, the TULF adopted the Vaddukoddai Resolution, unambiguously advocating for the first time a separate Tamil Eelam (homeland),⁶⁰ stating,

^s For a list of such organizations, see *Appendix B. Tamil Terrorist Organizations*.

Restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of Tamil Eelam, based on the right of self-determination inherent to every nation, has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil Nation in this Country.

The Vaddukoddai Resolution further directed the TULF Action Committee to formulate an action plan to launch the “struggle for winning the sovereignty and freedom of the Tamil Nation.” The resolution also defined the proposed boundaries for Tamil Eelam (see Figure 3-1): the Northern Province (districts of Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu, and Vavuniya) and the Eastern Province (districts of Ampara, Batticaloa, and Trincomalee).[†]

The LTTE, established by Velupillai Prabhakaran in May 1976, was small in number and limited in scope.⁶² Prabhakaran’s initial intention was to create an elite force, ruthlessly efficient and highly professional,⁶³ with in-depth training and strict discipline. Initially, the primary targets were moderate Tamil politicians and police.⁶⁴ Soon, the group sought more important targets, including the assassinations of Alfred Duraiappah, the SLFP mayor of Jaffna, in 1975 and M. Kanagaratnam, a Tamil member of the Sri Lankan parliament, in 1977. Successful recruitment, especially among Tamil students, increased membership and allowed the LTTE to expand its targets to include local security forces. In addition, bank robberies were a major source of income.^{65,u}

[†] Shortly thereafter, the TULF added the district of Puttalam. It is noteworthy that the proposed state of Tamil Eelam did not include the area of central Sri Lanka, where the Indian Tamils were concentrated.⁶¹

^u However, recruitment was less successful among the rural poor, who were ambivalent to the LTTE cause.



Figure 3-1. Sri Lankan districts, with the boundaries for Tamil Eelam in red.

Although Tamil politicians were elected to parliament through provincial elections in 1977, militant activity continued. In fact, the elections themselves became a major vehicle for political violence, with each round eliciting increasingly organized and systematic attacks by various parties.⁶⁶ Still, in the 1977 general election, TULF members secured eighteen of the twenty-three seats they contested (see Table 3-2). In the Northern Province in particular, the TULF received a majority of votes

in Jaffna District (seventy-two percent), Vavuniya (fifty-six percent), and Mannar (fifty-two percent).⁶⁷

Table 3-2. 1977 election results⁶⁸

Party	Seats
UNP	140
TULF	18
SLFP	8
CWC	1
Independent	1

Finally, in 1978, the electoral system was altered to include a separately elected executive and a party-list system that included proportional representation in multimember districts, and with these two electoral reforms, Sinhalese politicians could no longer safely ignore the Tamil vote.^v By this time, however, most Tamil politicians had already boycotted parliament, and armed insurrection had taken hold.⁶⁹ The strength of Sinhala nationalism and the failure of mainstream Tamil politicians to secure any noticeable gains therefore encouraged the eventual growth and sustainment of radical Tamil separatist movements.

The new constitution of 1978, which defined the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka as a unitary state (Article 2), reinforced the provisions of the 1972 constitution concerning the primacy of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. On one hand, the constitution granted all people the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, speech, and assembly (Articles 10 and 14). On the other hand, it specified that Buddhism was to have “the foremost place” in the country (Article 9). It also mandated that it is the state’s duty “to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana.”^{70,w} Although Buddhism did not become a state religion, all other religions and systems of thought were clearly deemed secondary under the constitution.⁷² The constitution further declared Sinhala to be the “official language” of Sri Lanka (Article 18) used for administrative purposes throughout the country, except for public records maintenance and public institution transactions in the Northern and Eastern Provinces (Article 22). Both Sinhala and Tamil were described

^v A multimember district is one that returns more than one member to the legislature.

^w Obeyesekere noted that *sasana* can be loosely translated as the Buddhist “church” and that doctrinally it refers to the universal Buddhist community or church that transcends ethnic and other boundaries.⁷¹

as “National Languages” (Article 19) for specific purposes such as parliamentary activities and education.⁷³

Communal violence continued to escalate in the 1970s and into the 1980s, marked by the burning of the Jaffna Library (which housed 90,000 Tamil books and manuscripts) in 1981^{74,75} and culminating in the anti-Tamil riots that killed an estimated 2,500 Tamils in 1983.^{76,x} Sparked by an LTTE attack on a Sri Lanka Army convoy that killed thirteen soldiers, the 1983 riots would prove to be a seminal event in modern Sri Lankan history, as official hostilities between the LTTE and the government commenced thereafter. After the killing of the thirteen soldiers, certain enraged army elements displayed the mangled corpses in the cemetery of Kanatte in Colombo, after which commenced a wave of killings of Tamils by Sinhalese mobs, some of whom chanted “Victory to the Sinhalese Army.”⁷⁷ Indications of possible pre-planning include the use of voter lists and addresses of Tamil shops, homes, and businesses, as mobs sought to kill and drive out Tamils from Colombo.^y Gangs associated with the Jathika Sevaka Samithiya (JSS), a government-run union organized by the highly sectarian Minister of Industry Cyril Mathew, went on a rampage. The JSS carried out intelligence activities, as it reportedly developed dossiers on Tamils that included information on where they lived and the property and businesses they owned.⁸¹

Most of Wellawatte, an area of Colombo where many Tamils resided, was burned down, and riots spread to other cities and also targeted Indian (especially south Indian) commercial interests. Much of Wellawatte was destroyed by men who were transported many miles

^x Official Sri Lankan government statistics claimed that only 350 Tamils were killed in the rioting.

^y “False consciousness,” specifically the displacement of economic anxiety and class concerns onto a paradigm of ethnic conflict, may have played a role as well. Some have argued that the targeting of Tamil commercial establishments was a result of the frustrations felt by the Sinhalese after the liberalization of the economy that had been undertaken by the UNP government a few years earlier.⁷⁸ According to this argument, the liberalization in foreign trade enacted by the government negatively impacted Sinhalese economic interests, because Sinhalese businesses with political connections had previously benefited from a permit-quota-license system that was dismantled by the reforms.⁷⁹ Many of the businesses that were shuttered in the face of cheap foreign imports were owned by Sinhalese entrepreneurs that employed Sinhalese labor, who had to be discharged once their firms failed. Tamil entrepreneurs lacked the connections to avail themselves of this form of protection against international competition and so they were better prepared to compete under the new liberalized foreign trade regime. Thus, there emerged the perception that Tamils were benefiting under liberalization at the expense of the Sinhalese, given preexisting experience with international trade. This added to Sinhalese frustration, as they were already upset over perceptions that the Tamils controlled wholesale and retail trade in Colombo. Perhaps as a reflection of this argument, Neelan Thiruchelvam, a Tamil member of parliament, stated “This time the Tamil entrepreneurial class has been destroyed.”⁸⁰

in trucks belonging to the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation, and attackers also used vehicles owned by the Sri Lanka Transport Board and other government departments.⁸² The armed forces also participated in these activities, as army personnel in Colombo actively encouraged arson and the looting of businesses and homes in Colombo (and in many cases participating in looting), and in Trincomalee, sailors from the Sri Lankan navy participated in killings, looting, and setting houses and businesses ablaze.⁸³ Often described as a “pogrom,” these events reinforced the LTTE message that nothing short of a separate Tamil state would provide the community with security. No government response to the riots was forthcoming other than the issuance of an edict outlawing separatism. The anti-Tamil violence spurred mass migration, resulting in further geographic polarization along ethnic lines and a large supply of displaced people who were quickly absorbed by the recruitment arms of the militant groups.⁸⁴

In addition to this escalation in ethnic violence, resettlement and state irrigation projects sponsored by the Sri Lankan government in the 1980s further exacerbated tensions by relocating tens of thousands of landless Sinhalese from the south and west into Tamil-majority lands in the east. These projects brought Sinhalese and Tamil farmers into direct conflict over water resources that were increasingly being diverted to support the sugarcane production practiced mostly by resettled Sinhalese. The projects were also framed as a return to the days of the ancient Sinhalese kingdoms that dominated the east, thus further enhancing both Tamil and Muslim fears of being overrun. These government-designed settlement programs exposed Sinhala settlers to acts of vengeance from Tamil groups who considered them legitimate military targets, resulting in an anti-Tamil mindset among settler families whose sons were increasingly recruited into either the regular army or paramilitary organizations.⁸⁵ In a country where eight-five percent of the population is rural, the resettlement schemes had a major impact on the demographic composition in many provinces, shifting the majority-minority distribution between ethnic groups and further exacerbating ethnic tensions.^z

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The discussions earlier in this chapter on Sri Lanka’s colonial experience and developments on the subcontinent indicate that global and regional developments had an impact on the island. This section

^z For data on the changing demographic composition of the Eastern Province during the twentieth and early twenty-first century, see International Crisis Group, *Asia Report*, no. 159.⁸⁶

expands on this theme by attempting to more fully situate developments in Sri Lanka within a broader context. While the island (at least as seen by policymakers outside of India) is not a military or diplomatic appendage of India, clearly events on the subcontinent, such as the decline of Buddhism and the divide between north and south India, had an impact on Sri Lanka. Below these themes are explored more fully, and European colonialism in the Indian Ocean region is discussed more broadly, noting the impact of these regional developments on Sri Lanka.

Additionally, upon independence in 1948, Sri Lanka's leaders found themselves with the responsibility to craft a foreign policy, which since 1815 had been the obligation of the island's imperial rulers. Suddenly the newly independent country's elected leaders had to contend with an emerging bipolar world divided into communist and capitalist blocs. This section, therefore, includes a discussion of the impact of emerging post-war trends on Sri Lanka, with particular emphasis placed on Chinese and Soviet policies in the Indian Ocean region and with respect to Sri Lanka. The section concludes with a brief discussion of some of the key trends in Sri Lanka's foreign policy before the emergence of conflict with the various Tamil militant groups.

Precolonial India

In the absence of reliable history texts of the period, events in the Indian subcontinent before the thirteenth century BC are difficult to detail and verify. Traditionally, the history of the subcontinent begins with the arrival of the Aryans in the northwest area at the "Land of the Seven Rivers" around present-day Punjab. Bringing with them the Sanskrit language and a socioeconomic caste system, the Aryans probably moved eastward into the Doab region of north-central India as depicted in the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.

In the mid- to late fifth century BC emerged two philosophical-theological schools: the Buddhist founded by Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha or Enlightened One) and Jainism under Nataputta (*Mahavira* or Great Hero). At the age of thirty-five, Gautama attained enlightenment and developed the concept of the Middle Way between indulgence and asceticism.

In the early part of the fourth century BC, India's first large kingdom, the Mauryan Empire, emerged under Chandragupta. Described as "probably the most extensive ever forged by an Indian dynasty,"⁸⁷ existing evidence suggests that Chandragupta's empire reached from Afghanistan in the northwest and Gujarat in the west-central to Bengal on the east coast. Ashoka, Chandragupta's grandson, further

extended the empire with the conquest of Kalinga (roughly present-day Orissa) on the east coast. It was this Ashoka who reportedly sent his son, Mahinda, on a Buddhist mission to the Ceylonese island. After Ashoka's death in 231 BC until the empire's last ruler in 180 BC, the Mauryan empire gradually declined and northern India experienced numerous ebbs and flows.

In the first century BC, peninsular India, that is, the region below the traditional north-south dividing line of the Narmada River, began to flourish politically and economically. Until this time, notes one observer, "the southern extremity of the subcontinent scarcely features in India's history."⁸⁸ In contrast to the Aryan origins of the Sanskrit speakers in the north, the southern states were then (and are now) populated by four ethnic groups of Dravidian peoples, each with its own distinct Dravidian language: the Kannada speakers of Karnataka, the Telugu speakers of Andhra Pradesh, the Tamil speakers of Tamil Nadu, and the Malayalam speakers of Kerala. Moreover, in contrast to the north's agrarian focus, the southern urbanized areas developed with the rapid expansion of trade, especially sea trade with Roman, Greek, and Egyptian merchants. It is not surprising, therefore, that the cultural as well as economic ties of southern India were drawn across the Palk Straits toward the Ceylonese island, rather than northward.

In the early fourth century AD, northern India began to recapture its political and military sway with the founding of the Gupta Dynasty under Chandragupta (not to be confused with the king of the previous Mauryan Empire). Over its course, the Gupta Dynasty absorbed most of the subcontinent, except for the extreme south. Whereas the Mauryan Empire had a centrally controlled administration, the Gupta Empire was more of a loose feudal system in which subordinate states—especially those at a greater distance—were left largely intact as they recognized the sovereignty of the Gupta Dynasty and paid the appropriate tribute.

By 510, the fierce attacks of the Huns on the Gupta Empire were taking their toll. The Huns seized Kashmir, Punjab, and fought their way into central India. Most noteworthy, the Hun assaults devastated the great centers of Buddhism in Taxila, Peshawar, and Swat and, therein, largely eliminated not only Buddhism in northern India but also the religious "homeland" of Ceylonese/Sri Lankan Sinhalese.

In 375, the Pallavas of Kanchipuram, near Madras, began to establish the "first great southern India dynasty."⁸⁹ For almost three centuries, the Pallavas faced no major challenges and became one of the major forces in the sea trade throughout Southeast Asia. Locally, the situation changed with the rise of Chalukyas in the Deccan area north of the Pallavas. Then, the two empires continuously jostled directly or indirectly

for more than a century. On occasion, the Chalukyas were distracted to the north to fend off Arab incursions into Gujarat. For their part, the Pallavas sometimes turned their forces south toward Madurai in an effort to suppress the Pandyas, allies of the Chalukyas, to support their own allies, the Cheras of Kerala, or to intervene in Ceylon in support of favored succession candidates.⁹⁰ In comparison with the local situation, the Pallavas remained a major sea power in Southeast Asia until deposed by the emergence of the Srivijayas in the eighth century.

In the latter part of the ninth century, a new Dravidian dynasty, the Cholas, rose in the south. After decades of inconclusive combat with the Pandyas and Cheras to the south and the powerful Rashtrakutas to the north, the Cholas began a rapid expansion of territory under their control. First, attacking southward, the Cholas decisively defeated the Pandyas and the Cheras. From here, the Cholas successively attacked Ceylon, reaching and plundering as far as the ancient capital of Anuradhapura. Then, in defense of their allies, the Eastern Chalukyas, the Cholas became embroiled in the Deccan region against the Western Chalukyas, becoming “the first south Indian dynasty to intervene in the north.”⁹¹ In the early eleventh century, the Cholas entered another phase of expansion. In 1014, the Cholas again invaded and plundered Ceylon. Then, the Pandyas and Cheras were attacked with great success. Subsequently, the Cholas turned north against the Western Chalukyas, and then continued up the east coast reaching the territory of the Palas in Bengal.

By the thirteenth century, Muslim forces had successfully occupied the land across the north from Afghanistan to Bengal. Between 1296 and 1312, several Muslim commanders mounted excursions south essentially in search of plunder, rather than territorial conquest. In 1311, one of these leaders, Malik Kafur, reached into the deep south with raids through the Tamil and Pandya areas. However, the Muslim hold on northern India proved vulnerable to invasions by Mongol forces under Timur the Lame (Tamerlane) and Afghan forces.

In the aftermath of Muslim disintegration, the subcontinent reverted to numerous “strong independent states based on ancient identities of lineage, language, dynastic tradition and economic interest.”⁹² Two of the more powerful new states were the Muslim kingdom of Bahmanid in the Deccan and its rival, the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar on the southern tip of the peninsula. Conflicts between Bahmanid and Vijayanagar, fundamentally border wars with religious overtones, continued until an agreement in the late 1440s put an end to hostilities. In the 1490s, however, the Vijayanagar kingdom was able to take advantage of in-fighting among Bahmanid leaders to assert its influence in the Deccan region. While the Bahmanid kingdom broke up into four weak

sultanates, the Vijayanagar kingdom emerged as the most powerful kingdom in south India, with control over the present-day regions of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh. The Vijayanagar kingdom lasted but a short time. In 1565, the four Bahmanid sultanates united to crush the Vijayanagar forces in the Battle of Talikota. This defeat and the resultant collapse of the Vijayanagar kingdom would “spell the end of the south as a separate political arena.”⁹³

While Vijayanagar was reaching its zenith during the reign of Krishna-deva-raya in the early sixteenth century, two history-changing events were occurring. In the north, Afghan forces under Zahir-ud-din Muhammad, also known popularly as *Babur* (The Tiger), began a series of incursions into northwest India. In short order, Babur—a descendant of Timur the Lame on his father’s side and Genghis Khan on his mother’s—pushed across northern India and established the Mughal Empire, which would ultimately rule over most of India until the nineteenth century. At nearly the same time in the south, but with much longer effect for all of South and Southeast Asia, European explorers were rounding the Cape of Good Hope and reaching India’s Kerala coast.

China

By the twelfth century, China had extended its territorial control in the north along a line from the Tian Shan Mountains of western Mongolia almost to the Pacific Ocean above present-day Korea and in the south along a line from the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia, across the Himalayan Mountains of northern India, to the South China Sea. Over the next century, it reached into Central Asia as far as Tashkent and Samarkand. The advance of the Mongols not only captured the throne of China but also spread into Persia and northern India. In addition, under the Mongol ruler Kublai Khan, China expanded its interests in Indian Ocean trade. After gaining influence in Vietnam, Burma, and Java, Kublai Khan established trading posts in Ceylon and southern peninsula India and made ten Indian kingdoms tributary to China.⁹⁴

By the thirteenth century, the Chinese were building the best boats sailing in the Indian Ocean. As a result, Chinese traders were able to replace the Arabs as the primary commercial carriers in the Indian Ocean.⁹⁵ Under Mongol ruler Kublai Khan, the Chinese regime sent diplomatic emissaries to Ceylon and southern India to establish and maintain diplomatic relations and regional influence in South Asia. Soon, Chinese merchants settled in Sumatra, Ceylon, and Calicut on India’s west coast. In effect, China’s Mongol dynasty held nearly complete domination of the eastern half of the Indian Ocean and came to control the lucrative spice trade across the eastern half of the Indian Ocean.⁹⁶

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, under the Han ruler Emperor Zhu Di, the Ming Dynasty undertook a major effort to refurbish the Han-centered image of China's international power and prestige in the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. To this end, China needed to overcome its Confucian tradition as a self-isolated state and advance along two paths:⁹⁷

- Enhance the mainland's circle of influence over an expanding outer ring of subordinate and tributary states
- Broaden its foreign trade ties to secure new sources of commercial wealth

For these purposes, China constructed a new imperial fleet under the command of Admiral Zheng He. For a period of thirty years beginning in 1405, China's massive fleet sailed the high seas from the mainland to Africa, conducting trade, extracting tribute, establishing diplomatic ties, and, where necessary, installing new leaders friendly to China.

During his first voyage in 1405, Zheng He landed in numerous ports across the Indian Ocean, including Ceylon. For more than a millennium, China and Ceylon had been closely linked by common ties to Buddhism, beginning with the visit of Fa Hien to India in 401 and Ceylon in 413.^{aa} However, Zheng He's visit, at first friendly, ended in hostility. According to a Chinese source of the period, Zheng He had attempted to steal the Sacred Tooth Relic, which was not only a major religious object but also a symbol of sovereignty and legitimacy for Ceylonese monarchs.⁹⁸ In 1408, Zheng He returned to Ceylon with a large military force, unseated the king, and took him as a prisoner back to China. To the throne, Emperor Zhu Di named a more friendly replacement. From then to 1438, Chinese forces occupied Ceylon.⁹⁹ As a consequence, Ceylon fell under China's influence and paid tribute to China until 1459, though Zheng He had to return to Ceylon on several "pacifying missions" to secure Ceylonese subordination.^{100,101} Indeed, as one author noted, Chinese authority in the coastal areas of South Asia was unchallenged.

At this moment Chinese influence abroad was at its peak, and all the important trading ports in the Indian Ocean basin and China seas—from Korea and Japan throughout the Malay Archipelago and India to the east Africa coast—were at least nominally under

^{aa} As early as the first century AD, Buddhist monks from northern India had begun religious missions to China over land routes by way of Central Asia. Fa Hien's visit was the first major, well-documented trips in the opposite direction. After two years in Ceylon, Fa Hien returned to China, where he published his famous monograph *The Travels of Fa Hien*, which inspired numerous subsequent religious exchanges between Ceylon and China thereafter.

Chinese authority and acknowledged the suzerainty of the dragon throne.¹⁰²

However, at the height of its naval power,^{ab} the course unexpectedly reversed. With the death of Zhu Di in 1424, his successor, Emperor Zhu Gaozhi, a traditionalist, was convinced by the conservative mandarin bureaucracy to curtail the imperial fleet, ban all sea-going ships, and again withdraw China into self-imposed isolation.^{ac} Except for one final major voyage in 1431–1432, the imperial fleet soon ceased to exist.^{ad} Therewith, China’s control and influence in the Indian Ocean rapidly waned at the very time that the Europeans, especially the Portuguese, were beginning to explore the sea routes through the Indian Ocean to China.

European Colonialism

By 1498, Vasco de Gama was successful in circumnavigating the Cape of Good Hope and reaching Calicut on the west coast of India. In contrast to the Chinese and earlier visitors, the Portuguese came to South Asia not simply to gain trade and profit, but more importantly to build forts and capture territory.

In 1500, a Portuguese expedition to India under Pedro Cabral bombarded the port of Calicut and forced the local ruler to grant the Portuguese use of a “warehouse” facility. Cabral returned to Portugal with considerable plunder and spurred another expedition by da Gama in 1502. After defeating an Egyptian fleet that had come to Calicut’s protection, da Gama likewise returned with valuable cargo and booty. Beginning in 1503, the Portuguese gradually displaced local Indian

^{ab} Reportedly, China’s navy possessed about 1,350 combat vessels, including 400 large floating fortresses and 250 long-range cruising ships that reached as far east as modern-day Zanzibar. Based on the expertise of its sailors and the tonnage of its ships, naval experts suggest that China would probably have circumnavigated the Cape of Good Hope before the Europeans. See, for example, Kennedy.¹⁰³

^{ac} In the post-Zhu Di period, as during the next five centuries, the Chinese leadership had an ambiguous view of the military as a necessary evil. On the one hand, the military was a constant threat to the civilian leadership. On the other hand, the military was essential for internal security and peripheral defense from constant land invasions, especially the Mongols in the north. This is a principal reason why the Army again became the dominant service under close civilian scrutiny and the navy devolved into a riverine force.

^{ad} In total, Admiral Zheng He commanded seven long-distance voyages between 1405 and 1432. Each voyage consisted of about 100–300 ships and carried about 27,000 men. In each voyage, there were generally about fifty colossal “treasure ships,” which were about five times the size and ten times the capacity of any wooden vessel then being built elsewhere in the world. In comparison, Europe’s pioneering long-distance voyages under Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama consisted of three to four ships, the largest of which had a capacity less than one-twentieth of a “treasure ship.”¹⁰⁴

leaders in battle and took control of their lands, including the port of Goa. In 1505, the Portuguese appointed a Viceroy to administer its Indian possessions, now called the *Estado da India* (State of India).

Likewise, in 1505, the Portuguese established a foothold on the west coast of Ceylon and gradually extended its control along the coast. By 1507, much of Ceylon had become a vassal state of Portugal. In 1517, the Portuguese solidified their control of the island with their occupation of Colombo. In a short time, the Portuguese were able to establish naval control over the major entry points into the Indian Ocean and channel most of the Indian Ocean trade to their main ports, Goa and Cochin.¹⁰⁵ For four and a half centuries from this point to independence in 1948, India and Ceylon would find themselves under the occupation of Europeans who largely dictated regional and local events.

Spain's absorption of Portugal in 1580 meant that the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 severely curtailed Portuguese sway in the Indian Ocean and opened the region to British and Dutch merchants. The British East India Company, founded in 1600, and the Dutch East India Company, founded in 1602, were initially intended to challenge Portugal's monopoly over the Indonesian spice trade. However, both companies—enticed by cheap Indian exports, especially cotton textiles—were lured to establish enclaves in the small states along the west coast, in the Tamil country at the southern tip, and eventually up the east coast of India. From here, the British and Dutch were able to fulfill their original goal and, by 1640, broke the Portuguese monopoly over the eastern sea routes of the Indian Ocean.

Although the Portuguese retained some of their footholds in India, the situation in Ceylon was quite different. In 1638, the Dutch East India Company entered into a treaty with the Kandyan kingdom and was able to oust the Portuguese from Ceylon. Subsequently, the Dutch took over the Portuguese coastal possessions, as well as the monopoly of Ceylon's cinnamon exports.

In the mid-seventeenth century, the French presence in the Indian Ocean region increased significantly. The French navy confronted the British navy and challenged it for supremacy at sea. On land, the earlier Europeans were soon joined in India by the French *Compagnie des Indes*, founded in 1660. For almost the next century, conflicts in India with European involvement were generally limited commercial competitions and small skirmishes to secure strongholds against other Europeans and local Indian rulers. This changed drastically in the 1740s as a reflection of the increased British and French confrontation in Europe.

In the Indian Ocean region, the growing British and French naval clashes now spilled over into the Tamil region of India. In 1746, the French in Pondicherry attacked and captured the British stronghold in

nearby Madras. Both sides immediately began a buildup of professional forces and recruitment of increasingly more powerful Indian allies. In addition to proxy wars, the British and French forces launched major offensives against each other's territory, including the British drive up the east coast to Bengal that is considered the initial move in Britain's conquest of India. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British were essentially in control of major portions of northeast India, as well as the two coastlines. However, the more that the British extended their hold in India, the more they felt vulnerable to external threats, especially from the French and the Russians.

In turn, the British moved to replace the Dutch in Ceylon at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As the British expanded colonization of India, Ceylon took on added importance as control over the Palk Strait became essential for the British line of communication between the west and east Indian coastlines. However, two factors hindered the British. First, the Bay of Bengal region lacked a potential harbor for developing a British naval base. Second, the annual October-to-March monsoons along the east India coastline forced the British fleet to seek safe harbor on the west Indian coast for major stretches of time. On the other hand, the Ceylonese port of Trincomalee, one of the best harbors in the entire Indian Ocean region, was an excellent solution.¹⁰⁶

Thus, the British assessed Ceylon as not simply a commercial venture, but most importantly a vital strategic linchpin in the British position east of the Cape of Good Hope. Maintaining control of Ceylon remained a priority for Britain while they controlled their empire and India. In Europe's never ending wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as in prior times, Ceylon was often perceived by the major seafaring states, such as Portugal and the Netherlands, as a prime jewel. Despite the many colonial concessions at the conclusion of these wars, Britain always made it a priority to hold onto Ceylon as long as there existed a British Empire and a British-controlled India. And indeed, the British would hold on to Ceylon until the mid-twentieth century, and the island would play a pivotal role in British plans during World War II for the destruction of Japanese power in the Pacific region.

Ceylon During World War II

By August 1942, the Japanese forces were rapidly advancing into the Indian Ocean. In December 1941, Japanese land-based naval bombers sank the British battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battle cruiser *Repulse*. Two months later in the Battle of Java Sea, the Japanese soundly defeated a joint force of American, Australian, British, and Dutch warships. On land, the Japanese seized Malaya, Singapore, Sumatra, and

Burma. With the fall of Singapore, in particular, the image of the British Empire's might and invincibility suffered a severe setback. This early in the war, Japanese victories and propaganda, which portrayed Japan as the "Liberator" of Asia under its "Asia for Asiatics" campaign, was still winning sympathizers and contributed to the Japanese advance, especially in Burma. Likewise, the Germans were successfully advancing through British colonies of North Africa, as well as toward the Caucasus regions of the southern Soviet Union.

In April 1942, the Japanese launched a major naval expedition of five carriers and 300 airplanes into the Indian Ocean. The main strike force headed south of Ceylon, raiding the port of Colombo, sinking a destroyer, and downing twenty-seven British aircraft, while losing only nine Japanese aircraft. Shortly thereafter, the British lost two heavy cruisers, the *Devonshire* and the *Cornwall*, in fighting to the southwest of Ceylon. Several days later, the Japanese strike force attacked the naval base at Trincomalee and sank the British small carrier *Hermes* and the Australian destroyer *Vampire*.¹⁰⁷ Simultaneous with the naval operations around Ceylon, the Japanese sent another squadron from Burma to attack the ports of Cocanada and Vizagapatan on the east coast of India and commercial ships in the Bay of Bengal. The squadron sank twenty-three merchant ships, including twenty in one day. In subsequent raids on merchant ships along India's west coast, Japanese submarines sank 32,000 tons of shipping.¹⁰⁸ At this point, Ceylon and India were vulnerable to Japanese conquest. The capture of Ceylon would have provided a launching pad for an advance against an India that was politically divided and militarily weakened by having sent most of its forces to other war theaters despite the objections of the Indian National Congress. With the additional capture or neutralization of India, Japan may have been able to link up with Germany and Italy in the western Indian Ocean region, sever Allied oil supplies from the Persian Gulf, shut off sea lines of communication across the Indian Ocean that were essential for supplying the Soviet and Chinese war efforts, and break direct ties with Australia.

However, two factors intervened. First, South Asia was geographically a tremendous overextension for the Japanese navy. Lacking a major naval base in the region, the Japanese were forced to rely on distant Singapore. Second and more importantly, the US Navy took up the slack of the weakened British fleet. The Americans not only deterred Japanese advances in the Indian Ocean but also forced the Japanese to withdraw to the Pacific naval theater. As a result, there were no more major raids into the Indian Ocean by Japanese naval forces after May 1942 and the British were able to concentrate their naval forces in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.¹⁰⁹ The political leaders and populace

of Ceylon opened their arms to the war effort. Indeed, Ceylon took up the role of a “surrogate Singapore.”¹¹⁰ The island became the home for many Allied wartime agencies, including headquarters for

- Supreme Allied Command South East Asia;
- the Eastern Fleet;
- the Royal Air Force’s reconnaissance operations in the Indian Ocean;
- the Dutch and Free French Forces in the east;

as well as main bases for

- allied special forces operating behind enemy lines;
- the Far East Combined Bureau; and
- allied secret services, such as the British MI6 and the American Office of Strategic Services.

During the war, many carriers and battleships sailed from Trincomalee to participate in attacks against Japanese-occupied territories. As the tide changed in Allied favor at the end of the war, Ceylon became a major assembly point for the British Pacific Fleet.

In contrast to India, the Ceylonese government and most of the island’s leading politicians united in positive support of the war effort. Traditionally oriented toward constitutionalism and gradualism, the political elites—with the exception of the Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP)—were generally reluctant to employ confrontational behavior during the war. Indeed, they worked on the assumption that cooperation would augment their bargaining position for postwar dominion status and eventual independence. However, cooperation had its limits. As one leading member of the Ceylon National Congress party clearly stated in reference to the conflicting Roosevelt and Churchill interpretation of Point Three^{ac} of the Atlantic Charter:

We believe that the War in which England is now engaged in was being waged for the freedom of small nations throughout the world. The recent declarations appear to restrict that freedom to such nations of Europe as have lost their independence. The Congress considers it anomalous that the people of Ceylon, a subject people, should be participating in a War effort to restore freedom to European nations, while

^{ac} The Atlantic Charter was an agreement between the United States and Great Britain signed in August 1941 and addressed the two countries’ vision for a post-World War II world. Point Three stated that all peoples had the right to self-determination, a norm whose universal application was not viewed favorably by Churchill, since Britain at that time controlled India.

they themselves are to continue indefinitely in a state of subjection within the Empire.¹¹¹

Indeed, the more adamant Churchill became with respect to maintaining the Empire after the war, the more the Ceylonese political leaders became in their demands, first, for postwar dominion status within the Commonwealth and then, when that received no positive British response, for immediate dominion status. Yet Ceylon attained its independence in 1948, and in recognition of its inability to provide for its own external defense, prior to independence it placed itself under the British security umbrella by signing a defense agreement with Great Britain giving the British rights to naval and air bases on the island.

Independence and Regional Politics

Indian Security Perceptions

Despite the detachment of Pakistan in 1947 and the possibility of internal secessions at the time of independence, India under the Nehru-led Indian National Congress party was viewed by all as the most likely successor to British authority in the Indian Ocean region in general and South Asia in particular. India's huge size, vast economic and demographic potential, and strategic central location among the smaller and weaker states of South Asia seemed to ensure its premier status.

Moreover, Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first prime minister and a key figure in its independence movement, came to adopt this view, as noted by de Silva:

In its commitment to the defense of this inheritance, Nehru's India was assuming, tentatively at first, but with greater conviction with the passage of time, the strategic vision of the *raj*, especially the conception of the South Asian region as "a political unit knit together for defense."¹¹²

Of course, from India's viewpoint, the strategic unity of the region would be buttressed by India's self-arrogated role as security guarantor for the region, and just as British planners worried about sea-based threats from hostile forces based in Sri Lanka (in addition to Russian land-based threats in the north), Indian planners were also concerned about threats from the sea. As one Indian political analyst stated:

The events of the second World War, especially the Japanese sweep through archipelagic and mainland South-East Asia in a remarkably short time, had driven home the lesson to India's nationalist elite that India's

eastern flank and the seaward approaches to the sub-continent were as important for India's defense as the land boundaries of the north-west and the north which had been traditional concerns of strategists during the days of the British *Raj*.

The events of the [second world] war also increased Indian awareness of, and concern with, its maritime strategy and the great importance of the Indian Ocean to the defense of the Indian peninsula. The lesson that India had lost its independence to European colonists because of the latter's control of the sea was relearned by the Indian nationalist elite as a result of the experience of the second world War.¹¹³

For another political analyst writing toward the end of World War II, given the impending declining role of the British the security needs of India demanded that she take on the task of securing the Indian Ocean region:

an exclusively land policy of defense for India will in future be nothing short of blindness. No other policy was required in the past, as the Indian Ocean was a protected sea—a British lake . . . But today the position is different. The freedom of India will hardly be worth a day's purchase, if Indian interests in the Indian Ocean are not defended from India, especially, as in the changed circumstances . . . the British fleet will be in no position to maintain that unchallenged supremacy which it possessed for 150 years . . . As a free nation it is [India's] sacred duty to organize herself in every way for the defense of her freedom. This . . . is primarily an Oceanic problem. Unless India is prepared to stand forth and shoulder the responsibility of peace and security in the Indian Ocean, her freedom will mean little. She will be at the mercy of any power which has command of the sea, as it will be impossible for us to require of Britain or any other country to defend the Indian Ocean for us.¹¹⁴

Given the reduced British presence in the region, during the 1960s Sri Lanka was to take shelter under the Indian defense umbrella, and by the 1970s Indira Gandhi came to the view that small south Asian nations like Sri Lanka must do so, since any alternative arrangement would have been regarded as unacceptable to India.¹¹⁵ These perceptions were likely influenced by a changed balance of power that shifted

decidedly in India's favor following India's intervention in Pakistan's civil war in 1971. Neither China nor the United States, which at that time had been allied with Pakistan, intervened to prevent the vivisection of that country caused by the establishment of Bangladesh. Sri Lanka and the other smaller south Asian states would have to accommodate themselves to the new strategic situation that featured a more powerful and self-confident India.¹¹⁶

For their part, the small states of South Asia, themselves newly independent from British control, developed a variable love-hate attitude toward India. On the one hand, the smaller states recognized their shared interests in regional peace and stability, their common heritage of Western democracy, and the benefits of close economic ties. On the other hand, smaller states feared that India's immense ambitions and capabilities would eventually and inevitably create a threat to their own security and independent survival. Herein, the Hindu-Muslim struggles in the northern sector of the subcontinent and the Tamil cross-border affinities in the south were among the constant reminders that conflict with India might occur at any time.

Russia/Soviet Union

As far back as the eighteenth century, the Russians had superficial plans for land invasions of India, western China, and/or Tibet as elements of the "Great Game" to defeat British counter plans to acquire the northwest area of the subcontinent, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Tibet. Immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, proposals for invading the Indian subcontinent were again floated,^{af} but soon abandoned. When the "export of revolution" was discarded after the disaster of the Russo-Polish War of 1920–1921, the Soviets turned inward focusing predominantly on domestic security and economic growth.

Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s and 1930s concentrated essentially on the protection of the Soviet Union from "imperialist" attack. In relations with the West, the Soviets stressed international peace, cooperation, and disarmament. With respect to the colonies, particularly those

^{af} Alternative proposals were advanced for offensives through Persia, Afghanistan, or Tibet. Leon Trotsky, then Commissar of War, proposed an Afghan route and even ordered preparation of "the necessary military supplies." Lenin approved a plan for sending troops through Mongolia and Tibet to India. Though the Trotsky and Lenin proposals were not implemented, the influential Indian communist M. N. Roy was able to convince the Bolshevik leadership to arm and fund a small training base in Tashkent for an assault via Afghanistan into northwest India. However, Roy's plans and the training base were soon discarded not only because the Afghan King refused to cooperate, but also in response to vehement British demands that the Soviets desist from the plan and honor their commitment under the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement of 1921 to refrain from military, diplomatic, and propaganda activity against the British Empire. On the Trotsky and Lenin proposals, see Volkogonov.¹¹⁷

in Asia, Moscow and the Soviet-controlled Communist International sought to mobilize nationalist and communist leaders indirectly in support of Soviet defense, advocating messages of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, nationalist self-determination among the “oppressed” colonial peoples, and the formation of either bourgeois-communist “united fronts from above” or communist-leftist “united fronts from below” as dictated by circumstances and Soviet requirements.

In the immediate post-World War II period, the breakdown of the wartime alliance and the promulgation of the Stalinist two camps thesis did not allow any room for Nehru’s efforts to develop a “third way” between the communist and capitalist camps, and so at this time the newly independent nonaligned states found little sympathy in the Kremlin.¹¹⁸ Stalin himself held a dim view of Nehru, Gandhi, and Sukarno of Indonesia, viewing them as lackeys of imperialism.¹¹⁹

With regards to Sri Lanka itself, the Soviets were largely dismissive of its independence and essentially viewed it as a farce, and they didn’t establish diplomatic relations with the island until 1956. It also used its veto power in the United Nations Security Council to veto Sri Lanka’s admission into the world body. The Soviet delegate to the Security Council noted that a distinction had to be made between real and false independence, and the presence of British air and naval bases on the island indicated that Sri Lanka was not a sovereign state.¹²⁰ These icy feelings were returned by Sri Lanka’s leadership. D. S. Senanayake, the prime minister at the time, once stated (of the Soviet Union) that “enslavement of the world is what we believe to be their attitude. Our view is quite the contrary. Since it is the freedom of this world that we are concerned with, we will never be with Russia until she gives up her policy.”¹²¹

With the death of Stalin in 1953, Soviet policy began to undergo a gradual reversal. Over staunch rightist objections, the Malenkov regime sought to promote economic development, including consumer production, to a higher priority relative to military construction. The Khrushchev regime attempted to go a step further in its post-1956 de-Stalinization, which was initiated at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1956. At the CPSU Congress the concept of “peaceful coexistence” was elaborated which recognized “various forms of transitions to socialism,” which therefore permitted collaboration with “national bourgeoisie” leadership from newly independent nonaligned countries.¹²² The Soviets viewed this leadership as progressive since they shared a common interest in resisting “imperialism,” and thus the nonaligned countries along with the Soviet bloc could form a “zone of peace.”¹²³

However, the new Soviet approach regarding peaceful coexistence with the capitalist camp directly collided with the ideology, worldview, and

national aspirations of the Maoist leadership in China. From the Maoist perspective, the Soviets had become right-wing “revisionists” and deserters of the world-wide communist revolution. Just as importantly, the Soviet relaxation of tensions with the West and attendant reduction in Soviet support for the Chinese economy and military threatened the Chinese leadership’s ambitions for consolidating its domestic hold over the legitimate territory of the Middle kingdom and extending its self-perceived rightful dominance over South and Southeast Asia. Thus, the Soviets and Chinese split along different paths and engaged in a hostile competition for hegemony within the communist camp and the third world.

Aside from the occasional small-scale Sino-Soviet border clashes that peaked with the 1969 conflict along the northern Amur River, the most concentrated area of direct Sino-Soviet confrontation was the Indian Ocean region, particularly South Asia. As part of their strategy to contain and encircle China, the Soviets (1) strengthened their forces in Central Asia, (2) enhanced relations with Afghanistan, (3) developed close security ties with the Indians, culminating in the Soviet-Indian Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation in 1971, and (4) significantly increased their naval presence in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. As elements of a counter-strategy, the Chinese (1) augmented their military forces in and access to Xinjiang Province, (2) improved their relations with Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and (3) intensified their commitment to a “one China” policy.

With respect to Sri Lanka, the new attitude adopted by the Soviets toward the nonaligned movement in 1956 likely facilitated the establishment of diplomatic relations with the island in that year, and additionally the Soviets were encouraged with the change in government in 1956, from the western-oriented United National Party to S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike’s People’s United Front government, which advocated a nonaligned foreign policy.¹²⁴ Later, beginning in 1980, the Soviets (as well as the Indians) grew alarmed with the increased presence of US naval forces in the Indian Ocean region after the establishment of the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), which was formed following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Specifically, there was concern that the United States was trying to secure additional bases for the RDF, either in the ports of Gwadar and Karachi in Pakistan, Chittagong in Bangladesh, or Trincomalee in Sri Lanka.¹²⁵ However, for the most part Sri Lanka appeared to be mostly an afterthought in Soviet strategic thinking during the post-War period, as they perhaps reasoned that its ally India would handle any Chinese and American diplomatic or military incursions into the region.

People's Republic of China

In the years of the Chinese Civil War, Mao Zedong closely adhered to Soviet leadership of the communist camp as required by the Stalinist two camp thesis. As late as 1948, Mao reiterated his view that the Soviet Union was “the socialist fatherland of the working people of the world” and vehemently opposed the notion that states could pursue a neutral “third way,” as advocated by Nehru. Indeed, just three months before the proclamation of the communist government in Beijing, Mao stated in the Russian newspaper *Pravda* on July 6, 1949:

Sun Yat-sen's forty years of experience have firmly convinced us that we must adhere to one side in order to achieve and consolidate victory. . . . [T]he Chinese people must, without exception, take either the side of imperialism or that of socialism. There is no third way. . . . Neutrality is a camouflage and a third way is a mirage.¹²⁶

With the triumph of Mao Zedong's communist forces, the new People's Republic of China set out to recapture what Chinese leaders considered their rightful territory. In quick order, the Red Army swept north and south. By 1950, China had reconsolidated control over Xinjiang in the west and Tibet in the south. Despite China's isolation by the international community, India signed an agreement in April 1954 that recognized Chinese control over Tibet and incorporated the five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence¹²⁷ as the basis for normalizing Sino-Indian relations.

China's initial views of Nehru were similar to those of Stalin, viewing him as a “running dog” of Anglo-American imperialism.¹²⁷ However, it would soon change its view of India and the nonaligned countries as it sought to enlist this bloc in an effort to counter the US-led policy of containment of communism. For his part, Nehru dismissed China's communist affiliation and nationalist ambitions as transitory factors. Nehru assumed that in time, China would be weaned away from communism and join the independent third way. To this end, the Indian Prime Minister became a strong supporter and sponsor of Chinese entrance into the newly emerging nonaligned movement, mostly composed of former colonies in Asia and Africa. This positive view of China was perhaps influenced by a more strategic analysis in which Nehru envisioned an Asia containing two spheres of influence, specifically an East Asia under Chinese influence, and a South Asia and South-East Asia (excluding Vietnam) under Indian influence.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ These principles included (1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; (2) mutual nonaggression; (3) mutual noninterference in each other's internal affairs; (4) equality and mutual benefit; and (5) peaceful coexistence.

Despite Nehru's best efforts, tensions between China and India erupted in 1958. Unbeknownst to India, China had covertly constructed an access road across the Aksai Chin Plateau from western Tibet to Xinjiang in area that India considered its territory. When discovered by India, Chinese leader Zhou Enlai proposed a solution that generally favored China and, therefore, was unacceptable to India. As Sino-Indian tensions rose and the Tibetans rebelled, and small groups of Chinese and Indian troops clashed. With the Sino-Soviet split reaching a high level, the Soviets refused diplomatic and material aid to China against India and Tibet.

Instead of quelling tensions in South Asia, the realigning of relations among China, the Soviet Union, and India spurred them on, with 1962 as a major turning point. In October 1962, the Chinese launched a surprise month-long offensive against Indian outposts and troop patrols in the disputed border areas. Despite China's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire in November 1962, no permanent solutions were forged. Indeed, on October 16, 1964, despite the withdrawal of Soviet nuclear assistance and the signing of the atmospheric nuclear test ban by the United States and the Soviet Union, China conducted its first atmospheric nuclear test. In the process, Chinese and Indian relations were irreparably severed. All hopes for a cooperative Sino-Indian leadership at the head of a nonaligned movement, including a third way for the South Asian states, though always tenuous, were now dashed. The Cold War and the Sino-Soviet rift entered into South Asia affairs more strongly than ever:

- the Indians and the Afghans strengthened their ties with the Soviets;
- the Chinese enhanced their ties with arms sales to India's primary foe, Pakistan;
- likewise, the United States improved its ties with Pakistan in response to closer Soviet relations with India and Afghanistan; and
- Sri Lanka entered into closer accord with China and the United States to balance the Soviet-Indian relationship.

Loyal to their European origins, the Indian and Ceylonese parties (along with the Outer Mongolian Communist Party) were the only Asian communist parties to remain essentially pro-Soviet and pro-nationalist during the Sino-Soviet conflict, though both had strong pro-Chinese minorities. Showing their displeasure in March 1963, the Chinese chastised the Indian Communist Party for having "embarked on the road of national chauvinism and class capitulationism" and having become "an appendage of India's big bourgeoisie and big landlords and a lackey of the Nehru government."¹²⁹ Faced with similar criticisms and divisive

efforts to swing the party in favor of the Chinese, the Ceylonese Communist Party was forced to expel its own pro-Chinese faction, including two politburo members, in October 1963.

The 1962 border war came at an awkward moment for Sri Lanka, as at this time the country was on good terms with both India and China. Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike resisted pressure within her government to brand China as the aggressor, and she assumed a mediating role by organizing a conference in Colombo with six nonaligned nations to seek a peaceful resolution to the boundary dispute.¹³⁰ This effort did not lead to a resolution of the conflict, but it was greatly appreciated by China, and Bandaranaike was warmly received in a January 1963 visit to the country. The two countries followed up the visit by signing a maritime agreement in July 1963 which gave most favored nation treatment to both countries with respect to commercial vessels engaged in cargo and passenger services between the two countries.¹³¹ Not surprisingly (given the nature of electoral competition at this time in Sri Lanka), during the 1965 election campaign Dudley Senanayake charged Bandaranaike with entering into a secret agreement to lease the port of Trincomalee to the Chinese, to be used as a stepping stone to invade India.¹³²

These comments by Senanayake foreshadowed a deterioration in relations when he led the United National Party back into power in 1965, but friendly relations were restored in May 1970 with Bandaranaike's return to office. Concerns emerged in Colombo regarding potential Chinese assistance to the JVP during the April 1971 uprising, but in a late April broadcast to the nation Bandaranaike informed the populace that foreign powers were not involved in the insurgency. Following the uprising, Sri Lanka received a 265-million-rupee interest-free loan from China to finance agro-based industries, and China provided Sri Lanka with a gift of five high-speed naval boats.¹³³ Additionally, in May 1973 Chinese workers completed the Bandaranaike International Conference Hall, which was used in 1976 to host the fifth summit of the nonaligned movement. Given Bandaranaike's close ties with Indira Gandhi, these moves by China did not negatively impact Sri Lanka's relations with India.

Ceylon/Sri Lankan Foreign Policy and Foreign Relations

Under the three UNP Administrations from 1948 to 1956, Ceylon's foreign policy highlighted a close security relationship with Great Britain and the Commonwealth system for security. In the Ceylonese threat perception, its northern neighbor, India, posed the most immediate danger. Historical fears plus perceived Indian aspirations to dominate

the Indian Ocean region and incorporate Ceylon into an Indian sphere of interest^{ah} convinced the Ceylonese to maintain a close relationship with Britain as codified in the Anglo-Ceylonese agreements on external affairs and defense as well as Ceylonese membership in the Commonwealth. At the same time, UNP leaders acknowledged the advantages of developing economic relations with communist countries when possible. On the one hand, the Stalinist two camp policy ruled out closer ties. On the other hand, the Chinese were more than willing to exploit closer Sino-Ceylon economic relations. Thus, despite western objections, the UNP concluded the Sino-Ceylon Rubber-Rice Pact in 1952.

Ceylon's foreign policy shifted to a more center-left orientation under the SLFP from 1956 to 1965. The upsurge of the nonaligned movement after the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia reduced Ceylon's fears and threat perceptions of India. With the official policy of nonalignment as the basis of Ceylon's foreign policy, the SLFP government moderated its security relations with Great Britain and "tilted" somewhat toward improved relations with the communist countries. As one of its first acts, the government successfully negotiated the British withdrawal from its Trincomalee naval base and Katunayake air base. At the same time, the government not only expanded economic ties with China and initiated new ties with the post-Stalin Soviet Union and other members of the East European bloc, but also began to establish diplomatic relations with its new economic partners. The British withdrawal significantly tempered Ceylon's image as a British "puppet," increased S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's personal image as a leader of the nonaligned movement, and opened up opportunities for trade and assistance from both the West and the East.

In 1960, the assassinated S. W. R. D. was replaced by his wife, Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Sirimavo became more personally involved in foreign affairs than previous government leaders, including her husband, and moved Ceylon's foreign policy a bit further along a nonaligned and pro-East tilt. In many of the international crises during her period in office, such as the Cuban, Berlin, and Vietnam crises, Sirimavo took positions that directly or indirectly undermined the US stance. In a largely anti-US move since neither the Soviets nor the Chinese had the requisite long-range naval and air capabilities, she staunchly supported the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the Indian Ocean region and

^{ah} On several occasions in the 1940s, Indian leaders suggested that Indian absorption of Ceylon was inevitable. In 1945, Nehru observed that shared ethnic, linguistic, and cultural affinities would draw Ceylon into unity with India "presumably as an autonomous unit of the Indian Federation." In 1949, Nehru implied that India would not sit by and allow Ceylon to join in relations hostile to India interests. See Kodirkara.¹³⁴

closed Ceylon's ports and airfields to all ships and planes equipped with nuclear warfare capabilities.

Domestically, Sirimavo's administration enacted legislation in 1964 to nationalize foreign oil companies and facilities in Ceylon. When compensation negotiations floundered, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the International Monetary Fund suspended all economic assistance and most diplomatic relations with Ceylon.

The government of Dudley Senanayake (1965–1970) took a much less active, less nonaligned, and less anti-Western role in foreign policy. Most importantly, Dudley negotiated a compensation settlement for the oil facilities nationalized by Sirimavo. In return, the Western states resumed their economic aid to Ceylon. On the domestic front, however, Dudley's new course toward free enterprise and away from state-ownership evoked strong hostility from Marxist and other organized opponents.

Sirimavo's return to office in 1970 coincided with the intense buildup of rivalries among the major powers for dominance in the Indian Ocean region, especially South Asia. This development came after a period that saw a Sino-Indian border war (1962), a Chinese atomic bomb test (1964), and a war between India and Pakistan (1965). This latter event saw the United States suspend arms sales to both countries in the hope of quelling hostilities without taking sides. Unfortunately, this action opened the door wider for competitive Soviet and Chinese involvement. The Soviets used the opportunity to increase its arms sales to India and, therewith, solidify the Soviet-Indian partnership. The Chinese acted similarly with Pakistan. In sum, South Asia was now a key surrogate arena for contesting the Sino-Soviet rift.

During this time the close ties between Sirimavo and Indira, founded on the twin policies of democratic socialism at home and non-alignment abroad, ensured a close relationship between India and Sri Lanka. Bilateral relations became frosty, though, with the election of J. R. Jayewardene in 1977. The two leaders did not enjoy a close relationship, and India became alarmed as Jayewardene proceeded to liberalize the economy and dismantle the welfare state in an effort to attract western capital to spur economic growth. Foreign capital did indeed flood the country, and India reasoned that it was only a matter of time before Jayewardene would request western security assistance to combat the budding ethnic conflict with Tamil militant groups.¹³⁵ This concern over Sri Lanka's foreign policy reorientation was one of the factors that led India to support the LTTE and other militant groups during the 1980s.

PHASES OF CONFLICT

JVP: 1971 Insurrection

On April 5, 1971, the JVP, a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement, launched an armed uprising against the SLFP government headed by Sirimavo Bandaranaike. The group consisted primarily of educated rural Sinhalese-Buddhist youths in their late teens and early twenties who had dim future prospects within a political-economic system dominated by a Westernized urban elite. The main feature of their plan of operations consisted of an island-wide attack on police stations throughout the country as a first step in overthrowing the Bandaranaike government. Additionally, the plan also called for either apprehending or killing Prime Minister Bandaranaike, attacking the capital city of Colombo, freeing leader Rohana Wijeweera from his imprisonment on Jaffna peninsula, attacking various military installations, and assassinating various individuals deemed counter-revolutionaries. The JVP managed to capture thirty-five police stations (with a number of other stations attacked), and more than fifty towns fell into the hands of the group.¹³⁶ This tally would have been higher had JVP cadres not tipped off the government by prematurely attacking the Wellawaya police station on the morning rather than the evening of April 5.^{137,ai} Fighting between JVP cadres and government troops and police lasted until about June, but by that time the government had largely put down the revolt. Fifty-three security forces personnel died, and several hundred were injured; among the police, thirty-seven were killed and 193 injured.¹³⁹ An estimated 4,000 to 6,000 JVP members were killed during the uprising.¹⁴⁰

An interesting fact of the uprising is that it occurred at a time when Sri Lanka was ruled by a coalition led by the left-wing SLFP. From the very start since its origins in the late 1960s, the JVP was skeptical of parliamentary democracy and believed that violence was necessary to establish a socialist society, regardless of whether Sri Lanka was ruled by the center-right UNP or the nonrevolutionary SLFP.¹⁴¹ Although the government was caught off-guard by the April 5th attack on police stations, by 1970 it had been keeping tabs on the JVP. In April, the Inspector General of the Police had established the “Che Guevara Bureau” to

^{ai} There are several theories regarding why the cadres in Wellawaya prematurely attacked the police station on April 5. One analyst¹³⁸ noted that the premature attack was the result of miscommunication within the JVP, while another argued that JVP cadres in the Wellawaya-Moneragala region lost faith in the JVP leadership and grew so tired of the factionalism within the group that they launched a premature attack to alert the security forces of the impending insurrection and to precipitate a government crackdown, thereby preventing a greater loss of life and avoiding the catastrophe that would have befallen the country if the JVP had come to power.

study the group, and the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) had a significant amount of information on the group.¹⁴² Additionally, after the group had made increasingly shrill threats of revolutionary violence for months,¹⁴³ the police arrested Wijeweera on March 13, 1971, and the government declared a state of emergency several days later. Still, top military and police officials discounted reports that the group was preparing to take power by force, as they refused to believe that a group of village youths would be able to take on a force led by men trained at Scotland Yard and Sandhurst.¹⁴⁴

JVP: 1987–1989 Insurrection

After the suppression of the 1971 uprising, many of the top leadership within the JVP were imprisoned, although in 1977 the new UNP government released Rohana Wijeweera and other JVP members. By that time, many of the top JVP leaders had turned against Wijeweera, who nonetheless went about rebuilding the party as an electoral organization despite the fact that the party still remained somewhat skeptical of bringing about socialism through elections.¹⁴⁵ Despite harassment from the government in the form of disruptions of mass rallies, arrests of activists, and the raiding of offices, the party was able to win thirteen seats in District Development Council (DDC) elections in 1981, and in October 1982 Rohana was the JVP's candidate for president, placing third behind the UNP and SLFP candidates, respectively. However, in July 1983, the party was proscribed by the government after false allegations that it was responsible for the anti-Tamil pogrom that swept the island that month after an LTTE attack that left thirteen government soldiers dead. The party then resumed an underground existence, and by late 1986 and early 1987 it had decided to wage an armed struggle against the government.¹⁴⁶

Over the next few years the group proceeded to wage a terrifying campaign of assassinations, intimidation, and economic sabotage that on several occasions came close to collapsing the government. Beginning in September 1986, it carried out a series of robberies that brought it money and vehicles, and in 1987, it carried out raids for weapons against army facilities. It then proceeded to wage a campaign to collapse the government by liquidating the governing UNP through assassinating parliamentarians and other top officials as well as local government officials. It issued death threats against all UNP officials and those serving in government, and in addition to assassinating several parliamentarians, it nearly decapitated the government in August 1987 as it lobbed grenades at a parliamentary meeting that nearly killed the president, prime minister, and other top officials. Additionally, the signing

of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord in July 1987 proved a godsend to the group, as it was able to mobilize nationalist and patriotic sentiment against the accord among the Sinhalese to provide momentum to the social revolution it wished to bring about in Sri Lanka.

The group also established cells in a number of public and private organizations, which enabled it to bring the economy close to collapse on several occasions. In November 1988, a month before the presidential elections, the JVP succeeded in paralyzing transport throughout the island, and bank, telecommunication, and postal facilities ceased to function.¹⁴⁷ Work stoppages also affected the petroleum sector, and food shortages emerged because shops were forced to close for several weeks.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, the army was called in to run buses and distribute fuel, while the navy operated the port of Colombo.¹⁴⁹ Various strikes also crippled the country in the summer of 1989 as the group made a final push to topple the government. By this time, though, the JVP had grown impatient, because attacks by government security forces were beginning to impact the group and its own actions were imposing real costs on society but had not yet led to the collapse of the government. It then proceeded to overplay its hand in August 1989 when it issued a death threat to the families of personnel in the armed forces, warning that they would be targeted for death unless their relatives in the security forces ceased their attacks on the group. This move proved to be the group's undoing, as paramilitary groups with names such as the Black Cats, Shra, PRRA, Scorpion, Eagle, and Yellow Cats stepped up a preexisting unconventional campaign by assassinating many actual and suspected members of the group, wiping out most of the top leadership by January 1990. Wijeweera himself was apprehended in November 1989 and killed shortly thereafter.

LTTE: First Eelam War, 1983–1987

On July 23, 1983, the LTTE conducted its first major attack, ambushing a Sri Lankan army troop convoy in the northern region and killing thirteen soldiers.¹⁵⁰ This led to the anti-Tamil “Black July” riots in which about 2,500 Tamils were killed and many other Tamils were assaulted. Early in the riots, the Sri Lankan military and police appeared to stand aside and even abet the attacks against the Tamils. Ultimately, tens of thousands of Tamils were left homeless throughout the country,^{151, 152, 153} numbering as many as 100,000 Tamils in Colombo and 175,000 elsewhere in the country.¹⁵⁴ As a result, many Tamils were forced to flee the Sinhalese-majority areas and the country.

In April 1985, a number of Tamil militant groups formed the Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF), providing an umbrella organization for antigovernment activities. The ENLF included the LTTE, the

Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students, and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization. On the basis of this and other Tamil efforts to join in common cause, the government throughout late 1984 and early 1985 increasingly raised the specter of a major war with the Tamil militants. In February 1985, for example, Sri Lankan President Jayewardene claimed to have information confirming that

the hit-and-run tactics of terrorists are to be changed soon. At least three of the terrorist groups have united and agreed on a common military strategy which will culminate in a "head-on battle" with the Sri Lanka Army as soon as they have sufficient numbers of trained men and weapons.

Preparations are now being made for the final, and what is believed by them to be, decisive battle.¹⁵⁵

Although the decisive battle did not occur, the violent action-reaction cycle continued with attacks on both military and civilian targets by both sides.

Under pressures from the Indian government, the Sri Lankan government and the ENLF coalition held brief and unsuccessful peace talks at Thimpu, Bhutan, in 1985. In response, in that July the ENLF issued a joint statement, called the Thimpu Declaration,¹⁵⁶ asserting that any "meaningful" solution to the Tamil question had to be based on the following "four cardinal principles":

1. Recognition of the Tamils of Sri Lanka as a nation
2. Recognition of the existence of an identified homeland for the Tamils in Sri Lanka
3. Recognition of the right of self-determination of the Tamil nation
4. Recognition of the right to citizenship and the fundamental rights of all Tamils who look upon the island as their country

However, the organization was unable to moderate intergroup rivalries or adjudicate policy differences. In 1986, the LTTE withdrew from the ENLF and initiated armed attacks on its former allies. After defeating its major rivals, the LTTE absorbed the remaining groups into a single organization and thus assumed complete control over the Tamil separatist movement.¹⁵⁷

At the same time, the LTTE expanded its targets to include Sinhalese civilians, and the government responded in kind. The LTTE began with attacks on two farming villages in Mullaitivu District, called the Kent and Dollar Farms, in November 1984, killing twenty-nine men,

women, and children in the former and thirty-three in the latter. Then, in 1985, the LTTE killed a reported 146 civilians in Anuradhapura. As a writer for *Time* magazine described the event:

The killings began when separatist guerrillas belonging to the country's predominantly Hindu Tamil minority hijacked a bus and headed for Anuradhapura, a city largely inhabited by Buddhist Sinhalese. As the guerrillas drove into the city's crowded main bus station, they opened fire with automatic weapons, killing about 100 men, women and children. Then they drove to the Sri Maha Bodhiya, a sacred Buddhist site, and fired indiscriminately into a crowd that included nuns and monks. The rebels continued on to Sri Lanka's northwest coast, attacking a police station and a game sanctuary on the way, and may have escaped by boat to India, where the Tamil Nadu state is home to 50 million Tamils. The macabre ride resulted in the massacre of 146 people.¹⁵⁸

In retaliation, continued the *Time* writer, Sinhalese assailants "hacked 39 Tamils to death with axes, swords and knives" and police killed twenty guerrillas who were hiding in a cave.

In mid-1987 the Sri Lankan security forces mounted the major military offensive Operation Liberation to capture the Jaffna peninsula, especially the city of Vadamarachchi, the focal point for traffic between India and the Jaffna peninsula. At the same time, India made known through private sources and diplomatic channels that it would not stand by and allow Jaffna to be captured. Moreover, India dispatched a flotilla of boats flying the Red Cross colors to bring relief supplies to the Tamils in Jaffna. When turned away by the Sri Lankan navy, the Indians airdropped food and medicine to the LTTE-held areas in Jaffna.¹⁵⁹ In response to the Sri Lankan military offensive, the LTTE conducted its first suicide attack. A LTTE insurgent detonated a truckload of explosives in an army camp, killing forty soldiers. The LTTE had created the Black Tigers, a group that was tasked with carrying out suicide attacks against political, economic, and military targets that year.

LTTE: Indo-Lanka Peace Accord, 1987–1990

On July 29, 1987, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the Sri Lankan President Junius Richard Jayewardene signed the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord. In the accord, under Indian pressure, the Sri Lankan government agreed to the unification of the Northern and

Eastern Provinces into a single administrative unit with one elected Provincial Council, one governor, one chief minister, and one Board of Ministers. However, in a referendum to be held by December 31, 1988, the Eastern Province could elect to become separate from the Northern Province. The agreement also called for a cessation of hostilities, after which the Tamil militant groups were expected to disarm and Sri Lankan army and security personnel would be confined to barracks. The entire agreement was made conditional on Indian cooperation and military assistance, including the deployment of an Indian Peace-keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka “to guarantee and enforce the cessation of hostilities.”

Aside from a temporary respite in the direct Sinhalese-Tamil conflict and a calming of Sri Lankan government fears of Indian unilateral military interference, it is difficult to believe that the government truly expected that the accord could provide a workable solution and achieve lasting peace. Any unification of the Northern and Eastern Provinces would certainly be viewed by Sinhalese nationalists as an unacceptable concession in the short term and a step toward Tamil Eelam in the long term. Therefore, an honest implementation of the accord would probably have provoked yet another inter-Sinhalese civil war comparable to the JVP insurrection of 1971.^{160, 161}

Interestingly, popular sentiments, among both the Sinhalese and the Tamils, opposed the presence of the IPKF on Sri Lankan territory. From the Sinhalese perspective, the IPKF was the protector of the Tamils, preventing a military solution to the conflict. Sinhalese nationalists resented and distrusted the foreign troops whose government had armed, trained, and otherwise supported the LTTE for years in an effort to bolster its popularity among its own Tamil population.^{aj} Therefore, anti-IPKF protests erupted in the south. With IPKF transport support, the Sri Lankan government shifted forces from the north to the south to control the protestors. This only further provoked the protestors, and the JVP mounted a two-year uprising against the government in the south. From the LTTE perspective, on the other hand, the IPKF became the major obstacle to the ultimate goal of Tamil independence, as India had no interest in seeing a secessionist movement in Sri Lanka succeed because it would set a precedent that would encourage separatist groups within India itself.

Although most Tamil leaders and groups, including the LTTE, initially pledged to honor the agreement and accept disarmament, hostilities soon resumed. The catalyst occurred when the Sri Lankan Navy arrested seventeen LTTE cadres at sea and, after initially holding them

^{aj} See *Part II. Structure and Dynamics of the Insurgency* for more information regarding Indian sponsorship of different Tamil insurgent groups.

at Palaly Base, attempted to transfer them to Colombo. The captured Tamils attempted to preempt their transfer to the capital by attempting suicide by biting into the cyanide capsules that all members of the LTTE wore around their necks. This led to the death of twelve of the cadres. The LTTE responded by killing 150 Sinhalese in the north and east regions.¹⁶² The inevitable result was conflict between the IPKF and the LTTE. By mid-1988, the initial IPKF contingent of 3,000 grew to 50,000, as compared to an estimated 4,500 LTTE fighters.¹⁶³ It was also becoming obvious to all that the official objective of a short-term peace-keeping mission was rapidly turning into a protracted and large-scale conflict between the IPKF and the LTTE. On October 10, 1987, the Indian forces launched a major offensive against the LTTE in the Jaffna peninsula, signaling that the IPKF had indeed transformed from an impartial party into an active participant.¹⁶⁴ Soon, both the Sri Lankan government (now headed by President Ranasinghe Premadasa) and the LTTE were calling for the IPKF to leave, but the Gandhi government refused. Remarkably, then, the Sri Lankan government joined with the LTTE in an “alliance of convenience” against the IPKF,¹⁶⁵ going so far as to supply arms to the LTTE for use against the IPKF.¹⁶⁶ As a consequence, the IPKF suffered considerable combat losses, and LTTE confidence and resolve considerably intensified.¹⁶⁷ With Gandhi’s defeat in the parliamentary elections of December 1989, however, the new Prime Minister V. P. Singh withdrew the IPKF from Sri Lanka. In May 1991, the LTTE carried out the assassination of then former Prime Minister Gandhi. The group feared the collapse of the Singh administration and the return of power to Gandhi, who had originally ordered the IPKF to take on the LTTE and who would likely proceed with the implementation of the accord if returned to power, which would entail the disarming of the LTTE and the derailment of the goal of Eelam.^{168,169}

LTTE: Second Eelam War, 1990–1995

In March 1990, after two years of fighting, India withdrew the IPKF from Sri Lanka and left the LTTE in de facto control of Sri Lanka’s north and east, including Jaffna, where the LTTE established its political headquarters. For a while, negotiations between the government and the LTTE leaders concerning possible Tamil autonomy in the north and east produced a peaceful interlude. However, fighting soon resumed as the LTTE renounced the cease-fire and declared the initiation of Eelam War II. The government responded with equal determination and force. The Sri Lankan military sought to overwhelm the numerically weaker LTTE. Exemplary killings and officially sponsored paramilitary groups, counterterrorist tactics that had successfully

suppressed the JVP insurrection in the south, were widely employed against the LTTE. Scorched-earth methods in the countryside, as well as sea and air assaults, were also employed. However, government tactics were unproductive. Rather, they emboldened the LTTE and solidified its tight control of Jaffna and its periphery as far south as Trincomalee and Vavuniya.¹⁷⁰

However, at this point, the LTTE adopted several decisions that were not only unsuccessful but also evoked a significant heightening of anti-LTTE sentiments at home and abroad. In November 1990, in an act of ethnic cleansing, the LTTE expelled 70,000 Muslim residents of Jaffna to lay the groundwork for an ethnically homogenous Tamil state.¹⁷¹ And as noted above, in May 1991, the LTTE employed a suicide bomber to assassinate Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. This act led to a significant drop in public support for the LTTE in Tamil Nadu and the proscription of the group by New Delhi in 1992, which signified the loss of Tamil Nadu as an operational and logistical base.¹⁷²

In July 1991, the LTTE launched a major effort to capture Elephant Pass, the gateway between the Jaffna peninsula and the rest of the island. The LTTE was unsuccessful in its month-long siege, but combined losses numbered more than 2,000 combatants.¹⁷³

LTTE: Third Eelam War, 1995–2002

In 1994, Chandrika Kumaratunga was elected Sri Lankan president on a platform of “peace and meaningful constitutional reform” and brought a new round of short-lived peace talks.¹⁷⁴ Shortly after her inauguration, Kumaratunga declared a unilateral cease-fire, and talks were started.¹⁷⁵ After three months without progress, especially concerning the issue of local Tamil autonomy, the LTTE resumed fighting in April 1995.¹⁷⁶ Each side accused the other of negotiating in bad faith. From the Sri Lankan government perspective, President Kumaratunga felt double-crossed, and her military commanders felt vindicated in their suspicion of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.¹⁷⁷

In April 1995, the LTTE attacked and sank two navy gunboats, thus ending the cease-fire.^{ak} Further, in an effort to carry the fight to its opponent’s territory to injure the national economy and scare foreign investors, LTTE suicide bombers detonated a truckload of explosives in Colombo’s financial and ministerial district, killing and wounding more than 1,000 people.^{179,180} However, this time, the military was successful in capturing Jaffna city in December 1995 and then the entire Jaffna peninsula in May 1996, which the militants had controlled since 1990.¹⁸¹

^{ak} See Rotberg for a description of the LTTE’s naval capabilities.¹⁷⁸

Over the next three years, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE engaged in several major conventional battles, with fortunes on each side in a constant ebb and flow. In July 1996, the LTTE launched Operation Unceasing Waves, its largest offensive up to that point. The highlight of the offensive was the LTTE victory in the Battle of Mullaitivu in which the LTTE overran one of the military's largest bases and killed a claimed 1,208 government troops.¹⁸² This was followed by an LTTE attack on an army garrison in which the LTTE, using a combination of conventional forces and suicide cadres, killed more than 2,275 people by government estimates.¹⁸³ Shortly thereafter, the military responded with its own offensive and, in September 1996, captured the town of Kilinochchi, the LTTE political headquarters established when the rebels were ousted from Jaffna. Though weakened, the LTTE was able to rebuff the military's 20,000-man offensive of May 1997, named Operation Sure Victory, intended to capture the strategically important A9 Highway, which runs through thick jungle from Vavuniya to Kilinochchi (see Figure 3-2),^{184,185} and overall obstruct the military from resupplying Jaffna by land or sea.¹⁸⁶



Figure 3-2. Highway A9 from Vavuniya to Kilinochchi.

In late 1997 and the first quarter of 1998, the LTTE managed to attack government naval patrols, arrange three major bombings, and keep control, at least at night, of the thinly populated coastline north of Trincomalee and the northern interior either side of the main road from Vavuniya to Jaffna. In 1998, the LTTE reversed prior misfortunes and pushed the military out of Kilinochchi in its Operation Unceasing Waves II. Likewise, in January 1998, LTTE suicide bombers exploded a large truck bomb at the revered Buddhist Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy^{187,al} and then at an area near Colombo railway station.

On October 8, 1997, the US government officially declared the LTTE a terrorist organization. In addition, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced that LTTE members would be denied visas for entry to the United States and LTTE profits from fund-raising activities in the United States would be frozen.¹⁸⁸ Within the week, the LTTE responded with another suicide truck bombing within the Colombo commercial district, targeting the recently opened twin-tower World Trade Center located near the Hilton Hotel, where twelve American military officers were reportedly staying.¹⁸⁹

After its victories, the LTTE sought to restart the peace negotiations that had been dormant since 1994. As a sign of its good will, the LTTE released soldiers and merchant sailors that had been held as hostages for up to five years. In November 1998, Prabhakaran reiterated his desire for peace talks to be moderated by a third party,¹⁹⁰ noting,

The Tamils only wanted to live with dignity and peace in their homelands without any interference. We have every right to decide our own political destiny . . . On that basis we prefer to have a political agenda which could lead us to self-ruling.¹⁹¹

At the same time, Prabhakaran noted that unless there was a fundamental transformation in “the hawkish and racist attitude of Sinhala[ese] chauvinism,” which he admittedly did not anticipate, the government would bear responsibility for creating “the concrete historical conditions for the birth of the independent Tamil state.”¹⁹² However, the peace negotiations failed to gain any traction and the fighting continued.

In December, Sri Lanka’s minister of power and energy, the deputy defense minister, and the chiefs of the army, navy, and air force

^{al} Both the timing and symbolism of the attack on the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic were significant. First, Britain’s Prince Charles was scheduled to attend festivities related to the fiftieth anniversary of Sri Lanka’s independence the following week at the temple. Second, as noted earlier, the temple and the tooth are major symbols of not only the Buddhist religion but also Sinhalese political sovereignty and governmental legitimacy in Sri Lanka. Indeed, the attack on the Temple underscores the political importance, both domestic and foreign, that the LTTE considered in planning and executing its terrorist actions.

were ambushed in Oddusudan but were able to escape.¹⁹³ Overall, the LTTE was able to maneuver with relative ease from its jungle encampments south of Jaffna, and it continued to harass government vessels off the northeast coast and remained capable of assassinating officials in Jaffna or detonating bombs in Colombo.¹⁹⁴

In 1999, President Kumaratunga concluded that the LTTE insurgency could be ended by battlefield military victory. In March, the military launched Operation Rana Gasa from the south, aimed at dislodging the LTTE from the Vanni, but was only partially successful. The LTTE returned to the offensive with Operation Unceasing Waves III, which resulted in a reassertion of control over nearly the entire Vanni region. In addition, the LTTE made significant gains to the north and came close to assassinating President Kumaratunga.¹⁹⁵

Estimates of the time placed the Sri Lankan military strength at 143,000 personnel and the LTTE at 10,000 troops.¹⁹⁶ However, the military had significant weaknesses. As one observer noted:

The official army is weak strategically, poorly led, poorly paid, demoralized by danger and sustained lack of success, and allegedly riddled with corruption. Strategically, its major handicap is a scarcity of intelligence about the enemy. It has few resources for gathering intelligence, few Tamils to do it, and very few trained analysts of the intelligence that is gathered. So the Sri Lankan army fights a committed, even fanatic cadre of guerillas with overwhelming numbers but with insufficient training, knowledge and motivation.¹⁹⁷

In September 1999, the Sri Lankan air force conducted a bombing raid in northeast Sri Lanka that killed twenty-two Tamil civilians and wounded thirty-five others. In response, the LTTE Freedom Birds, a female unit, carried out a predawn attack on sleeping villagers in the east, in which twenty-three men, seventeen women, and eight children were reported to have been “systematically cut and chopped” to death. Similar attacks on smaller villages claimed six more victims.¹⁹⁸ Reports by nongovernment sources, such as the University Teachers for Human Rights in Jaffna and United Nations officials, claimed that the LTTE was increasingly resorting to forcible conscription of male and female teenagers, as well as some as young as nine or ten years of age, to make up for depleting manpower. In the University Teachers estimate, the LTTE had lost as many as 1,500 of its core 7,000 fighters in recent months.¹⁹⁹

The cycle of attempted cease-fires and returns to violence continued for the next several years. In part, a major obstacle to cease-fire negotiations at this time was an irreconcilable difference between the

government and the LTTE concerning the sequencing of events: the government insisted that war would continue until talks could reach a conclusion, while the LTTE insisted that a cease-fire precede settlement talks.^{200,201} A December 1999 cease-fire brokered by the Norwegian government broke when the LTTE launched an offensive aimed at taking the Elephant Pass in April 2000. However, unlike in the previous year, the government mounted a counterattack, Operation Agni Khiela, aimed at retaking control of the Jaffna peninsula.²⁰² In July 2001, the LTTE conducted a major suicide attack against Bandaranaike International Airport. The attack not only destroyed eight military and four commercial planes but also significantly curtailed international travel and tourism, a key source of income for the government.

Norwegian Peace Initiative, 2002–2006

In late 2001, both sides were exhausted by events and put out feelers for a cease-fire. Again, the LTTE announced a unilateral cease-fire, and the government accepted. In March 2002, the government (now led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe of the UNP) and the LTTE officially signed the Cease-fire Agreement (CFA) and accepted monitoring by the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. In a bilateral memorandum of understanding, the LTTE was unexpectedly granted access throughout the island. In addition, the all-important A9 Highway, linking Jaffna to the rest of the country, was reopened to allow displaced people to return and commercial activity to commence. In September, with great optimism both domestically and internationally, the sides commenced peace talks in Sattahip, Thailand. Talks lasted into 2003 and in the discussions the government proposed the establishment of a federal state arrangement. For its part, the LTTE announced that it would agree to a settlement that would give the Tamils “internal self-determination” within the north and east of the country. However, transforming these general ideas into concrete agreements proved impossible. Finally, after six rounds of talks without reaching a full peace agreement, the LTTE pulled out in 2003, and the talks were suspended.

The 2002 cease-fire commenced a negotiating process that had the potential to culminate in a federalized Sri Lankan state that was acceptable to both parties. During these peace negotiations, the LTTE declared that if substantial autonomy for the Tamil areas was not forthcoming, it would revert to its demand for an independent homeland. The scaling back of LTTE demands (from independence to autonomy) took many parties by surprise, but because an acceptable level

autonomy (from the LTTE perspective) was never forthcoming from the government, the LTTE never had to make good on this promise.

Tragedy struck Sri Lanka in December 2004 when the Indian Ocean tsunami hit the island, causing 40,000 deaths and leaving many homeless. Although many countries pledged aid and assistance to the island, the conflict proved a major obstacle to relief efforts in LTTE-controlled areas. Before that catastrophic event, in March 2004, Vinayagamoorthy Muralithiran, also known as Colonel Karuna, then commander of the LTTE's Batticaloa-Ampara District, announced his withdrawal from the LTTE and sought to split the LTTE Eastern command away from Prabhakaran's Northern command. In a one-page note, Karuna listed his grievances with the LTTE leadership, noting that it had (1) generally neglected the district's development by denying LTTE funds to the Batticaloa-Ampara District area, (2) excluded local Tamils from divisional commands and administrative positions in LTTE-held areas, (3) siphoned off fighters from the east for defense of the Jaffna area, and (4) conducted activities, including murders, without consulting Eastern LTTE leaders. Indeed, tensions between Prabhakaran and Karuna appeared to be on the rise for several years as the two increasingly came into conflict about leadership, direction, and priorities. The final straw seems to have been Karuna's rejection of a Prabhakaran request in early March 2004 for an additional 1,000 eastern troops, probably the Jayanthan unit, to be transferred from the east to the north. It was speculated at the time that Prabhakaran's request was the prelude to a purge of his rival, who was a brilliant battlefield commander but was not sufficiently deferential to the dictatorial Prabhakaran. This fractioning of the LTTE would prove catastrophic in the future as the LTTE lost valuable eastern manpower and territory that might have been crucial in the upcoming Fourth Eelam War.

In 2005, the Sri Lankan government initiated an island-wide recruitment campaign to substantially increase the size of the army, and in May 2005, an LTTE sniper assassinated Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, a Tamil anti-LTTE hardliner. In June 2005, the government and the LTTE concluded the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS), it but was never implemented because of ongoing suspicions on both sides,²⁰³ as well as political and legal problems within the government.

In November 2005, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa won the national presidential election over former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe. Despite opposition from major Sinhalese and Buddhist political allies, Rajapaksa signed an order extending the merger of the Tamil-dominated Northern and Eastern Provinces, originally implemented as part of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of 1987. Moreover, the

government and the LTTE agreed to restart talks, which had been suspended when the LTTE withdrew in 2003, in Geneva, Switzerland, on April 19–21. However, the LTTE ultimately refused to attend the talks. Instead, on April 25, the LTTE carried out a suicide bombing against Army commander Sarath Fonseka, seriously wounding Fonseka and killing eight others.²⁰⁴ Sporadic fighting in the north and east resumed, after those events, in June 2005.

Fourth Eelam War, 2006–2009

With his victory in the 2005 election, Rajapaksa asserted his belief that only a military solution and the elimination of the LTTE could end the ethnic conflict. Additionally, by this point most Sinhalese as well as the government did not consider the Norwegians to be impartial monitors of the cease-fire. Although the CFA was not then officially abrogated and more sessions of the peace talks were scheduled to be held in June, the LTTE refused to attend. Subsequently, cease-fire violations, suicide attacks, and military clashes continued to occur. In 2006, the government began a military campaign against the LTTE and Tamil population, with the support of the Tamil opposition. This latest military effort was prompted by the LTTE's closure of the sluice gates of the Mavil Aru reservoir in July, which cut the water supply to thousands of farmers and villagers in government-controlled areas. This outbreak of hostilities unequivocally ended the CFA and marked the formal start of the Fourth Eelam War, even though hostilities had commenced roughly a year prior. In 2007, after weeks of Sri Lankan air force raids on Tamil targets in the north and east, the LTTE Air Tigers carried out their first confirmed attack on a military base near Colombo International Airport. At this time, estimates suggested that the LTTE had successfully smuggled four light aircraft onto the island and used one to drop explosives on the air base.²⁰⁵ In July 2007, the military captured Vakarai, a key LTTE foothold, and gained control over eastern Sri Lanka.

In late 2007, the government was faced with several dire situations. First, the economy was stagnating and faced an inflation rate of nearly twenty percent. Second, the south was experiencing war fatigue in general and anger that the government could not defeat the Tamils. Third, in December 2007, the US government suspended military aid to Sri Lanka because of government human rights violations.²⁰⁶ In an effort to shore up wavering national and international support, the Sri Lankan government seemed to settle on the option of reopening hostilities in a major way. In January 2008, the government officially

withdrew from the 2002 CFA, and the Norwegian monitors departed Sri Lanka.

Having pacified most non-LTTE Tamil militant groups with political deals and power-sharing agreements, the government launched a conventional ground offensive against the LTTE in April 2008. With a force of 160,000 well-equipped troops, the Sri Lankan military gradually steamrolled LTTE forces, now essentially restricted to Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts.²⁰⁷ However, on several occasions, the outmanned LTTE was able to delay the march of a larger, but overconfident, Sri Lankan military force by superior tactics and surprise attacks. For example, feigning retreat, the LTTE was able to draw the initial wave of unsuspecting military units into a trap, surrounding the advancing soldiers, mowing down the onrushing troops, and capturing Sri Lankan military equipment to sustain the war effort.²⁰⁸ On other occasions, the LTTE was able to carry out air raids^{209,210} and underwater attacks,^{211,212} as well as suicide attacks outside of the battlefield.²¹³ As the military continued to advance, LTTE operations came increasingly to rely on interconnected, lightly manned defensive strongpoints that the better equipped and more mobile military was able to isolate and destroy.²¹⁴ Never a large force, the LTTE had little ability to recruit and replace casualties. As the LTTE continued to retreat, it forced local civilians to go along with it in hope that (1) the Sri Lankan military would suspend its air and artillery attacks on the concentrated forces, and (2) the international community would pressure the government to halt its offensive.²¹⁵ However, the Sri Lankan military pushed on.

On May 16, 2009, President Mahinda Rajapaksa declared victory for the government. On the following day, Selvarasa Pathmanathan, the LTTE chief of international relations, admitted defeat. On May 18, LTTE officials further acknowledged and Sri Lankan military leaders confirmed that Velupillai Prabhakaran, the LTTE leader; Charles Anthony, Prabhakaran's heir; Colonel Soosai, the leader of the LTTE Sea Tigers; Pottu Amman, the Chief of Intelligence; B. Nadesan, the political chief; S. Puleedevan, head of the peace secretariat; and S. Ramesh, chief of the eastern military wing, had all been killed in combat.²¹⁶ With this, the Fourth Eelam War came to an end.

Wartime Casualties

According to United Nations figures, approximately 80,000 to 100,000 people were killed over the course of the four Eelam Wars.²¹⁷ Of this total, about 23,000 were Sri Lankan soldiers and policemen, and about 27,000 were Tamil combatants. In the period from 2002 to 2005, casualties were low but significantly increased in the period of the

Fourth Eelam War. According to the estimates of one source, depicted in Figure 3-3, estimated fatalities from 2006 to 2009 amounted to slightly more than 20,000.

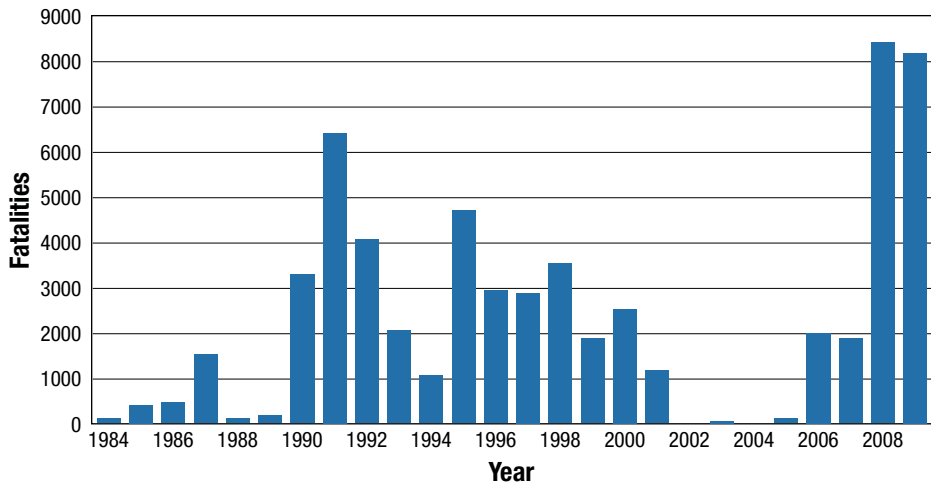


Figure 3-3. Estimated fatalities from 1984 to 2009.

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CHAPTER 4.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Sri Lanka experienced numerous bouts of political violence after securing its independence from the United Kingdom in 1948. As described in the previous section, Sinhalese youth waged insurrections against the government in 1971 and over 1987–1989, and prior to the commencement of formal hostilities between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state in 1983, intercommunal riots between Sinhalese and Tamils erupted in 1956, 1958, 1961, 1974, 1977, and 1983. The current section will delve into the economic and sociocultural factors that motivated these outbreaks of violence. To set the stage, we first provide some of the key basic demographic facts that constitute important structural underpinnings to these conflicts, and we also introduce some of the main theories that have been forwarded to explain the outbreaks of violence in post-independence Sri Lanka. Although there is not an accepted unifying theory that adequately accounts for all the myriad facets and factors of political violence in Sri Lanka after its independence, these theories will provide a framework for placing into context some of the economic and sociocultural factors that are widely acknowledged as motivating the spasms of violence seen in the country since the mid-twentieth century.

We eventually turn to describing the main factors that motivated Tamils and Sinhalese to take up arms against the state and each other. Although some of these factors are economic in nature, a full accounting of the underpinnings of the conflict would be incomplete without an adequate description of the mytho-historical factors that played a fundamental role in providing content to and structuring Tamil and Sinhalese social identities. The clash of social identities added a virulence to the conflict, as defeat was perceived as not only entailing material consequences but also cultural extinction and the concomitant impairment and potential annihilation of social identities. Additionally, we also note how these two social identities are not undifferentiated wholes but rather display a significant amount of internal diversity, especially with respect to caste and region.

DEMOGRAPHICS: ETHNICITY

The island's four primary ethnic groups are the Sinhalese, the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Indian Tamils, and the Moors. The Sinhalese are the majority ethnic group in the south, west, and central regions of the island. They trace their arrival on the island from northern India back to about the fifth or sixth century BC. They constitute approximately seventy-five percent of the population, yet they have been described as a “majority with a minority complex”¹ because of fears that they would be overrun by hordes of Tamils. During most of the

ethnic conflict about fifty to sixty million Tamils resided across the Palk Strait in Tamil Nadu, and the Sinhalese feared that these Tamils would someday link up with their Sri Lankan cousins and overrun the island. This has led to the Sinhalese perception that “we are carrying on a struggle for national existence against the Dravidian majority” and that “if the Tamils get hold of the country, the Sinhalese will have to jump into the sea.”²

During the colonial era, the Sinhalese were further divided into “up-country” and “low-country” categories. Although the Portuguese and Dutch controlled the coastal region of the island, neither was able to extend its authority to the (Sinhalese) kingdom of Kandy in the interior of the island. The result was the emergence of cultural and religious differences between Sinhalese in the southwest littoral (low-country Sinhalese) of the island and those of the Kandyan interior (up-country Sinhalese). Greater numbers of the former converted to Christianity, adopted a cosmopolitan outlook, and challenged caste hierarchies by obtaining substantial wealth in the colonial economy in the late nineteenth century, whereas the latter remained more culturally conservative (i.e., Sinhalese-Buddhist) and insular in outlook.

The arrival of Tamils from southern India, especially from the state of Tamil Nadu, and their settlement into the northern region of Ceylon is not as well documented but probably dates from about the tenth century AD. The Indian Tamils, also commonly referred to as the estate Tamils or up-county Tamils, are descendants of immigrants from India who were brought to the island by British colonists during the nineteenth century to labor on plantations established by the British. During the coffee boom from 1871 to 1881, 24,000 Indian Tamils were brought annually into Ceylon, and 34,000 arrived annually during the tea boom from 1891 to 1900. Additionally, 60,000 arrived annually from 1923 to 1928 when rubber production peaked, and by 1953 the population of Indian Tamils (984,327) slightly outnumbered that of their Ceylonese cousins (908,705).³ Indian Tamils have historically been an isolated and poor population, working mostly on tea plantations in central Sri Lanka.⁴ Strict caste and social divisions divide the Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils, and indeed both groups had pejorative nicknames for the other and criticized the dialect spoken by the other group.⁵ Consequently, few Indian Tamils joined the LTTE; instead they maintained their own separate political and militant organizations.

The Moors, also known as the Sri Lankan Muslims, trace their lineage to Arab traders and merchants of the eighth century AD who transited the Indian Ocean. They practice Islam and speak Tamil, and with Portuguese colonization of the west coast in the sixteenth century, the Moors were pushed further from the more heavily populated

southwest to the central and eastern regions of the island. In contrast to the Indian Tamils, the Moors and the Sri Lankan Tamils were able to gloss over their socioreligious differences and, at times, forge a tenuous working relationship. In addition, there are a comparatively small number of Anglo-Sri Lankans and Burghers, the latter being descendants of Dutch and Portuguese settlers.

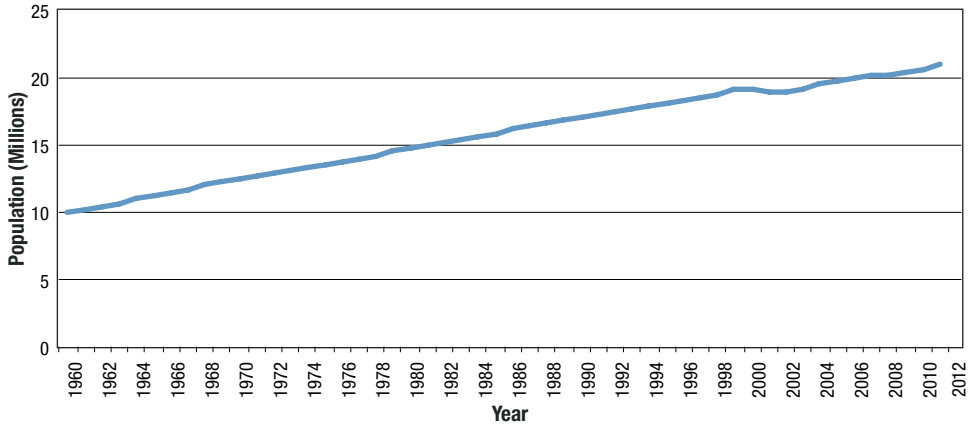


Figure 4-1. Official population estimates, 1960–2011.

As shown in Figure 4-1, the Sri Lankan population grew to exceed fifteen million in 1982 (from nearly ten million in 1960), and by the end of the conflict in 2009, the population had nearly reached 20.5 million. Additionally, according to official census data from 1946 to 2011, depicted in Figure 4-2, the Sinhalese were the largest ethnic group over this period, constituting approximately seventy to seventy-five percent of the total population, and the 2011 census records Sri Lankan Tamils as constituting approximately eleven percent of the population.⁶

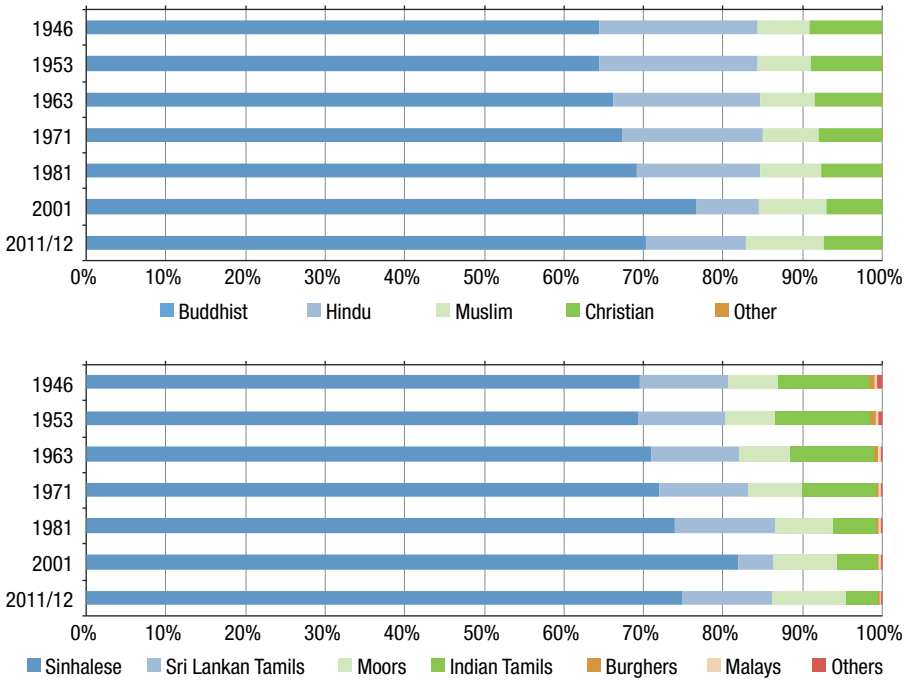


Figure 4-2. Percentage of population by ethnicity for Sri Lankan census years.

The Sri Lankan Tamils have traditionally been concentrated in the north and east, making them the majority in some districts. However, in the east, the Sri Lankan Tamils are co-located with significant numbers of the island’s Muslim minority (see Figure 4-3).

Until the recent years of conflict, Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamil homesteads tended to intermix in the countryside. Although there were very few Tamils in the south and west, cities, especially Colombo, were often heterogeneous in numbers and settlement.⁷

DEMOGRAPHICS: RELIGION AND LANGUAGE

The Sinhalese are overwhelmingly members of the Theravada school of Buddhism. Although Buddhism originated in India, it was driven to the peripheries of the subcontinent by centuries of Muslim raiders from present-day Afghanistan and by the revival and spread of Hinduism in India. Sinhala, the language of the Sinhalese, is an Indo-Aryan language with classical Indian roots but today is indigenous only in Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese, therefore, view themselves and their island home as the last line of defense for a besieged and isolated group.

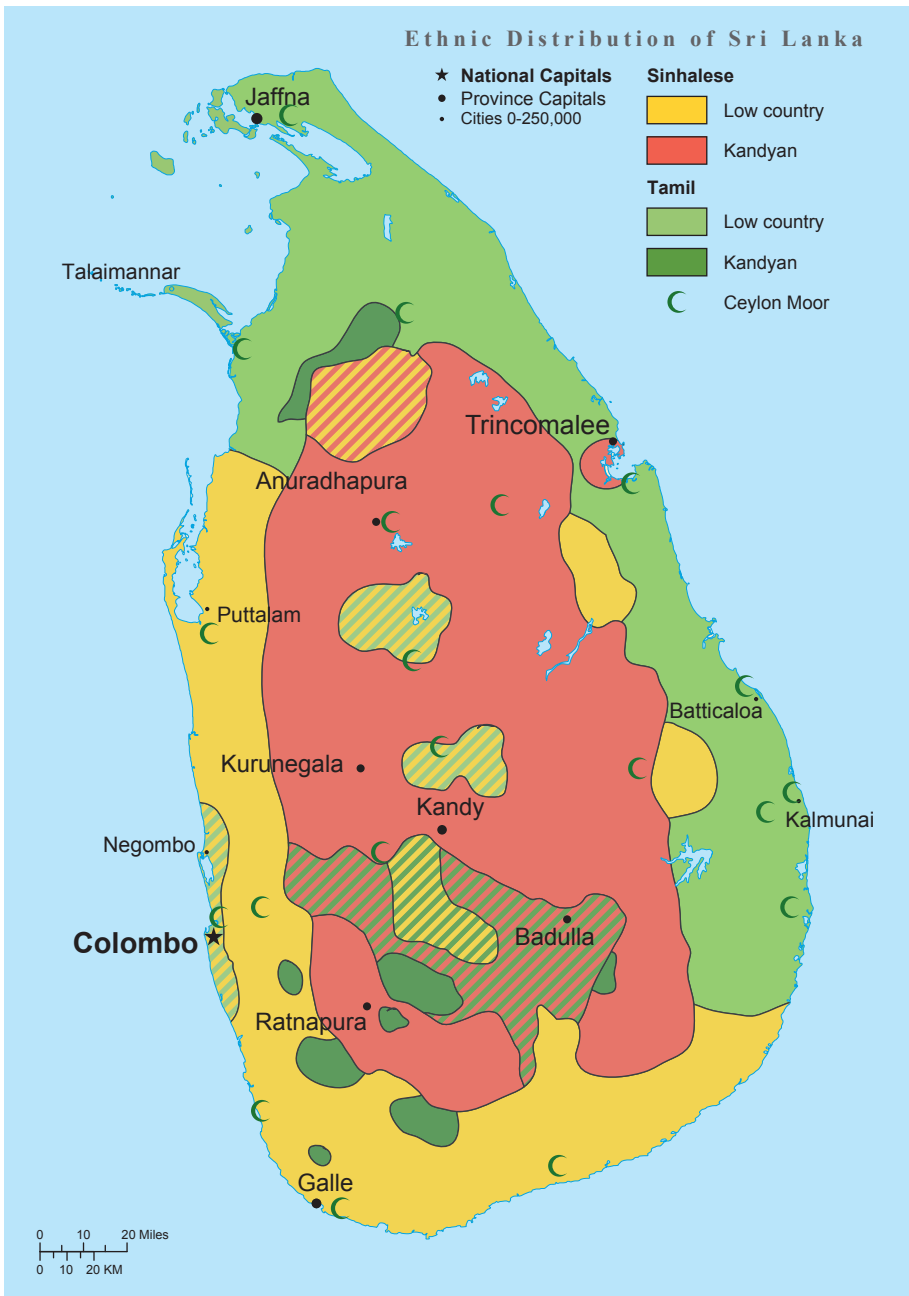


Figure 4-3. Sri Lankan ethnic distribution.

The vast majority of Sri Lankan Tamils are members of the Saivite school of Hinduism, in common with the Tamils in the co-ethnic state of Tamil Nadu, just across the Palk Strait in southern India (see Figure 4-4 for the percentages of provincial populations that are Hindu). Tamil—the language of the Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils, and Muslims—is a Dravidian language that is spoken not only in Sri Lanka but also in Tamil Nadu. During the nineteenth century, these two

characteristics—religion and language—vied within the Tamil community to become the foundation of “Tamilness.” By the end of the century, language proved the stronger of the two and became the dominant factor in determining what constitutes Tamilness.^{8,a} This is why subsequent Sinhalese attempts to minimize or restrict the Tamil language were perceived as direct attempts at suppressing Tamil society, culture, and way of life as a whole.

In parallel with the growing importance of Tamil as a language, there emerged an unprecedented interest in developing a history of the Tamils on the island. Initially intended to awaken the Tamils to their heritage, these historical writings soon morphed into instruments of bitter conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. In a spiraling action-response mode, each group increasingly depicted the other as its arch enemy and chief obstacle to its rightful and legitimate status on the island.

In summarizing the traditional divisions between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, one observer noted that the two are differentiated by language and script, religion, social organization, territorial concentration, and sense of collective history. Even when characteristics overlap, such as conversion to Christianity under colonial rule or facility in the English language, the result is superficial and does not produce a common bonding or shared identity.⁹

^a Stokke and Rynthveit also point out that Christian missionaries and Tamil Christian converts were formidable forces behind the push for the supremacy of language over religion. This perception permitted Tamils to convert to Christianity without losing or compromising their sense of ethnic identity.

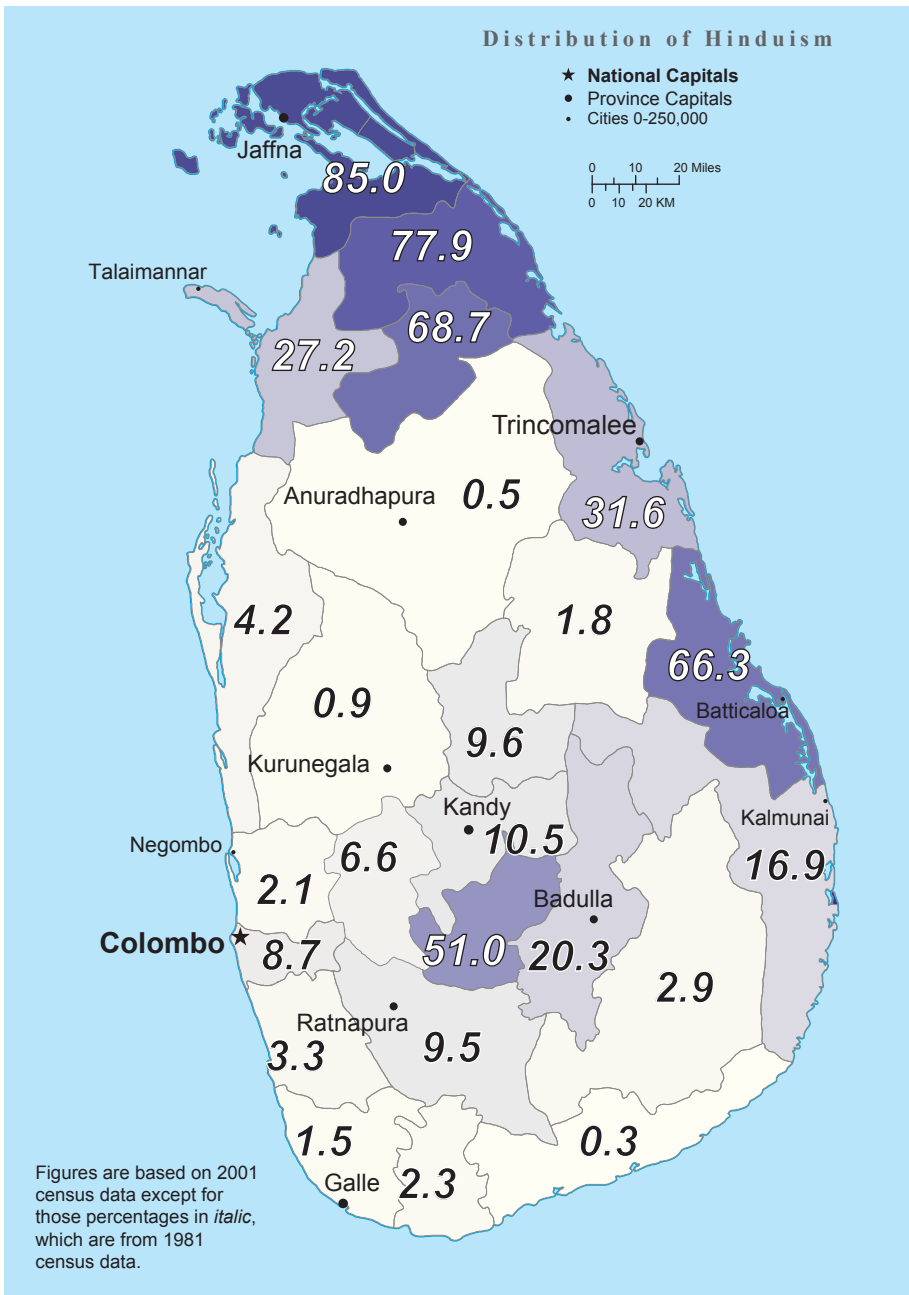


Figure 4-4. Distribution of Hinduism in Sri Lanka.

THEORIES OF VIOLENCE IN SRI LANKA

A variety of theories have been advanced to understand the various conflicts in Sri Lanka.^{10,11} The approach known as primordialism notes that ethnic identity is largely inborn and immutable and is both socially acquired through language, culture, and religion and genetically

determined through skin pigmentation and physiognomy.^b Ethnicity is therefore seen as having a timeless and enduring sociobiological basis that is largely inherited at birth and promotes a commonality of interests among those within the same ethnic group, and which may remain latent but angrily emerge as a country experiences social and economic change in the effort to achieve modernity. Nissan and Stirrat noted that the history of Sri Lanka has largely been written in primordialist terms, and evidence for a primordialist basis to the modern iteration of the ethnic conflict is found in the Sinhalese historical chronicle the *Mahavamsa*, which was first written in sixth century AD (and subsequently updated) and uses the terms “Sinhala” and “Damila” to describe the antagonists, with the former as the followers and defenders of Buddhism and the latter depicted as non-Buddhist invaders.^{14,15}

Proponents of primordialism may also point to the epic contest between Elara, the Tamil ruler of the kingdom of Anuradhapura, and Dutugemunu, a regal Sinhalese figure of symbolic importance to modern-day Sinhalese. Buddhism was established in Sri Lanka only after the Buddhist Indian emperor Ashoka (who ruled from 274 to 237 BC) sent a mission to the island that resulted in the conversion of Devanampiya Tissa, the King of Anuradhapura. In 177 BC, the kingdom fell under south Indian control, and Elara ascended the throne in 145 BC and ruled for forty-four years. Dutugemunu waged a fifteen-year campaign against Elara that was ultimately successful and is depicted in the *Mahavamsa* as an epic victory of the Sinhalese over the usurping Tamils in a holy war fought for Buddhism.¹⁶ Speaking of Dutugemunu, the *Mahavamsa* states, “his war cry was ‘Not for kingdom but for Buddhism.’”¹⁷

Additionally, after his victory, Dutugemunu was despondent over the scale of human carnage that resulted from his struggle with Elara, and in the *Mahavamsa* he is reported to have asked the *sangha* (the Buddhist order), “how shall there be comfort for me, O venerable sirs, since by me was caused the slaughter of a great host numbering millions?” The *sangha* responded by stating, “from this deed arises no hindrance in the way to heaven. Only one and a half human beings have been slain by thee, O lord of men . . . Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts.”¹⁸

While the *Mahavamsa* does locate a cosmic battle between the Sinhalese and Dravidian invaders from south India in antiquity, others have noted that the recent ethnic conflict is a product of twentieth century politics and nation building, and that it is misleading to apply modern-day notions of ethnic identity and nationalism to the states and peoples that inhabited Sri Lanka’s distant past. For instance,

^b For more information on primordialism, see Geertz¹² and Imtiyaz and Stavits.¹³

Spencer noted that ethnicity was not a politically relevant factor within the political systems of the precolonial kingdoms of Kotte, Kandy, and Jaffna;¹⁹ and Tambiah argued that ethnic solidarity was not prevalent among residents within those kingdoms, as they did not see themselves as “Sinhalese” or “Tamil” members of those political units.^{20,21}

Additionally, conflicts during the colonial era between Sinhalese and Tamils were rare.^{22,23} The first modern-era conflict between the two occurred in 1956, when 300 Tamils organized a *satyagraha* (peaceful sit-down protest) outside parliament to protest the Official Language Act (No. 33) of 1956, which made Sinhala the only official language. *Bhikkus* and other supporters of the bill attacked the Tamil protesters and threw some of them into a nearby lake, and rioting and looting was directed against Tamil businesses and individuals. Before this event, in the colonial-era conflicts were often waged along caste lines within the respective communities or were religious struggles between Buddhists and Christians or between Buddhists, Catholics, or Hindus against Muslims.²⁴ None of the clashes during the colonial era were between Buddhists and Hindus, and, interestingly, Tamils were not attacked by Sinhalese in 1915 when the Sinhalese rioted against Muslims.^{25,26}

Additionally, there are a number of historical irregularities that suggest both cooperation and intermixing between Tamils and Sinhalese. For instance, some Tamil nobles supported Dutugemunu against Elara, the Tamil king, while some Sinhalese opposed him, thus suggesting that the battles between the two may not have represented a twilight struggle between Sinhalese and Tamils.²⁷ And Nissan and Stirrat noted the following anomalies:^{28,29}

- There is inscriptional evidence at Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, both historical centers of Sinhala-Buddhist civilization, of Tamil-speaking groups residing in these cities. Additionally, Tamil soldiers served in the armies of Sinhalese kings and even acted as guards for the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy.
- In Jaffna, which is the heartland of Sri Lankan Tamils, there are place names that are of Sinhalese origin and Buddhist remains from the first millennium AD. The latter may be due to the fact that, at this time, there were significant Buddhist-Tamil communities in south India.
- A population of Sinhalese-Buddhists of the *salagama*, *karava*, and *durava* castes reside in the coastal zones of southwestern Sri Lanka. Members of these castes were among some of the more active participants of the Buddhist revival during the nineteenth century, yet evidence indicates that these groups are descendants of immigrants from Hindu south India, specifically

from Kerala (Malayalam speakers) and Coromandel (Tamil speakers), who were subsequently “Sinhalized.”^c

- Many Sinhalese of the *karava* caste along the coastal areas north of Colombo up to Puttalam were relatively recent migrants from south India who had converted to Catholicism under Portuguese rule and who were bilingual, using the Tamil language at home and Sinhala with outsiders and in markets. Additionally, Tamils and Sinhalese lived peacefully within the Pānama and Akkaraipattu areas of the Eastern Province, sometimes in the same villages, and intermarried with one another.
- The independent Sinhalese kingdom of Kandy was the last to succumb to European colonialism, coming under British rule in 1815.^d Yet the last rulers of this kingdom were Tamil-speaking kings, the Nayakkars from Madurai in southern India. During the time of Dutch colonial rule, the Kandyan royalty actively sought military and dynastic/marital alliances with Nayakkar rulers and warrior elements from south India. The Nayakkar dynasty established itself in 1739, and these kings converted to Buddhism and revived the Buddhist monastic order (they also restored several major Hindu temples). Some of the Kandyan chiefs who signed the Kandyan convention with the British (which led to the surrender of authority to the imperial power) signed their names in Tamil script rather than Sinhala, and even today, within the Kandyan region there are Sinhalese with family names that betray a Tamil origin. One such name is “Hettiarachige,” which is translated as “chief of the Chettis,” a Tamil trading caste.

Hence, rather than representing unchanging identities that impose an inherited destiny on present-day actors, “Sinhalese” and “Tamil” may to some extent represent socially constructed categories that are the result of human actions and choices, specifically discourse and the ascription of specific meanings and emotive content to ideas and categories.³⁰ Although differences and conflict existed in the past, pressures in the twentieth century related to state and nation building, electoral competition, and competition over limited economic opportunities may have led to “reading history backwards,” where “pre-existing differences were reinterpreted in a new fashion that emphasized antagonism and hostility instead of tolerance and exchange.”^{31, e} Hence, social

^c See the section on Sinhalese Mytho-history for more information regarding the Buddhist revival during the nineteenth century.

^d See *Chapter 5. Government and Politics* for more information regarding the era of British rule of the island.

^e For a discussion of “reading history backwards,” see Pfaffenberger.³² For an interesting discussion of the Social Constructivist perspective, see Stokke.³³

constructivists would note that the recent and distant past was reinterpreted to emphasize eternal conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese. From this perspective, one may argue that the virulence and satanic quality of the conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese is due not simply to a disagreement over how to apportion economic and political resources and opportunities but rather to the fact that constructs such as Tamil and Sinhalese have been endowed with a significant emotive and symbolic quality, as they have come to represent exclusionary ethnically based symbols of immortality that both groups feared were at risk of obliteration in the current conflict.

Another approach, based on Huntington's theory of modernization, argues that political instability and revolutions occur during periods of rapid social change and the mobilization of new groups into politics without concomitant advances in political development.³⁴ Applied to Sri Lanka, modernization theorists would note that *political* development in the post-independence period did not match the impressive *social* modernization that was occurring through the broad-based expansion of education in local languages (instead of English), particularly among rural Sinhalese. This expansion in education and the increasing number of graduates led to new aspirations and an increase in expectations regarding suitable employment, which went unfulfilled as the economy was not able to keep pace with the large increases in the number of educated job seekers.^{35,36} The resultant frustration led to the political mobilization of this group in the late 1960s, and they flocked to the JVP because existing parties, including those on the left, did not adequately address their grievances.^f Educated unemployment was a destabilizing factor in Sri Lanka during this period, as the JVP launched an insurrection to overthrow both the government and the political system and to restructure the latter along Marxist-Leninist lines. As Huntington noted, however, this effort was not unique to Sri Lanka:

In general, the higher the level of education of the unemployed, alienated or otherwise disaffected person, the more extreme the destabilizing behavior which results. Alienated university graduates prepare revolutions; alienated technical or secondary school graduates plan coups; alienated primary school leavers

^f Interestingly, the leaders of the left-wing parties, having been educated at Oxford, Cambridge, or the London School of Economics, had more in common with their colleagues within the center-right United National Party than with rural Sinhalese educated in the vernacular. Not surprisingly, one of the reasons Rohana Wijeweera, the founder of the JVP, started the organization was his belief that existing leftist parties had neglected the rural proletariat.^{37,38}

engage in more frequent but less significant forms of political unrest.³⁹

A related perspective is the theory of relative deprivation developed by Gurr, which argues that political violence flows from relative deprivation, which is a discrepancy between the goods and conditions of life that one can realistically achieve with what one believes he or she is legitimately entitled to.⁴⁰ Political violence emerges as deprivation leads to anger and subsequently to aggression. This perspective is useful for understanding why Tamil and Sinhalese youths took up arms against the government in the 1970s. In the case of Tamil youth, the capability of achieving life aspirations was severely curtailed by the government through legislation that severely restricted access to university education and employment within the public sector. For Sinhalese, aspirations were raised after government policies increased access to education, but the capability to satisfy increased aspirations lagged as the economy failed to produce a sufficient number of jobs to absorb the increasing number of educated graduates. One theoretical difference with the approach offered by Huntington is that Gurr spends relatively less time theorizing the social, political, and economic causes of political instability and violence and instead focuses on the links between relative deprivation and violence.⁴¹

Lastly, another perspective that can be adopted is the argument that the island's experience under colonialism, and especially British rule, set it on a path toward eventual ethnic conflict.⁴² Indeed, under the British, the island was administratively organized along linguistic lines, with Sinhalese areas administered in Sinhala and Tamil areas administered in Tamil, and the boundary separating the two areas bore a strong resemblance to the borders of the ancient Tamil Eelam invoked during the ethnic conflict in the twentieth century.⁴³ And within the British colonial administration, Tamils were overrepresented, owing to their success in acquiring English-language skills, thereby leading to charges of British favoritism toward the Tamils at the expense of the Sinhalese. However, there are several counterarguments one can make in response to this perspective. First, as already mentioned, the categories of "Tamil" and "Sinhalese" representing distinct peoples preceded British rule, and one consistent pattern of Sri Lankan history is the persistence of fighting between Sinhalese kingdoms and Tamil-speaking invaders from southern India.[§] Additionally, Nissan and Stirrat noted that British policy was highly influenced by European racial theory that

[§] See the *Sinhalese Mytho-history* section for examples of Tamil invasions of Ceylon from southern India.

viewed language differences as markers of racial distinction,^h and so the administrative division of the island along linguistic lines was based not on a “divide and rule” policy but on a misguided liberal desire to respect the customs and languages of different “races.”⁴⁴

SINHALESE MYTHO-HISTORY

Any attempt to fully understand the ethnic conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese would be incomplete without an understanding of the mytho-history that animated both groups. In the case of the Sinhalese, the *Mahavamsa* and, to a lesser extent, the *Dipavamsa* and *Culavamsa*, are the main historical chronicles that imbued the Sinhalese with a belief in their own exceptionalism. This belief is rooted in the perception that they were designated by the Buddha himself as the stewards of Theravada Buddhism, which led them to ascribe a Zion-like status to the island. The *Mahavamsa* notes that the island of Lanka was originally populated by demons called *yakkhas* and snake beings called *nagas*.⁴⁵ Around this time in the land of the Vangas (which modern-day Sinhalese believe to have been located near the Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh), the daughter of the king of the Vangas was abducted by a lion that subsequently impregnated her. She conceived a boy, Sinhabahu, and a girl, Sinhasivali. Sinhabahu eventually killed his lion father and married his sister, and they had two sons, the eldest of which was Vijaya. The chronicles assert that Vijaya was violent and demonic, and so he and his followers were banished to the island of Lanka.⁴⁶ After his arrival, Vijaya and his followers married women from Madurai in south India (Vijaya himself married a princess from the royal family of that region), and their offspring emerged to constitute the Sinhalese people. Thus, Vijaya is regarded as the progenitor of the Sinhalese, yet ironically, the unions with south Indian women and the offspring they produced made the Tamils both kinfolk and cofounders of the Sinhalese people, a fact that adherents of the Vijaya myth do not emphasize.⁴⁷

Before Vijaya’s arrival in Sri Lanka, the first chapter of the *Mahavamsa* notes three visits of the Buddha to the island. The first visit occurred when “at the ninth month of his Buddhahood . . . himself set forth to the isle of Lanka, to win Lanka for the faith. For Lanka was known to the Conqueror as a place where his doctrine should [thereafter] shine in glory.”⁴⁸ During this first visit, the Buddha tamed the *Yakkhas* in the eastern part of the island, and on his second visit, he

^h See the *Sinhalese Mytho-history* section for a discussion of European racial theories that influence British policy in Ceylon.

subdued and converted the *Nagas* in the northern part. On his third visit, he went to Kelaniya, near Colombo, and to Anuradhapura, which would become the first capital of the Sinhalese kings. According to the *Mahavamsa*, Vijaya arrived in Sri Lanka on the day the Buddha died in 543 BC.¹ Before his death, he is reported to have told Sakka, the king of the gods and the divine protector of the Universal Buddhist Church (*sasana*), the following statement:

Wijaya, son of King Sinhabahu, is come to Lanka from the country of Lala, together with seven hundred followers. In Lanka, O Lord of gods, will my religion be established, therefore carefully protect him and his followers and Lanka.⁵⁰

Thus was born the notion that the Buddha had prepared the island and subsequently consecrated it as the repository of his religion, to be nurtured and advanced by the Sinhalese people.

Another theme ascribed to the chronicles is the notion that the Sinhalese are the defenders of the *sasana* against usurping Tamils opposed to Buddhism. The repeated invasions of Sri Lanka by invaders from south India who were generally Tamil speakers is a motif of the chronicles.⁵¹ Thus, a few centuries after the fall of the kingdom of Anuradhapura in 177 BC mentioned previously, in the fifth century AD Pandyan invaders from south India conquered Anuradhapura, which was retaken by Dhatusena twenty-five years later.⁵² More invasions occurred in the ninth and tenth centuries AD, and in 993 AD, the Chola Empire from south India annexed Anuradhapura and the surrounding region.

This glorious accounting of Sinhalese history was revitalized in the mid-nineteenth century after the encroachments of Christianity (rather than Hinduism) that accompanied British rule. Christianity had made some inroads on the island under both Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule. The Portuguese converted a number of Ceylonese in coastal regions to Catholicism, and once the Dutch took over the maritime regions controlled by the Portuguese, they welcomed missionaries from the Dutch Reformed Church to win converts to Calvinism.⁵³ A number of missionary societies from Britain arrived in Sri Lanka once the British supplanted the Dutch, including the London Missionary Society (1805), the Baptists (1812), the Wesleyan Methodists (1814), and the Church Mission (1818).⁵⁴ In 1813, the American Missionary Society established a presence in the Jaffna peninsula, and these organizations focused on providing an English-language education. During the nineteenth century, every village in the Jaffna peninsula hosted a mission

¹ There is no consensus on the date of the Buddha's death. In China, the date is identified as 947 BC, and in India, it is noted as 486 BC.⁴⁹

school,⁵⁵ and the imparting of an English-language education on Jaffna Tamils was so successful that this group took a disproportionate number of posts within the colonial administration.

The establishment of English-language education also spurred the emergence of a new social class of Ceylonese, sometimes referred to as the “educated Ceylonese,” which spanned the Tamil-Sinhalese ethnic divide. This group never amounted to more than four to five percent of the population, but the Protestants within this group emerged as a bureaucratic and economic elite under British rule, and this class adopted a Western worldview, lifestyle, and mode of dress at the expense of knowledge of indigenous culture, literature, and history.^{56,57} In the mid-twentieth century, the British were to hand over power peacefully to this group (particularly to the Sinhalese component of this class), and it can be argued that Sri Lanka experienced a delayed ethnonational “revolution” in 1956, with the electoral victory of the SLFP, as over the next two decades, the government proceeded to align the state along a more explicit Sinhalese-Buddhist foundation. Yet the intellectual impetus for this movement can be located in the mid to late nineteenth century as Buddhists monks and an alienated non-peasant and Sinhalese-educated intelligentsia consisting of ayurvedic physicians (who practiced traditional medicine), village schoolteachers, and government officials (headmen, coroners, registrars of marriages, etc.), alarmed at the political dominance of Protestantism and the emergence of an English-educated political and economic elite, led an assault on Christianity and Western influence.^{58,59} Thus, a number of Buddhist associations were formed, including the Sarvagna Sasanabhivruddhi Dayaka Dharma Samagama (Society for the Propagation of Buddhism), and a number of public debates between Christians and Buddhists were held. In one such debate in 1873, the monk Migetuwatte Gunananda, who had founded the Samagama, participated in a public debate with a Sinhalese Christian. Ten thousand people attended and generally agreed that Gunananda had won.⁶⁰ Another monk, Batuwantudawe, wrote *Kristiani Prajnapti Khandanaya* (*The Tearing Asunder of the Evidence and Doctrine of Christianity*) in response to the publication of a pro-Christian tract.⁶¹

During this time, one figure who played a prominent role in generating a Sinhalese-Buddhist national consciousness was Anagarika

Dharmapala (1864–1933),^{j,k} whose discourse of resistance against Western imperialism was motivated by religious animosity toward Christianity and was informed by European racial theories that came to regard the Sinhalese as an Indo-European Aryan people. Dharmapala believed that the Sinhalese were of superior Aryan stock, as indicated by the following passage:

The Aryan race is the only race with noble customs handed down from tradition . . . [therefore] the Sinhalese (who are Aryans) should cultivate ancient codes of conduct, Aryan customs and Aryan dresses and ornaments . . . The Sinhalese first came to this country from Bengal and the Bengalis are superior in their intelligence to the other communities of India.⁶⁴

Despite an alleged racial link with their British rulers, one of the themes that emerged from his writing was the notion that the arrival of Europeans ruined Sinhalese culture and dragged it and the Sinhalese people down to the level of inferior races, as demonstrated in the following passage:

From the day the white man set foot on this island, the arts and sciences and the Aryan customs of the Sinhalese have gradually disappeared and today the Sinhalese have to kiss the feet of the Moor [and] the dastardly Tamil.⁶⁵

Another passage invokes the glory of King Dutugemunu and his supposed holy war for Buddhism while linking Buddhism to Ceylonese nationalism:

My message to the young men of Ceylon is . . . Believe not the alien who is giving you arrack whisky, toddy, sausages, who makes you buy his goods at clearance

^j Dharmapala was actually born Don David Hewavitarana and spent a considerable amount of his youth in Christian schools. He indigenized his name once his Buddhism became more fundamentalist in his late teens and early twenties. A big influence on his life were H. S. Olcott, an American colonel, and Madame Blavatsky, both of whom organized the Theosophical Society of New York in 1875 and traveled to Ceylon to organize the Buddhist Theosophical Society of Ceylon. After a three-month tour of Ceylon with Olcott and Blavatsky, Dharmapala became convinced of the decay of Buddhism and dedicated his life to its revival.⁶²

^k There was also a Saivite Hindu revivalist movement centered in the Jaffna peninsula that slightly preceded the Buddhist revivalism of the late nineteenth century. This movement was led by Arumuka Navalar (1822–1879), who was critical of Christian proselytizing activities and launched a Tamil Hindu school system to prevent Tamil children from potential conversion in Christian schools. Ironically, he helped translate the Bible into Tamil, although he also wrote textbooks for Hindu children and engaged in polemics against Christians.⁶³

rates . . . Enter into the realms of our King Dutugemunu in spirit and try to identify yourself with the thoughts of that great king who rescued Buddhism and our nationalism from oblivion.⁶⁶

Additionally, although his main targets were Western imperialism and influence, his writing suggests the idea that Ceylon is not a multi-ethnic society but rather a homeland for the Sinhalese people:

The island of Lanka belongs to the Buddhist Sinhalese. For 2455 years this was the land of birth for the Sinhalese. Other races have come here to pursue their commercial activities. For the Europeans, apart from this land, there is Canada, Australia, South Africa, England and America to go to; for the Tamils there is South India; for the Moors . . . Egypt; the Dutch can go to Holland. But for the Sinhalese there [is] only this island.⁶⁷

Eller noted that Dharmapala's writings would help frame the discourse that energized Sri Lankan nationalism from the 1950s onward.⁶⁸

The revival of Buddhism and the notion of Sinhalese exceptionalism were also invigorated in the late nineteenth century by European racial theories that identified the Sinhalese as an Indo-European Aryan people. Specifically, language and race were conflated so that different language groups were seen as constituting different racial groups, and beginning in the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries, philologists began to tie Sinhala to Sanskrit, an Indo-European language. Because language was seen as a marker of racial variation, it was only a short conceptual leap to subsequently place the Sinhalese people within the Aryan family. Thus, in 1788, William Jones's lecture on the structural similarities between Sanskrit and European languages was published, and this relationship was viewed as reflecting the common ancestry of speakers of those languages.¹ In 1819, Friedrich Schlegel used the term *Aryan* to designate this group of people.⁷⁰ The link to Sinhala was first made by B. C. Clough, who produced the first Sinhala-English dictionary between 1821 and 1830. Clough was the first to argue that Sinhala was derived from Sanskrit, and this was followed up in 1852 by the Sinhalese scholar James D'Alwis, who argued that Sinhala, while not a dialect of Sanskrit, shared a common origin with it.⁷¹

¹ The idea of the common origin of the non-Semitic peoples of Europe and India had a number of enthusiastic supporters at the time in Europe, including Hegel, the German philosopher. He referred to the idea of the similarity between European languages and Sanskrit as "the great discovery in history."⁶⁹

Two subsequent works had an important influence on the development of Sinhalese consciousness.⁷² In his 1861 publication *Lectures on the Science of Language*, Max Müller argued that the languages spoken in Iceland and Ceylon were “cognate dialects of the Aryan family of languages.” And in 1856, after his study of the grammar of south Indian languages, Robert Caldwell used the term *Dravidian* to designate a family of languages consisting of six “cultivated dialects” (Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Canarese, Tulu, and Kadagu) and six “uncultivated dialects” (Tuda, Kota, Gond, Khond/Ku, Oraon, and Rajmahal), and he further argued that there was “no direct affinity” between Sinhala and Tamil. These works were cited by D’Alwis in an 1866 essay where he referred to “the Aryan invasions” of Ceylon, which was interpreted to signify that Vijaya, the progenitor of the Sinhalese people, was of Aryan stock.⁷³ Thus, D’Alwis argued that the Sinhalese were essentially Aryans, which was a rather prestigious designation for a colonial people because it elevated them to the same status as their colonial rulers on the basis of a common descent.

The racial distinction between Sinhalese and Tamils was also grounded in biological anthropology during an 1879 lecture on Ceylon given by M. M. Kunte. He stated, “There are, properly speaking, representatives of only two races in Ceylon—Aryans and Tamilians, the former being divided into descendants of Indian and Western Aryans.” He also claimed that “the formation of the forehead, the cheek-bones, the chin, the mouth and the lips of the Tamilians are distinctly different from those of the Ceylonese Aryans.”⁷⁴ By the 1920s, history books started to propagate the view that the Sinhalese were of Aryan origin, although the pureness of their Aryan blood may have been diluted through intermarriage. For instance, H. W. Codrington’s *Short History of Ceylon* stated the following:

Vijaya’s followers espoused Pandyan women and it seems probable that in course of time their descendants married with the people of the country on whom they imposed their language. Further dilution of the original Aryan blood has undoubtedly taken place in later ages, with the result that, though the Sinhalese language is of North Indian origin, the social system is that of the south.⁷⁵

Thus, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the linguistic differences between Sinhalese and Tamils was given a racial foundation rooted in alleged sociobiological differences between the two groups, with the Sinhalese endowed with higher status on the basis of supposed Aryan origins and the alleged superiority of this group over other races.

TAMIL MYTHO-HISTORY

In contrast to the Sinhalese, the Tamils did not employ history instrumentally to inform ethnic identity, as ethnic identity for the Tamils was instead based more on religious, cultural, and social practices.⁷⁶ But as noted by Wilson, Tamils began to increasingly use history to justify their claims as rightful inhabitants of the island.⁷⁷ In doing so, Tamils attempted to counter Sinhalese claims of exceptionalism and paternity over the entire island, and one such effort was the argument that the Sinhalese were not really Aryans, “but Dravidians in disguise, and thus had nothing to be snooty about.”⁷⁸ More specifically, they noted that the Sinhalese are the product of the intermixing of the indigenous people of Ceylon (the Veddahs) with subsequent Aryan and Dravidian settlers and invaders.⁷⁹

There have also been some claims that Tamils have inhabited the island at least as long as the Sinhalese. Although only twenty miles separate Sri Lanka from south India, there is no firm evidence of the date of the first Tamil settlements in Sri Lanka.⁸⁰ However, findings at archeological sites at Pomparippu, Gurugalhinna, Katiraveli, Podiyogampola, and Walave Basin demonstrate a strong affinity with the Iron Age civilization in south India, suggesting that before the arrival of Buddhism in the third century BC, the local population cultivated rice through tank irrigation and was culturally closest to the Iron Age culture of middle and south India.⁸¹ Ponnambalam has claimed that Tamils were the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka and that the Sinhalese were originally Tamils that converted to Buddhism and adopted the Sinhala language, which is similar to Pali, the language of the *Mahavamsa*.^{82,83} Tamils also emphasize that even if Sinhalese settlers preceded the arrival of Dravidians from south India, Tamils have lived on the island for at least 1,000 years and formed political units independent of Sinhalese control.⁸⁴

Additionally, the Tamils can also point to historical documents (albeit of more recent vintage) that purport to show that Tamils have been on the island for at least as long as the Sinhalese. The *Yalppana Vaipava Malai* (*The Garland of Jaffna Events* [YVM]) was compiled in the early eighteenth century, and it depicts Rama (one of the protagonists of the *Ramayana*) as defeating the *Yakkhas* and the demon Ravana.⁸⁵ Additionally, in the YVM, Vijaya is a Saivite Indian prince, and he and his followers marry Tamil wives. Vijaya builds Saivite temples before the arrival of Buddhism, and the YVM also discusses the relations between the Chola dynasty and Ceylon, as well as the establishment of the Tamil settlement in the Jaffna peninsula. There is also a vague reference to Elara, and on the basis of the YVM, in 1912 the historian Mututampipilai argued that Elara arrived in Ceylon long before Vijaya’s arrival.⁸⁶

CASTE DIFFERENCES AMONG TAMILS AND SINHALESE

Caste differences were not as important as ethnic differences after independence in Sri Lanka, but they still played an important role in the JVP and Tamil insurgencies. The elite Sinhalese castes, including the *govigama*, but also the *karava*, *salagama*, and *durava*, largely withheld support to the JVP in 1987–1989. In general, during both of its insurrections, the group tended to draw support from the lower castes, including the *wahumpura* and *batgam* castes.⁸⁷ For instance, the *wahumpura* villages of Ellewela and Ketanwila in the Matara District strongly supported the JVP, while the JVP received much less support in the neighboring *govigama* village of Lenama. Additionally, in 1987–1989, the group received very little support in Galle District, which may be due to the fact that nearly all of its population belonged to one of the four higher castes previously mentioned. And Chandraprema noted that the JVP played on caste resentment, as it typically attempted to recruit youth from oppressed castes when forming *balakayas*, or armed units that carried out violence.⁸⁸

Caste differences were also a factor in the Tamil insurgency. The LTTE drew a lot of support from the *karaiyar* caste, whereas the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam drew support from the elite *vellalar* caste.⁸⁹ Bandarage noted that most Tamil insurgents were from lower castes and that the Tamils they murdered were primarily *vellalars*. Additionally, she noted that the *vellalar*-dominated Tamil United Front succeeded in directing lower-caste Tamil anger at *vellalar* elites toward the Sinhalese.⁹⁰ Caste (and regional) differences likely explain why Sri Lankan Tamils in the Eastern Province were less radicalized than Tamils in the Northern Province.⁹¹ The elite *vellalar* caste controlled economic and political affairs within the Jaffna peninsula, whereas the *mukkuvar* caste is at the top of the caste hierarchy in the Eastern Province, and neither they nor “Minority Tamils” from lower castes were eager to see an independent Tamil state controlled by *vellalars*.⁹² Indeed, these factors undoubtedly played a role in the March 2004 split of the LTTE into a northern wing headed by Prabhakaran and an eastern wing led by Vinayagamorthy Muralithiran, who went by the nom de guerre of Colonel Karuna. This split proved disastrous for the group, as it played a fundamental role in their military defeat by the government. Following is a brief discussion of caste in Sri Lanka and its role in generating political tensions.

The term *caste* originated from the term *casta*, which was used by the Portuguese to identify groups that do not intermarry, are hierarchically organized in terms of social status, and whose interactions are

governed by a variety of ritualized behaviors.⁹³ Indeed, with respect to ritualized behaviors, a number of social restrictions discriminated against low-caste Tamils. For instance, at one time “outcastes” were not permitted to attend school; sit on a bus; own a car or bicycle; wear shoes; cremate their dead; use laundries, cafes, or taxis; or to enter temples.⁹⁴ Within the Sinhalese community, the *govigama*, the farmer caste, was the highest caste, and it constituted about sixty percent of the Sinhalese population.⁹⁵ Secondary castes included the *karava* (fisherman caste), *salagama* (cinnamon peeler caste), and *durava* (toddy taper caste). *Karavas* and *salagamas* benefited economically under British rule and began to challenge the social and political supremacy of the *govigamas*, and in fact during this time caste differences were more important than ethnic differences. For instance, in 1911, the *karavas* presented their own candidate for the single elective seat open to Ceylonese on the Legislative Council, which actually led the *govigamas* to cross ethnic boundaries and support the Tamil *vellalar* candidate, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, in an elite-caste alliance against the *karavas*.⁹⁶ However, as the country moved inexorably toward independence, ethnic differences emerged as the main cleavage within society, and caste differences among the Sinhalese were further subsumed in the mid-twentieth century as rural-to-urban migration led recent migrants to drop identities based on village communities, kin groups, and locality-based castes in favor of the Sinhalese communal identity.⁹⁷

Interestingly, having ancestors who arrived between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, many of the members of the *karava*, *salagama*, and other lower castes likely have south Indian origins and were incorporated into Ceylonese society through a process of “differential incorporation” that was prevalent in other south Asian societies as well. Specifically, Eller noted that new groups were absorbed through a process of “inferiorization,” whereby waves of migrants who settled in southwest Ceylon were aggregated from disparate communities and integrated into an inferior position of Sinhalese society by being placed within a lower caste.^{98,99} These migrants had to learn Sinhalese and adopt Buddhism, and, perhaps as a result of identity-related insecurities bought about through comparisons with older inland Sinhalese communities, inhabitants of the southwest littoral emerged as some of the most eager participants in the Buddhist revival and defenders of Sinhalese-Buddhist religion and culture.¹⁰⁰

The *vellalar* (cultivator) is the politically and economically dominant and most numerous caste within the Tamil society of Jaffna peninsula, where they form the landholding elite. There is no indigenous Brahmin caste within Sri Lanka. Instead, Brahmin priests were brought in from India (especially by wealthy *vellalars*) to perform ritual duties.¹⁰¹

Other “clean castes” include the fisher castes of *karaiyars* and *mukkuvars*, while at the bottom are the “unclean castes,” or untouchables, such as the *pallars* and *nalavars*.^m Wilson noted that *vellalars* looked down on *karaiyars* and refused to marry them, but during the Tamil insurgency against the government, *karaiyars* acquired high status because of their active participation in the fighting.¹⁰³ During the precolonial era, *vellalars* served as the highest revenue officers (with the title of *mudaliyar*) in the kingdom of Jaffna, and under Portuguese, Dutch, and English authority, members of this caste assisted European officials with various administrative duties.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, under English rule, *vellalars* consolidated their status by eagerly taking to English-language education, and most of the English-educated elite from the Tamil community came from the *vellalar* caste.¹⁰⁵

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a symbiotic relationship between Hindu Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, characterized by cultural and economic links and by the role played by Indian sources in revitalizing Hinduism on the island, the practice of which had been severely curtailed under the Portuguese.ⁿ However, although strong links still remain between the two regions, beginning in the nineteenth century Sri Lankan Tamils began to develop an indigenous identity distinct from that of south India. The spread of Christianity, which was ultimately adopted by about ten to fifteen percent of the Tamil population, played a role in differentiating Sri Lankan Tamils from their Tamil Nadu counterparts.¹⁰⁷ Caste-related practices, though, also played a role in convincing Sri Lankan Tamils of the uniqueness of their culture and its representation of the essence of Tamil civilization, which added further motivation to the insurgency against the Sinhalese state, given fears that the government was trying to eradicate Tamil culture.¹⁰⁸ Specifically, *vellalar* adherence to Brahminical Hinduism stood in stark contrast to a virulent anti-Brahmin movement that emerged among non-Brahmin castes in Tamil Nadu, which featured a rejection of Brahmin religious rituals and practices and challenged Brahmin social and political dominance.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, for Sri Lankan Tamils the sponsorship of Brahmin-administered rituals was in accordance with ancient Tamil traditions and had the added benefit of according *vellalars* with a social status that they otherwise would be unable to attain under orthodox Hinduism.¹¹⁰ As a result, Pfaffenberger argued that Jaffna *vellalars* regarded themselves as the

^m Arasaratnam noted that untouchables fared relatively better in Jaffna than in south Indian villages because norms of purity and pollution were not strictly observed in Jaffna and pollution by sight was rarely practiced in the peninsula.¹⁰²

ⁿ Arasaratnam noted that the Portuguese initiated widespread destruction of Hindu temples, with Felipe de Oliviera, the Captain General of Jaffna (1619–1627) having boasted of destroying 500 temples.¹⁰⁶

dominant group in Jaffna, with other castes residing there at their sufferance and for their convenience.¹¹¹

In addition to differences with Tamil Nadu, regional differences also existed between Jaffna Tamils and those in the Eastern Province. The Jaffna peninsula has always been the center of gravity for Tamil society, yet the Eastern Province was never fully incorporated into the precolonial Tamil kingdom of Jaffna, and the integration between the two Tamil regions under European rule was tenuous at best, as colonial rule arrived in the eastern region only in the nineteenth century.^{112,113} Additionally, English-language instruction was not as prevalent in the eastern region as in the north, and conditions of overcrowding and economically inhospitable terrain were not factors in the east (as they were in the north) propelling Tamils in this region to migrate to Colombo in search of suitable economic opportunities.¹¹⁴ Religious differences also divided Tamils in two regions, as *vellalars* in Jaffna are largely Saivite Hindus (i.e., worshippers of the god Siva), whereas the numerically dominant *mukkuvars* in the Eastern Province are Vaishnavites (worshippers of Vishnu).¹¹⁵ Before the mid-twentieth century, these differences led to a social and political distance between the two Tamil communities, with the Tamils of the Eastern Province gravitating toward Sinhalese parties.¹¹⁶ Yet the two groups were drawn together after the Sinhala-only legislation of the mid-twentieth century, although concerns remained during the insurgency that an emergent Tamil state would be under *vellalar* domination.^{117,118}

TAMIL AND SINHALESE ECONOMIC CONCERNS

The economic dimension of Tamil grievances fostering the LTTE insurgency centered on concerns over “internal colonialism” and policies that restricted the economic prospects of Tamils within a Sinhalese-dominated state. These sentiments are nicely captured by a 1976 statement issued by the Tamil United Liberation Front, which charged that the Sinhalese government aimed to make the Tamils into a

slave nation ruled by the new colonial master, the Sinhalese, who are using the power they have wrongly usurped to deprive the Tamil nation of its territory, language, citizenship, economic life, opportunities of employment and education thereby destroying all the attributes of nationhood of the Tamil people.¹¹⁹

Specifically, Tamil economic concerns centered on official language policy, university admissions and access to employment in the civil service in Colombo, and government resettlement schemes. With

respect to language policy, under the British, the English language was the language of government, higher education, and the professions, yet by the mid-twentieth century eighty percent of the population did not have access to an English education and were therefore denied of opportunities for economic and social advancement.¹²⁰ In response, the *Swabasha* movement emerged, which championed the use of the vernacular languages, both Sinhalese and Tamil, for everyday use. In 1944, the State Council passed a resolution calling for Sinhalese and Tamil to replace English as the official languages within a reasonable amount of time. Yet Tamil was dropped in 1956 as the new SLFP-led government passed the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956, also known as the Sinhala-only bill, which designated Sinhalese as the only official language of the country.

The year 1956 was an election year, and the SLFP swept into power on a wave of messianic fervor as that year also coincided with the *Buddha Jayanthi*, or the worldwide celebration of the 2,500th anniversary of the death of the Buddha. Before the election, the SLFP appealed to the newly mobilized political *bhikkus* and mass Sinhalese-Buddhist public by vowing to make Sinhalese the official language of the country (in twenty-four hours no less), and the legislation proved detrimental to Tamil economic interests, as Tamils now either had to pass Sinhala examinations to obtain employment in the government (which was the country's largest employer) or compete for the limited number of regional Tamil-speaking positions.¹²¹ This legislation contributed to the de-Tamilization of the civil service. For example, Tamils held twenty-five percent of the positions within the Ceylon Civil Service in 1948, but by 1979 (by which time it was renamed as the Sri Lanka Administrative Services), the Tamil share dropped to thirteen percent.¹²² The drop was more pronounced in the numerically larger lower clerical grades, as the Tamil share of these positions dropped from forty-one to five percent over the same time period. And within the armed forces, Tamil representation dropped from forty to one percent from 1956 to 1970.¹²³

Another factor that limited Tamil access to employment opportunities was the inability to fully participate in patronage networks, whereby increasingly scarce jobs were awarded to the well-connected by the politically powerful. Economic stagnation in the 1950s led to a curtailment of opportunities for public-sector employment, and around this time, patronage networks emerged through which the ruling parties recruited party faithful for state employment.¹²⁴ By the 1970s, the state became heavily involved in the economy and patronage was actually formalized through a job bank scheme where each member of parliament could recommend up to 1,000 job seekers for employment in the lower grades of the public sector. The more limited Tamil representation in

Colombo meant that young Tamils had fewer opportunities to avail themselves of this pathway toward public-sector employment, and in the case of the job bank scheme, Tamil politicians also had less success in placing Tamils into the civil service. For instance, by May 1982 only 1,470 of the 11,000 applicants nominated by parliamentarians from the Tamil United Liberation Front were awarded government jobs, which represented a success rate much lower than that achieved by other parties.¹²⁵

Tamil grievances also centered on efforts by the government to resettle Sinhalese peasants and other settlers into lands in the north and east that were considered by Tamils to be part of their historic homeland. The establishment of plantations by the British in the mid-nineteenth century evicted many Sinhalese peasants from their land and generated landlessness among this class, as well as overcrowding in the southwest portion of the island.^o Hence, the effort to relocate Sinhalese into the dry zone in the north and east represented an attempt to correct a historical wrong while also alleviating demographic pressures in the wet zone. Tamils, though, saw it as an effort to establish new “facts on the ground” and dilute Tamil representation in Colombo.

The resettlement effort commenced in 1928, with the Tabbowa Resettlement Scheme, and resettlement was given further impetus in 1935, with the passage of the Land Development Ordinance.^{127,128} By the late 1960s, the government had allocated 300,000 acres of land to 67,000 allottees through various colonization schemes, and the largest of these, Gal Oya in the Eastern Province, established an irrigation area of more than 120,000 acres between 1948 and 1952.^{129,p} Many Sinhalese viewed the resettlement of the dry zone as an effort to restore what they considered the greatness of ancient Buddhist-Sinhalese civilization,¹³¹ and by the early 1980s, resettlement had led to a noticeable shift in the demographic makeup in areas that the Tamils considered part of their traditional homeland. For instance, the proportion of Sinhalese in Trincomalee District increased from 3.8 percent in 1911 to 33.6 percent by 1981, and in Batticaloa/Ampara the increase was from 3.7 to 21.8 percent over the same time period.¹³²

Throughout this period, the Tamils saw the resettlement effort as a way to dilute their presence on the island, and it formed one of the chief reasons that led them to take up arms against the government. At

^o One of the means through which the British evicted Sinhalese peasants to make way for plantation agriculture was through the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance No. 12 of 1840, which declared that “all forest, chena, unoccupied or uncultivated lands to be Crown lands until the contrary was proved.” This ordinance placed the onus on peasants to prove ownership of their lands, which most were unable to do.¹²⁶

^p For more information on the different resettlement schemes, see Amerasinghe.¹³⁰

the fourth annual convention in August 1956, the Tamil Federal Party passed a resolution that stated the following:

The colonization policy pursued by successive Governments since 1947 of planting Sinhalese population in the traditional homelands of the Tamil-speaking peoples is calculated to overwhelm and crush the Tamil-speaking people in their own national areas.¹³³

And in the May 1976 Vaddukoddai Resolution issued by the Tamil United Liberation Front calling for independence, the resettlement of Sinhalese in the north and east was one of the nine justifications listed for the desire for an independent state.¹³⁴

In the 1970s, the United Front government, led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, nationalized nearly one million acres, including large tea and rubber plantations and about one-fourth of the agricultural land on the island. The government intended to use the newly acquired land as an alternative to peasant colonization to relieve unemployment and landlessness in the wet zone, factors that it believed motivated the 1971 JVP rebellion.¹³⁵ However, in the late 1970s, the market-friendly United National Party government initiated a number of development projects, the most important of which was the Accelerated Mahaweli Program, which initially was planned in the late 1960s as a thirty-year endeavor but which the new government hoped to complete in only six years. This enormous project called for the building of fifteen reservoirs on the Mahaweli River and its tributaries to generate hydroelectric power and irrigate 390,000 acres of new land, primarily in the Eastern Province in the Mahaweli and Madura Oya basins, which would facilitate a new resettlement scheme that would dole out newly irrigated land to 140,000 families.^{136,137} Once completed, the project was expected to involve thirty-nine percent of the island and fifty-five percent of the dry zone.¹³⁸

In 1981, Sri Lankan Tamils constituted forty-two percent of the population in the Eastern Province, with Sinhalese constituting twenty-five percent and Muslims, thirty-two percent.¹³⁹ The demographic composition of the settlers would be determined by a “national ethnic ratio” rather than a local one, thereby ensuring that most of the settlers would be Sinhalese. Besides diminishing Tamil representation in Colombo, the use of a national ethnic ratio would have strategic implications for the Tamils, because if the demographic balance shifted away from them, they would have a harder time claiming that the Eastern Province belonged in an independent Tamil state. Peebles¹⁴⁰ noted that both before and after it won the 1977 elections the UNP was sympathetic

toward Tamil concerns regarding colonization^{q,r} but turned a blind eye toward Sinhalese colonization under the Accelerated Mahaweli Program. There were accusations of leniency toward separatists, because at that time the government was considering concessions toward Tamils on language, education, employment, and local autonomy.¹⁴¹ The project absorbed forty-nine percent of all resources targeted for public investment between 1982 and 1984, with much of the financing coming from international lenders, which led Herring to argue that the international community was contributing to the sustainment of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.¹⁴²

Lastly, educational trends and government education policy played a fundamental role in both the Tamil and 1971 JVP insurgencies, with government policy enacted in response to the JVP insurgency tipping the scales in favor of violent insurgency later in the 1970s in the case of the Tamil insurgency. During the colonial era, Ceylon maintained a two-tiered educational system, which consisted of fee-based schools that were sponsored by missionaries and provided education in English and non-fee-levying schools that provided instruction in Tamil or Sinhalese.¹⁴³ In the mid-1940s, the government significantly expanded access to education by establishing a number of new schools and changing the medium of instruction over to the local vernacular, resulting in an increase in enrollment at the primary and secondary level from 867,000 to 2,716,000 students between 1945 and 1970.¹⁴⁴ University enrollment also increased substantially, from 904 students in 1942 to 19,723 in 1965, as in 1959 universities began to admit students who needed instruction in Sinhala or Tamil.¹⁴⁵

These increasing numbers, though, mask noticeable differences between Sinhalese and Tamils regarding fields of study. Owing to superior facilities in the Jaffna peninsula for imparting a science-based education than those in the rural south where the Sinhalese predominate,^s Sri Lankan Tamil enrollment in the engineering, medicine, and science faculties at the university level far exceeded their proportion in the population. Hence, although Sri Lankan Tamils constituted about eleven percent of the population in 1970, they secured more than

^q Clearly, the UNP's sensitivity did not extend to Tamil concerns over the demographic viability of including the Eastern Province in an independent Tamil state, as no Sri Lankan government accepted the legitimacy of Tamil Eelam.

^r In addition to complaints that the Accelerated Mahaweli Program facilitated Sinhalese colonization of Tamil areas, Tamils complained that it neglected Tamil areas and that it reflected a development program in which little development financing found its way to Tamil regions of the country.

^s Efforts to develop a science-based education in the rural areas, particularly where the Sinhalese were numerous, suffered from a lack of qualified teachers and laboratory facilities.^{146, 147}

thirty-five percent of the admissions to science-based faculties, and in engineering and medicine it was as high as forty-five percent.¹⁴⁸ In contrast, Sinhalese students were overrepresented in less practical subjects such as the social sciences and humanities, and therefore they had a much harder time in securing employment after graduation because job opportunities were scarce for graduates in these fields.

For instance, in 1964, eighty-five percent of the students enrolled in social sciences, law, and the humanities at the University of Ceylon were Sinhalese, whereas in science and engineering they constituted only fifty-nine percent of the students (Tamil students constituted 37.2 percent), and in medicine and dentistry Sinhalese students amounted to 54.5 percent of total enrollment and Tamils, 40.5 percent.¹⁴⁹ As a result of this imbalance, educated unemployment was a significant problem among young Sinhalese. In 1969–1970, the unemployment rate for those twenty-five to thirty-four years of age without schooling was 1.4 percent; for those with a primary education, it was 3.9 percent; and for those with at least some secondary-level education, specifically at the General Certificate Examination (Ordinary Level) and above, it was 23.3 percent.¹⁵⁰ With about three-quarters of the population being Sinhalese, these numbers indicate that, at the time of the JVP insurrection in 1971, there was a large population of educated Sinhalese youth with frustrated ambitions.

In the aftermath of the 1971 insurrection, the United Front government appeared to acknowledge the role of educated unemployment in fostering the rebellion, and so it proceeded to institute a number of highly controversial educational policies to correct for the inadequacy of the science-based curriculum at the secondary level in rural schools. These policies resulted in the increase of Sinhalese access to university-level science faculties, which, it turns out, came at the expense of Tamil enrollment in science-based university courses.¹ In the early 1970s, it instituted a district quota system to increase university enrollment from rural areas. Additionally, at this time, university entrance examinations were administered primarily in either Sinhalese or Tamil (a small number took exams in English), and so the government established a standardization scheme whereby the number qualifying from each language would be proportional to the number taking the exam in that language, which in effect signified that Tamils would have to attain a higher score to enter university.¹⁵² For instance, for Tamil students, the qualifying mark for admission into a medical faculty was 250 out of

¹ Incidentally, the Sri Lankan governments appeared to recognize the political importance of higher-level education as avenues for social and economic advancement, and so decisions regarding the number of students to be admitted to universities were made at the cabinet level rather than by the universities themselves.¹⁵¹

400, whereas for Sinhalese, it was only 229.¹⁵³ Tamil representation in science-based faculties at the university level dropped noticeably after the enactment of these measures, particularly after the adoption of district-based quotas. Specifically, the percentage of university places in science-based faculties held by Tamil students fell from 35.3 percent in 1970 to nineteen percent in 1974.¹⁵⁴ Tragically, the government response to the issue of educated unemployment, which had fostered the JVP insurrection, motivated a Tamil insurgency based on the same factor. In fact, de Silva noted that the educated unemployed were the most militant agitators for Tamil independence in the mid-1970s.¹⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, in the late 1970s, the unemployment rate for young Tamil males with General Certificate Examination (advanced level) qualifications was forty-one percent.¹⁵⁶

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CHAPTER 5.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

The process toward self-governance in Sri Lanka gradually commenced once the British took control of the island's maritime regions in 1796 from the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), the Dutch East India Company. After the British takeover, the maritime regions were initially ruled by the imperial administration in India, specifically through British authorities in Madras. Ceylon (as the country was then known) was given a military commander-in-chief that had jurisdiction over civil and military affairs, and the civil administration was managed by the Madras Civil Service and led by Robert Andrews, the resident and superintendent of revenue.¹ The main responsibility of the civil administration was to raise revenue, although it also had judicial and administrative responsibilities, and it was assisted in its tasks by *aumildars*, who were natives of Madras. The *aumildars* were brought in to replace the *mudaliyars*, who were high-status Sinhalese landowners who assisted the previous Dutch administration with a number of tasks, including collecting revenues, carrying out the orders of Dutch officials, and keeping the administration informed of developments within the Sinhalese community.^a The *aumildars* were unfamiliar with Sinhalese customs and language, and so they were incapable of forming a link between the population and British officials. Hence, they were unable to provide the British with sufficient warning of a Sinhalese revolt, which lasted from June 1797 to early 1798. Given their connection to the local populace, the *mudaliyars* were aware of the preparations for the revolt, but they did not inform the British, owing to their alienation over their displacement by the *aumildars*, which resulted in a loss of status, power, and salary.²

The British modified the colonial administration in November 1797 by placing the maritime regions of Ceylon under the joint control of the Crown and the English East India Company. Given their unhappy experience with representative governance in the American colonies, in Ceylon (and in other colonies), the British decided to concentrate power in the office of the governor, which in Ceylon was established in 1798 and vested with both legislative and executive authority. Both the governor and civil service officials were appointed by the Crown and received direction from the governor-general of India and the directors of the East India Company, although ultimately they answered to the president of the Board of Control, who was the British government official who oversaw the company.³ Additionally, the East India Company controlled the revenues of Ceylon and in particular those from the important cinnamon monopoly.

^a The British, though, did come to rely on the *mudaliyars* by the mid-nineteenth century, especially in the maritime provinces.

Beginning in 1802, the colony was placed under the sole authority of the Crown, which meant that it was administered independently of India by the Colonial Office in London. This move was undertaken in part because it was recognized that Ceylon needed its own civil service. Previously, civil service officials were company employees brought in from Madras, but because of differences between Madras and Ceylon, they failed to develop an in-depth understanding of conditions on the island.⁴ Hence, British officials established the Ceylon Civil Service, to be staffed by (British) officials who spent a significant portion of their careers in the colony. Additionally, an advisory council was established to advise the governor, who was under no obligation to follow its recommendations.

Although the British were in control of the maritime regions, by the first decade of the nineteenth century, they had not yet established control over the Kandyan kingdom in the interior of the country. Both the Portuguese and the Dutch had failed to subjugate this region, as the rugged terrain and lack of roads permitted the Kandyans to wage successful guerilla campaigns against encroaching European forces. The British tried to subject the region in 1803 but failed, although they succeeded in 1815 by conspiring with the Kandyan aristocracy against the king, who had lost the support of both the elites and the general populace. However, Kandyan elites did not expect their kingdom to come under foreign rule, which is what transpired with the signing of the Kandyan Convention of 1815, the terms of which were drafted largely by the British.⁵ However, the British made concessions to local political and social sensitivities by preserving the laws, institutions, and customs of the region, as well as the power and status of local chiefs. Additionally, the fifth clause of the convention declared that “the Religion of Buddhoo, its rites, ministers and places of worship are to be maintained and protected.”⁶ The Kandyans did not adhere to the separation of religion from politics, and so the British were obligated to insert the fifth clause into the convention if they were to legitimate their authority over the Kandyan region among the *bhikkus* and elites. Nonetheless, the Kandyans chafed under British rule and organized a rebellion in 1817–1818, which the British were eventually able to quell. After the rebellion, the British reduced the privileges enjoyed by local chiefs but still maintained a separate administrative structure for the Kandyan region, which was not integrated politically with the maritime region until the early 1830s.

In 1833, the British commenced a gradual process that dispersed power in Ceylon away from the governor to other political bodies and began to consider Ceylonese opinion when formulating policy. As part of a series of reforms known as the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms, the

advisory council was renamed the Executive Council. In addition to the governor, it consisted of the colonial or principal secretary, the treasurer, the Queen's advocate, the senior officer commanding troops on the island, and the government agent (see below) of the Central Province. The governor was required to consult the Executive Council on all nontrivial matters regarding his executive duties that were not urgent, and although he was free to disregard their advice, if he did so he was required to submit a report to the Colonial Office detailing the circumstances of the issue in question.⁷ Additionally, a Legislative Council was established primarily to serve as an alternative source of information on local conditions to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London. This council consisted of sixteen members, ten of whom were colonial officials, or "official" members, and the remaining six were "unofficial" members nominated by the governor.^b The unofficial members consisted of three local Europeans as well as one each from among the respective Tamil, Sinhalese, and Burgher communities. Right from the start, unofficial members tended to view the Legislative Council as a local parliament, although colonial officials at that time had little sympathy with the liberal sentiment embodied in these reforms and at times evoked undisguised hostility toward greater self-rule.⁹ Indeed, in 1825, the governor remarked,

Whatever Utopian ideas Theorists may cherish of universal fraternity without regard to Colour, Religion or Civilization or whatever notions Levellers may wish to see adopted, I am decidedly of opinion that this people cannot nor ought to have under the existing circumstances any greater share in the Government.¹⁰

The Office of the Government Agent was established as part of the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms to extend the Crown's authority throughout the island. The government agent was the principal representative of the government within a province, and his main duties included maintaining law and order, keeping the populace loyal to the government with the help of local elites, collecting revenues and disbursing payments, and implementing the laws of the government within the province.¹¹ The British were suspicious of the Kandyan chiefs after the 1817–1818 rebellion, and they subsequently worked to undermine the authority of the indigenous elite throughout the country, but they continued to rely on this class for exercising provincial authority. Each province was divided into districts (there were twenty-one total

^b In addition to the governor, other members of the Legislative Council were the colonial secretary, the chief justice (who was replaced by the Queen's Advocate in 1838), the auditor-general, the treasurer, the government agents for the Western and Central Provinces, the surveyor-general, and the collector of customs at Colombo.⁸

throughout the country) that were administered primarily by either the government agent or his assistant, and districts were divided into divisions led by a chief headman. These in turn were divided into subdivisions under a superior headmen, with approximately 4000 villages and subdivisions of villages under village headmen.¹²

By the late nineteenth century, an anglicized elite emerged primarily among low-country Sinhalese but also among Tamils and members from other minority groups.^c Members of this elite had received an English education and earned their fortunes in commercial activities, and rather than ethnic tensions between Sinhalese and Tamils, the key element of discord during this period were caste differences between Sinhalese members of the elite. Members of non-*govigama* castes, and in particular those from the *karava*, began to earn substantial wealth in plantation agriculture, commerce, and trade and began to agitate for top status within the Sinhalese caste hierarchy.¹⁴ This agitation had a political component, as the *karava* community organized to promote candidates for gubernatorial nomination to the Legislative Council. Throughout the nineteenth century, appointees to the Sinhalese seat came from the elite *govigama* caste, specifically from a single family, and the Ceylon National Association, which had originally formed as an organization of wealthy *karava* entrepreneurs, began to promote *karava* candidates.¹⁵ However, it was not until 1912, under a reformed Legislative Council, that a non-*govigama* Sinhalese was nominated to the council.¹⁶ As for the Tamil seat, throughout the nineteenth century, it was primarily held by a single family from the elite *vellalar* caste, and it was not until 1898 that a non-*vellalar* was nominated to the seat.¹⁷

Additionally, during this period and into the early twentieth century, unlike in India, there did not emerge a vibrant nationalist movement that agitated for greater democratization and independence. In contrast to the energetic Buddhist revivalist movement in the second half of the nineteenth century that sought greater Ceylonese autonomy from Western religious and cultural influences, Ceylonese political and economic elites aimed for modest constitutional and political reforms that stopped well short of calls for independence or the mobilization of the broader public into political activity.^{18,19} For instance, although the Ceylon National Association promoted *karava* candidates to the Legislative Council, it was not interested in broader constitutional or political reform, despite the desire of some younger members to pattern the organization on the Indian National Congress, which was agitating for greater Indian autonomy on the subcontinent.²⁰ One factor

^c The English-speaking Tamil elite tended to be concentrated in the professions and in the civil service, while the emerging Sinhalese elite, particularly those from the *karava* caste, earned their fortunes in commercial activities and plantation agriculture.¹³

behind this passivity was a convergence of economic interests between the Sinhalese elite and British commercial interests. These two groups were not in competition in plantation agriculture, nor did there exist wealthy and influential indigenous groups in banking and shipping.²¹ Additionally, Sinhalese entrepreneurs did not control large domestic industries, and when entrepreneurs did participate in the political system, they were largely grateful for the British connection.²²

Another factor was that Ceylonese elites did not trust their compatriots with political power. At the urging of Ponnambalam Arunachalam (then a prominent Tamil official in the government), in the early twentieth century, John Ferguson, the owner-editor of *The Ceylon Observer*, attempted to organize a conference or public meeting that would call for constitutional reform in Ceylon, but he received scant support from Ceylonese public officials. “They would not trust power to their countrymen,” he indicated in a letter to Arunachalam.²³ Nonetheless, reforms were gradually implemented during this period. In 1889, the Legislative Council was enlarged to include two unofficial members representing the Muslim community and the Kandyan Sinhalese, and more importantly, in 1912, the Legislative Council was expanded to include an elected seat (the “Educated Ceylonese” seat) chosen under a very restricted franchise that entailed professional, income-based, or educational qualifications.^d

Although Ceylonese elites became frustrated with the heavy-handed British response to the outbreak of sectarian riots between Sinhalese and Muslims in 1915, overall they remained politically quiescent.²⁶ They did establish the Ceylon National Congress (CNC) in 1919, but it was far more conservative and restrained than its Indian counterpart on the subcontinent, which at that time was leading a nationalist movement against the British. Still, after the First World War, the British began to seriously consider the possibility, and indeed the necessity, of transferring greater authority to the indigenous populations in its colonial outposts.²⁷ The pace of devolution in Sri Lanka picked up in the 1920s. In 1921, a new constitution was enacted in which the Legislative Council was expanded from twenty-one to thirty-seven members, of which twenty-three were unofficial members. Of this latter figure, sixteen members were elected, three of whom were communally elected and eleven territorially elected (nine from Sinhalese areas and two from Ceylon Tamil areas).²⁸ In total, thirteen of the unofficial members were Sinhalese, and the remaining ten were from minority groups. The British still held ultimate veto authority, as clause 52 of the constitution enabled the governor to declare any bill, clause, or amendment to be of

^d The electorate at this time did not exceed four percent of the total population.^{24,25}

“paramount importance” and thereby take into consideration only the votes of the official members when determining whether the legislation in question passed the council. The constitution was modified again in 1924, with the Legislative Council expanded to forty-nine members, of whom thirty-four were elected (twenty-three from territorial elections, which returned sixteen Sinhalese members). The expansion of the Legislative Council to include a large majority of unofficial members meant that the governor now had to try to keep the unofficial members content lest they form a permanent opposition against the official members.²⁹

The next major reform occurred in 1931 after recommendations made by the Donoughmore Commission, which was sent by the British to undertake a serious inquiry into the functioning of the 1924 constitution and to suggest changes. The result was a significant (and controversial) restructuring of the Sri Lankan political system. The commission maintained the office of the governor and recommended a unicameral legislature (the State Council) comprising sixty-one members, which divided itself into seven executive committees that addressed different domestic issues (agriculture and lands, local administration, health, etc.). Certain key issues, such as defense, external affairs, and finance, were the responsibility of three officers of state, who were British officials, and these officials, along with the heads of the executive committees, formed the Board of Ministers. Additionally, universal suffrage was adopted, and communal elections were abandoned in favor of territorial elections.^c These last reforms generated significant concerns among the minorities, and tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamils began to emerge in the 1920s. Previously, Tamils regarded themselves as one of the founding majority groups of the island, even though they were greatly outnumbered by the Sinhalese. Yet as the devolution of power from the empire to the colony began to quicken in the 1920s, the Tamils began to fear that the combination of Sinhalese numerical superiority (the Sinhalese outnumber the Tamils, the largest minority group, by six to one), universal suffrage and territorial elections would result in their permanent political subordination to the Sinhalese.³¹ The reforms barely passed in the Legislative Council, with a vote of nineteen to seventeen (the vote was restricted to the unofficial members), and voting broke down along communal lines, with all minorities voting against the Donoughmore Constitution and all but two Sinhalese voting in favor. The two Sinhalese voted in opposition because they felt the reforms fell short of self-government.

^c The commissioners also proposed extending the franchise to the Indian Tamils within Ceylon, but this measure was dropped to win Sinhalese approval of the reforms.³⁰

Clearly, the issue of representation (territorial or communal), combined with universal suffrage, was highly controversial during this period. The Donoughmore commissioners rejected communal elections because, in their opinion, they would inhibit the emergence of an inclusive national identity that encompassed all communities on the island.³² Still, some measures were enacted to redress imbalances that did not rely on communal elections. Of the sixty-one members of the State Council, fifty were elected on the basis of territorial elections, and eight were nominated by the governor to represent inadequately represented populations (the remaining three were the officers of state). To implement this system, a delimitation commission was established in 1930 to delineate fifty electoral districts on a basis of one per 100,000 inhabitants. The Tamils complained of the “artificial uniformity” of this method, and in the late 1930s, G. G. Ponnambalam, a prominent Tamil leader, unveiled a “fifty-fifty” campaign that championed an electoral system in which minority votes would be overweighted to ensure that no single ethnic group could outvote a combination of the others.³³ The British governor at the time, Sir Andrew Caldecott, did not support this endeavor, because he saw it as another form of communal representation that would only foster sectarianism.³⁴ And, in 1944, the Soulbury Commission (see below) was also opposed to the fifty-fifty proposal.

Movement toward independence picked up pace again in the early 1940s as initial Japanese victories in the Pacific theater of World War II led to imperial Japan’s acquisition of British, French, and Dutch colonial possessions in Southeast Asia, which highlighted the importance of Ceylon as a source of critical war supplies (particularly rubber) and as a base from which to mount the destruction of Japanese power in the Pacific. Indeed, in 1944, the headquarters of the South-East Asia command, under Lord Louis Mountbatten, was established in Kandy, and the island served as a crucial link in the supply line to the Soviet Union via the Persian Gulf.³⁵ During this time, British officials believed that further concessions on self-governance were required to satisfy the desires for greater autonomy among Ceylonese political elites, who were largely supportive of the Allied cause. A commission headed by Lord Soulbury was established in 1944 to consult with local political elites on the development of a new constitution offering greater self-government for the island. The Soulbury Constitution was approved by the State Council in November 1945 and became the foundational document when Ceylon was granted independence (as a dominion within the British Commonwealth) in 1948. The new constitution established a parliamentary system with a bicameral legislature featuring a Senate (with nominated and elected members) and a popularly elected House of Representatives that selected the prime minister. The head of state

was the British monarch, represented by the governor-general, and although executive authority was formally vested in the monarch, it was actually exercised by the prime minister and the cabinet.³⁶ The island was granted external sovereignty over its defense and foreign policy, although a defense agreement was signed with the United Kingdom, providing for British access to military facilities on the island.³⁷

Don Stephen Senanayake, a prominent Sinhalese politician in the State Council and Board of Ministers, played a key role in drafting the constitution, and his sensitivity to minority concerns ensured that the new constitution contained some provisions that attempted to safeguard minority rights and representation. For instance, although the new constitution called for territorial elections, a weightage scheme was incorporated to increase minority representation in the legislative branch, and Article 29 (2) prevented the legislative branch from enacting legislation that discriminated against a particular religious or ethnic group (which proved to be insufficient in later years). Additionally, while he recognized that the government had a special obligation to foster Buddhism, he espoused a more inclusive nationalism that championed the secular state.³⁸ In contrast, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the founder of the nativist Sinhala Maha Sabha (Sinhalese Great Assembly), promoted a more exclusive form of nationalism in which the state more explicitly reflected the Sinhalese and Buddhist nature of the majority population. Nonetheless the Soulbury Constitution reflected the success of Senanayake's effort at crafting a multiethnic state on the basis of a relatively stable equilibrium among the various ethnoreligious communities within the island.

During this time, several major political parties began to emerge. The United National Party was started by Senanayake in 1946, and it also included Bandaranaike and the Sinhala Maha Sabha. The UNP won the first general election in 1947 and shepherded the country through independence, although in 1951, Bandaranaike led the Sinhala Maha Sabha out of the UNP to form the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Both the UNP and the SLFP are predominantly Sinhalese parties, with the UNP adopting a center-right platform that favored economic liberalization, foreign investment, and close ties with the United States, while the SLFP took on a center-left orientation that championed nonrevolutionary socialism and the more explicit promotion of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism. Both parties alternated in power during the first few decades of the post-independence period, with the UNP ruling from 1947 to 1956, 1965 to 1970, and 1977 to 1994, and the SLFP ruling from 1956 to 1965 (save for a brief interlude in 1960 when the UNP ruled) and from 1970 to 1977.

One of the more pernicious aspects, though, of the two parties' competition for Sinhalese votes was their engagement in a process described as "ethnic outbidding," whereby each party tried to outdo the other in terms of favoring exclusivist policies to gain favor with the dominant Sinhalese-Buddhist community and often reversing previous policy positions in the process.³⁹ Thus, in 1944, Bandaranaike had taken a softer line toward the possibility of Tamil being adopted as an official language, stating in the State Council,

It would be ungenerous on our part as Sinhalese not to give due recognition to the Tamil language . . . I have no personal objection to both these languages being considered official languages; nor do I see any particular harm or danger or real difficulty arising from it.⁴⁰

Yet before the 1956 elections, he stated that the Sinhalese were in a "life and death struggle" and that language parity would result in "disaster to the Sinhalese race."⁴¹ Bandaranaike won the elections, and the country was swept up in a wave of messianic religiosity as that year marked the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's death. Once in power, Bandaranaike's government passed the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956, otherwise known as the Sinhala-Only bill, which made Sinhala the only official language of the country, thereby promising to marginalize Tamils who were hoping to obtain employment in the civil sector.

UNP politicians were also guilty of ethnic outbidding. Sir John Kotelawala, the UNP prime minister at the time of the 1956 election, had been a supporter of linguistic parity, stating,

Those of you who [want to] start this communal racket do not know what it means. I have myself seen this communal racket work in India. I saw enough bloodshed there . . . I can assure . . . this House that . . . as long as I am head of the UNP the principle of [linguistic parity] we have adopted will be maintained to the very end.⁴²

Yet he would later switch to a Sinhala-only policy, stating, "I want Sinhalese to be the official language of the country as long as the sun and moon shall last."⁴³

Ethnic outbidding also derailed several efforts to conciliate Tamils by elevating the status of the Tamil language and devolving authority to the Tamils. In an effort to defuse growing ethnic polarization, Prime Minister Bandaranaike (of the SLFP) and S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, the head of the Tamil Federal Party, negotiated what came to be known as the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam (B-C) Pact, which recognized Tamil as an official minority language permissible for administrative use in

the Northern and Eastern Provinces and called for the establishment of regional councils to handle agriculture, education, and Sinhalese settlement in traditional Tamil areas. This effort was opposed by the *bhikkus*, Sinhalese nationalists, and the UNP, who saw this effort as the first step toward the partition of the island. The leader of the opposition UNP at the time, J. R. Jayewardene, led a protest march from Colombo to Kandy in an effort to pressure Bandaranaike to scuttle the B-C Pact. Yet a year earlier, as the SLFP government was going to introduce the Sinhala-only Act into parliament, he argued that

no Government should and could make Sinhalese the official language by trampling down on the language rights of over a million of the permanent residents of the country . . . Surely that was the way to sow the seeds of a civil war.⁴⁴

In 1965 the roles reversed, with the ruling UNP attempting to negotiate a pact that would devolve authority to the Tamils and the opposition SLFP charging the UNP with risking the dismemberment of the country. By 1965, the UNP had won back control of the government and was led by Dudley Shelton Senanayake (son of Don Stephen), who proceeded to negotiate the Senanayake-Chelvanayakam (S-C) Pact, which also addressed language issues and Sinhalese settlement in Tamil areas. Yet this time it was left to the SLFP, in combination with *bhikkus* and Sinhalese nationalists, to charge the government with risking the territorial integrity of the country. Their efforts forced the UNP government to abandon this latest attempt to reach an accommodation with the Tamils.

During this time, several parties emerged to represent Tamil interests.^f The All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) was organized in 1944 by G. G. Ponnambalam, S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, and several other Tamil notables. It won a number of seats representing Tamil areas in the first elections under the Soulbury Constitution in 1947, with Ponnambalam and other Tamils joining the UNP government. However, a group of ACTC members led by Chelvanayakam opposed this move and broke away to form the Tamil Federal Party. Rather than join the government or sit in opposition, this group preferred to press for a federal union for Ceylon consisting of two sectors: a Tamil sector consisting of the Northern and Eastern Provinces and the other comprising the remaining seven Sinhalese provinces.⁴⁵ In the early 1970s, these two Tamil parties and several other Tamil groups formed the Tamil United Front (TUF),

^f There were also parties that represented the other communities on the island. The Ceylon Workers' Congress was an outgrowth of the Ceylon Indian Congress and represented Indian Tamils, while the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress represents the Muslim community on the island.

and in 1975, the group changed its name to the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) to emphasize that it was seeking an independent ethnocracy for Sri Lanka's Tamils. A manifesto put out by the group stated,

The Tamil United Liberation Front regards the general election of 1977 as a means of proclaiming to the Sinhalese Government this resolve of the Tamil nation. Hence the TULF seeks the mandate of the Tamil nation to establish an independent, sovereign, secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam that includes all the geographically contiguous areas that have been the traditional homeland of the Tamil-speaking people in the country . . . The Tamil-speaking representatives who get elected. . . while being members of the National State Assembly of Ceylon, will also form themselves into the National Assembly of Tamil Eelam and establish the independence of Tamil Eelam by bringing that constitution into operation either by peaceful means or by direct action or struggle.⁴⁶

Interestingly, this manifesto was issued in the run-up to the 1977 parliamentary election, which was won by the UNP but also resulted in the TULF securing enough votes to become the main opposition in parliament. Hence, the opposition was headed by an "anti-system" party that sought to dismember the state.

At its first national convention in 1976, the TULF issued the Vadukoddai Resolution, which formally called for the establishment of an independent Tamil state. It charged the SLFP government, led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike (the widow of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, who was assassinated by a *bhikkhu* in 1959) with not taking advantage of the final attempt "to win constitutional recognition of the Tamil Nation without jeopardizing the unity of the country," and the convention called upon

the Tamil Nation in general and the Tamil youth in particular to come forward to throw themselves fully in the sacred fight for freedom and to flinch not till the goal of a sovereign socialist state of Tamil Eelam is reached.⁴⁷

What finally led the Tamils to seek independence rather than autonomy within a federated Sri Lanka was the new constitution adopted in 1972 by the SLFP government. Rather than simply reform the existing constitution, the SLFP decided to rewrite a new constitution that did not incorporate Article 29 (2) of the Soulbury Constitution, which afforded protection to the minorities against any discriminatory

legislation.⁴⁸ The new constitution made Sinhalese the official language^g and, through Chapter II, it elevated the status of Buddhism. Chapter II stated the following:

The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Section 18 (1) (d).

With this clause, Sri Lanka essentially ceased being a secular state, with Buddhism afforded greater status than Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Furthermore, although the 1972 constitution contained a new chapter on *Fundamental Rights and Freedoms*, which specified the equality of all persons before the law, Section 18 (2) allowed the government to essentially override these guarantees in the interest of national security, territorial integrity, and public safety and order.^h The lack of strong guarantees of minority rights combined with the elevation of Buddhism and the secondary status ascribed to the Tamil language convinced Tamils in the early to mid-1970s to agitate for a separate state on the island.

The 1972 constitution also abolished the Senate and established a unicameral National State Assembly. Furthermore, the official name of the country was changed from the Dominion of Ceylon to the Republic of Sri Lanka. With the adoption of a new (and current) constitution in 1978, the name of the country was changed again to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. Before the establishment of the 1978 constitution, the government passed the second amendment to the 1972 constitution, which established the office of the executive president. The new constitution gave Sri Lanka a political structure similar to that of France under the Fifth Republic, with the president as the head of state, chief executive, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.⁵⁰ The president appoints a prime minister with parliament's approval, and in consultation with the prime minister selects

^g Within the Constituent Assembly that formulated the 1972 constitution, members from the Tamil Federal Party moved an amendment to recognize Tamil as an official language of Sri Lanka, along with Sinhala, but this motion failed, and the Federal Party members walked out of the Constituent Assembly and no longer participated in its deliberations.⁴⁹

^h Specifically, Section 18 (2) of the 1972 constitution stated, "The exercise and operation of the fundamental rights and freedoms provided in this chapter shall be subject to such restrictions as the law prescribes in the interests of national unity and integrity, national security, national economy, public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of rights and freedoms of others or giving effect to the Principles of State Policy set out in Section 16."

the members of the cabinet. Additionally, the president presides over cabinet meetings and can assume any ministerial portfolio.ⁱ

With respect to language, Article 18 of the 1978 constitution recognizes Sinhala as the official language of the country, but Article 19 recognizes Tamil as a national language, which means it can be used for administrative purposes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and during the examination process for government employment. The new constitution also permitted the use of Tamil for other purposes (e.g., for certified public documents, for use in the court system in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, etc.), and although many of these rights were already in existence through legislation and regulations passed in the 1950s and 1960s, the constitutional enshrinement of Tamil as a national language meant that subsequent legislation could not bar the use of Tamil for these purposes.⁵² Also, the designation of Tamil as a national language implicitly recognized for the first time the existence of the Tamil community on the island as a distinct nationality, separate from the Sinhalese community.⁵³ Combined with more stringent safeguards for minority rights, the new constitution offered greater guarantees for minority interests. Nonetheless, by this stage, the Tamil community had embarked on the path toward independence, and in August 1983, after the outbreak of anti-Tamil riots in July, the TULF members of parliament forfeited their right to sit in the legislative body after refusing to take an oath renouncing separatism.

On a regional level, Sri Lanka is divided into nine provinces (see Figure 5-1), which are further subdivided into twenty-five districts. Colombo is the executive and judicial capital of the country, while Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte is the legislative capital.

ⁱ The new constitution's concentration of authority in the Office of the President, combined with the five-sixth majority the UNP won in the 1977 elections, led to concerns that the presidency had acquired too much power. In fact, the first president under the new constitution, J. R. Jayewardene, reportedly required all UNP members of parliament to submit signed undated letters of resignation to him, which he could use to dismiss MPs as needed.⁵¹



Figure 5-1. Sri Lankan provinces.

In the early 1980s, the district was the principal subnational unit of government, with each district maintaining administrative offices collectively known as *kachcheri* that represented most national-level ministries.⁵⁴ Each district had a government agent and a district minister. The former was appointed by the central government and the position itself was a holdover from the British colonial era, and the latter was filled by a member of parliament whose influence exceeded that of the

government agent, given the district minister's access to central government funds, which enabled the formation of patronage networks. Below the *kachcheri* system was a subdistrict level of government consisting of village and town councils.

In 1981, the *kachcheri* system and the subordinate subdistrict administration were replaced by District Development Councils and subdistrict units known as *pradeshiya mandalaya* (divisional council) and *gramodaya mandalaya* (village council). These changes were introduced in an effort to satisfy minority demands for greater local self-government, particularly with respect to economic planning and development.⁵⁵ In 1987, though, the province became the focal subnational unit, as the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord led to the establishment of provincial councils in Sri Lanka. These councils were formalized in domestic law with the thirteenth amendment to the 1978 constitution and by the Provincial Councils Act No. 42 of 1987. The 1987 accord also called for the merging of the Eastern and Northern Provinces. The accord itself drew the ire of *bhikkus* and Sinhalese nationalists, who bristled at the indignity of having an amendment to the constitution enacted as a result of the actions of a foreign power and who felt that the devolution of power entailed with the establishment of provincial councils would eventually lead to the detachment of the Tamil regions of the country and their formation into an independent Tamil state.

Two final points need to be made regarding Sri Lanka's political system. In an effort to deal with the ethnic conflict, the 1978 constitution modified the electoral system in a manner that assigned greater relevance to Tamil votes, which, it was hoped, would penalize Sinhalese politicians who ignored Tamil concerns. Previously, parliamentarians were elected on the basis of plurality from single-member constituencies, and so Sinhalese politicians had little incentive to appeal to Tamil and other minority voters, given the overwhelming number of Sinhalese in the electorate. So when the 1978 constitution established the office of the president, it was decided that the winner needed to obtain a majority of votes, rather than simply a plurality, and an alternative voting system was adopted in case no single candidate received more than fifty percent of the vote. Specifically, in this case, all but the top two contenders were eliminated, and the alternative preferences of voters whose first or second choices were eliminated but whose second or third choices were among the top two were reallocated to them to determine a majority.⁵⁶ A Sinhalese presidential contender could no longer ignore or alienate Tamil voters for fear that they would not obtain their reallocated votes. Additionally, a proportional representative system in multimember constituencies was adopted for legislative elections, which, it was also hoped, would add greater relevance to

Tamil votes, but by this point, the Tamils were beginning to organize their insurgency, and within a few years, open warfare would break out between Tamil insurgents and the national government.

Lastly, observers have been sometimes surprised by Sri Lanka's tragic history of ethnic conflict, given its long tutelage under British colonial rule, which imparted on the country a democratic system of governance with all of the requisite political institutions. However, these governing institutions were overlaid on a society with ethnic fissures that grew in prominence as the country proceeded on the path toward independence and modernity. Having observed conditions of both endemic conflict and harmonious stability in various deeply divided democratic societies, political scientists have come to distinguish democracies in such societies between those that are "consociational" versus those that are "control" democracies. A consociational democracy is one in which elites from different social groups, as part of a conscious effort to maintain the stability of the political system, cooperate to develop policies that satisfy the interests of different groups, and politics within such a system often involves interethnic bargaining, compromise, the balancing of interests, and reciprocity. Additionally, state institutions within consociational democracies act as "umpires" by enforcing rules that do not discriminate against any particular group.

In contrast, within a control democracy, stability is maintained through the actions of a dominant group that successfully manipulates and imposes its will over a subordinate group.^j Within control democracies, the former instrumentally uses state institutions to advance its interests at the expense of the latter. Both consociational and control democracies represent ideal types, and sometimes democracies with heterogeneous societies embody aspects of both types. DeVotta has argued that the post-independence Sinhalese-dominated political system of Sri Lanka represented a control democracy in which Sinhalese elites eschewed ethnic compromise with the Tamils and instead opted for the establishment of a Sinhalese ethnocratic state.⁵⁹ However, as is illustrated in *Chapter 8. Government Countermeasures*, there have been government efforts to reach an accommodation with the Tamils; unfortunately, these efforts were not successful in preventing the outbreak of hostilities.

^j To learn more about consociational versus control democracies, see Andeweg⁵⁷ and Lustick.⁵⁸

ENDNOTES

- 1 Lennox A. Mills, *Ceylon Under British Rule, 1795–1932* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 16.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 27, 99.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 27, 41.
- 5 K. M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 230.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 231.
- 7 Mills, *Ceylon Under British Rule, 1795–1932*, 27, 105
- 8 *Ibid.*, 106.
- 9 de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 263–264, 356–357.
- 10 Vijaya Samaraweera, “The Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms,” in *The History of Ceylon, Volume 3*, ed. K. M. de Silva (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Colombo University Press, 1973), 82.
- 11 K. M. de Silva, “The Development of the Administrative System” in *The History of Ceylon, Volume 3*, ed. K. M. de Silva (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Colombo University Press, 1973), 218.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 219.
- 13 K. M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880–1985* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 43.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 K. M. de Silva, “The Legislative Council in the Nineteenth Century” in *The History of Ceylon, Volume 3*, ed. K. M. de Silva (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Colombo University Press, 1973), 243.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 245.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 245.
- 18 de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880–1985*, 4.
- 19 de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 381.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 364.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 366.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 de Silva, “The Legislative Council in the Nineteenth Century,” 246.
- 24 de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880–1985*, 51.
- 25 A. J. Wilson, “The Development of the Constitution, 1910–1947” in *The History of Ceylon, Volume 3*, ed. K. M. de Silva (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Colombo University Press, 1973).
- 26 de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880–1985*, 50.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 28 Wilson, “The Development of the Constitution, 1910–1947,” 364.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 366.
- 30 de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 424.
- 31 de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880–1985*, 53, 59–60.
- 32 de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 422.
- 33 de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880–1985*, 100, 103.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 104.
- 35 de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 450.
- 36 Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, *Sri Lanka: A Country Study*, 184

- ³⁷ “Defense Agreement between His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom and the Government of Ceylon, 4 February 1948,” Tamilnation.org, <http://www.tamilnation.co/srilankalaws/48defenceagreement.htm>.
- ³⁸ de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880–1985*, 125, 154.
- ³⁹ Neil DeVotta, “Illiberalism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (January 2002): 84–98.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² DeVotta, “Illiberalism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka,” 87.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.
- ⁴⁵ A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism* (London, UK: Hurst and Company Ltd., 2000), 82.
- ⁴⁶ Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*, 33.
- ⁴⁷ Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, 110.
- ⁴⁸ de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880–1985*, 252.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, *Sri Lanka: A Country Study*, 185.
- ⁵¹ Asoka Bandarage, *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy* (New York and Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2009), 96.
- ⁵² de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka 1880–1985*, 297–298.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 297.
- ⁵⁴ Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, *Sri Lanka: A Country Study*, 188–189.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 639–640.
- ⁵⁷ Rudy B. Andeweg, “Consociational Democracy,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 3 (2000): 509–536.
- ⁵⁸ Ian Lustick, “Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism versus Control,” *World Politics* 31, no. 3 (April 1979): 325–344.
- ⁵⁹ DeVotta, “Control Democracy, Institutional Decay, and the Quest for Eelam: Explaining Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka,” 57.

CONCLUSION TO PART I

This section highlights the economic, political, social, demographic, geographic, and diplomatic context of the JVP and LTTE insurgencies. What is important for the special operator to note is that in a given insurgency at any point in time, contextual factors will help determine group grievances and condition individual and group action and interests. For instance, in the case of the LTTE, Sri Lankan government policy on language and university admissions contributed to an economic context characterized by the relative deprivation of Tamils, and the elevated status given to Buddhism and the Sinhalese language in the 1972 constitution helped generate a social context in which Tamils feared cultural annihilation.

Additionally, demographic, geographic, and diplomatic factors conditioned group interests and actions. The presence of millions of Tamils across the Palk Strait contributed to Sinhalese fears that concessions on federalism would lead to independence and perhaps the incorporation of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and indeed the entire island, within India. Furthermore, as we will see in subsequent chapters, the presence of India offered strategic depth to the LTTE and other Tamil militant groups, and the location of Sri Lanka off the tip of the subcontinent conditioned India's strategic calculations, because it was in its interest that no extraregional hostile power establish influence in Colombo.

The extended duration of both insurgencies, and in particular the LTTE, suggests another perspective through which to view an insurgency—one that highlights the impact of contextual factors. Various political scientists and sociologists have developed a number of concepts to understand the temporal factors that affect social and political phenomena. One such notion is that of path dependence, which captures the idea that past events and decisions condition the range of possible actions available today. For instance, Goldstone noted that the commencement of the Industrial Revolution in England was a path-dependent process, as the introduction of the first steam engine in 1712 led to more efficient steam engines that significantly improved the extraction of coal.^{1,2} As a result,

Cheap coal made possible cheaper iron and steel. Cheap coal plus cheap iron made possible the construction of railways and ships built of iron, fueled by coal, and powered by engines producing steam. Railways and ships made possible mass national and international distribution of metal tools, textiles, and other

products that could be more cheaply made with steam-powered metal-reinforced machinery.³

Path dependence may also characterize an insurgency, which itself can be viewed as a social and political phenomenon. For instance, with the passage of the Vaddukoddai Resolution in 1976 the goal of independence for the Tamil regions had finally moved from the fringe to the mainstream of public opinion and was followed up by the refusal of Tamil parliamentarians in August 1983 to take an oath renouncing separatism. Additionally, the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE proceeded along a more violent trajectory after the July 1983 riots.

One can take this analysis a step further and unpack the notion of path dependence to develop a better understanding of how history impacts the present. For instance, scholars interested in the temporal analysis of politics sometimes emphasize the importance of initial conditions, intermediate events, and what are known as “critical junctures.”⁴ Clearly the initial conditions of an insurgency specify the starting social, political, and economic context as well as the grievances and interests of the various sides. One potential dating of the starting point of the Tamil conflict is the moment of Ceylonese independence, at which point the Tamils constituted a numerical minority whose representation in the professions and universities exceeded their proportion of the population. Additionally, they nursed political grievances owing to the adoption of territorial rather than communal elections in the Soulbury Constitution.

Furthermore, events such as the failures of the B-C and S-C Pacts; the passage of the Official Language Act of 1956; the adoption of the 1972 constitution; the communal riots of 1958, 1961, 1974 and 1977; and the Vaddukoddai Resolution could be considered intermediate events located between the initial conditions at the time of Ceylonese independence in 1948 and the final outcome (i.e., the start of the Tamil insurgency). The initial conditions, therefore, are likely to have at least some impact on the sequence of events that play out in a “run” of an insurgency, that is, on the events temporally located between its beginning and end, with intermediate events also having an impact on the trajectory and final outcome of the insurgency.

Lastly, Capoccia and Kelemen define a “critical juncture” as a “relatively short period of time during which there is a substantially heightened probability that agents’ choices will affect the outcome of interest.”⁵ More specifically, during this brief period the main actors confront a broader range of policy options and their choice of policy from these options is likely to have a significant impact on future outcomes. Of note is the high probability, relative to the probability before

and after the juncture, that choices made during this brief period affect the outcome of interest and as a result critical junctures may trigger a new path-dependent process that constrains future choices.⁶ One can argue that July 1983 constituted a critical juncture of the Tamil insurgency, as the LTTE killing of Sri Lankan government soldiers and the subsequent anti-Tamil riots constrained future policy options and commenced a new path-dependent sequence of violent events that culminated only recently in 2009.

Hence, important concepts useful in the temporal analysis of social and political phenomenon, such as initial conditions, intermediate events, and critical junctures, can perhaps also be fruitfully applied to develop a temporal analysis of insurgencies that highlights the impact of contextual factors. This form of analysis, though, does not take anything away from the potential role of human agency or the ability of leaders to shape the course of events and place history on a new trajectory.

Finally, special operators will also want be mindful of the role of contingency in insurgencies. By this we mean the impact of chance events on the evolution and final outcomes of an insurgency. For instance, the 1994 massacre of twenty-nine praying Palestinians in Hebron by Baruch Goldstein, an Israeli doctor, severely impacted the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, as it contributed to a decision by Hamas to undertake suicide bus bombings in Israel.⁷ These actions in turn eroded Israeli confidence in the peace process. The lesson to be taken away from this example is that, ideally, the overall social, political, and economic context that impacts an insurgency should be influenced in such a way such that contingent events do not negatively impact the desired outcome of a mission.

ENDNOTES

¹ Jack A. Goldstone, “The Problem of the ‘Early Modern’ World,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41, no. 3 (1998): 275.

² James Mahoney and Daniel Schensul, “Historical Context and Path Dependence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, eds. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 454.

³ Goldstone, “The Problem of the ‘Early Modern’ World,” 275.

⁴ Mahoney and Schensul, “Historical Context and Path Dependence”, 456–460.

⁵ Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen, “The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism,” *World Politics* 59, no. 3 (2007), 348.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 120 (September/October 2000).

PART II.

**STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS OF
THE INSURGENCY**

CHAPTER 6.

JANATHA VIMUKTHI PERAMUNA (JVP)

TIMELINE

1965, 1967	Initial discussions are held on formation of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).
Mid-1969	JVP Central Committee is formed.
September 1970	JVP politburo holds its first meeting.
March 1971	Rohana Wijeweera is imprisoned after months during which he and the group made threats of revolutionary violence.
April 1971	JVP mounts an insurrection against the Sri Lankan government. Although initially taken by surprise, the government eventually crushes the rebellion. Many top JVP leaders are imprisoned.
May 1972	The Criminal Justice Commission is established to try the perpetrators of the April 1971 uprising.
December 1974	Wijeweera and thirty-one others are found guilty by the Criminal Justice Commission and are imprisoned.
November 1977	Rohana Wijeweera is released from prison and embarks on reconstituting the JVP as an electoral organization.
June 1981	JVP participates in District Development Council elections.
October 1982	Rohana Wijeweera runs for president and places third.
July 1983	JVP is banned after anti-Tamil riots.
Late 1986/early 1987	JVP decides to launch another uprising against the government.
June 1987	The JVP successfully raids the General Sir John Kotalawala Defense Academy and the Katunayake air force base for weapons.
July 1987	The Indo-Lanka Peace Accord is signed between India and Sri Lanka. The subsequent stationing of Indian troops in Sri Lanka is used by the JVP to mobilize the public against the government.
August 1987	JVP launches a grenade attack on a meeting in parliament that featured the president and prime minister. Both survived, but one parliamentarian was killed.
October 1987	JVP attack the Counter Subversive Unit, killing the police commissioner.
December 1987	JVP assassinates the chairman of the United National Party.
May 1988	JVP issues death threats against all parliamentarians, ministers, and officials of the United National Party. JVP assassinates the general secretary of the United National Party.

November 1988	JVP declares a national day of mourning on November 3 after the deaths of a JVP student leader and politburo member. Streets are deserted, commercial establishments and government institutions are closed, and transport grinds to a halt.
	To protest the holding of presidential elections in December, the JVP orchestrates a work stoppage throughout the country, paralyzing the economy.
Late 1988	JVP's center of power shifts from the Southern Province to the Central Province.
April 1989	President Premadasa calls for both LTTE and JVP to enter the political mainstream and invites both for talks. LTTE agrees, but JVP refuses.
May 1989	Wijeweera issues an order calling on Sri Lankans to boycott Indian goods and cease all commercial activity with India.
June 1989	The JVP politburo decides to make a final push to overthrow the government in July.
Summer 1989	To force the collapse of the government, the JVP orchestrates strikes by port and railway workers, as well as telecommunications and postal workers. Banks, markets, and stores close, and the navy is called on to run the Port of Colombo.
July 1989	Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves dwindle and are able to cover only a few days of imports.
	JVP organizes a <i>hartal</i> to commemorate the second anniversary of the Indo-Lanka Accord. Shops close and people are forced to hoist black flags in protest.
August 1989	JVP issues death threats against family members of armed forces personnel. In response, paramilitary groups go on a rampage and decimate JVP over the next few months.
November 1989	Wijeweera is captured by government forces and subsequently killed.

COMPONENTS OF THE INSURGENCY

Underground

After their expulsion from the Communist Party (Peking Wing), Rohana Wijeweera and others held discussions in 1965 and 1967 that culminated in the formation of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna

(JVP).¹ Some of these discussions addressed organizational forms for the movement, and a debate ensued as to whether the revolution would even require the establishment of a revolutionary party.² This pathway toward revolution had previously been advocated by Che Guevara, who noted that a revolution could be successfully waged by a small group of committed revolutionaries without first establishing a revolutionary organization.³ Although this view was considered by Wijeweera and his colleagues, they instead decided to build a revolutionary organization, and so in the late 1960s and 1970, the JVP began to structure itself as an underground organization that aimed to seize power, through violence if necessary, to establish a socialist society in Sri Lanka.

By the middle of 1969, the JVP formed a Central Committee. By that time, the group already had district secretaries and it was decided that they should sit on the Central Committee.⁴ A politburo of twelve influential members was also formed and had its first meeting in September 1970, although, interestingly, a party congress to elect this body was not held, for fear of repressive actions by the state.⁵ The fundamental organizational unit was the local cell, which typically consisted of five members that were required to meet at least once per month and whose leader was appointed by a local JVP leader.⁶ Cell leaders sat on village committees, whose purview was confined to their respective villages. Local committees, also known as police committees, represented the next layer up in the organizational hierarchy, and they were led by a secretary, who in 1971 was responsible for developing the plan to attack the local police station.⁷ District committees came next in the hierarchy, above which were the Central Committee and the politburo, with district secretaries selected by the JVP leadership.⁸ District committees were a critical component of the organization because they channeled communication between the secretaries of the police committees and the top leadership of the party. The party also formed four functional divisions corresponding to propaganda, education, organization, and arms.⁹

After the failure of the 1971 insurrection, many of the top JVP leaders were arrested, and it was not until November 1977, with the release of Wijeweera from prison, that the party was able to reconstitute itself, this time as an open electoral organization that contested elections. However, the party was proscribed in July 1983 on the (largely false) pretext that it helped instigate nationwide anti-Tamil riots that convulsed the country. Thus, the organization was forced to return underground, and because a decision was made in late 1986 and early 1987 to launch an armed uprising against the government,¹⁰ the group embarked on reestablishing its preexisting underground organization. In fact, by

then, the group had already started to rebuild its former cell system to prepare for an armed conflict against the government.¹¹

The organizational structure that emerged (see Figure 6-1) bore a resemblance to the preexisting structure from the early 1970s. At the apex stood the politburo, under which was the Central Committee.^{12, 13, 14, 15} Members of the politburo headed national committees focused on education, finance, military organization, and propaganda, and some were responsible for front organizations centered around youth, students, workers, *bhikkus*, and women.

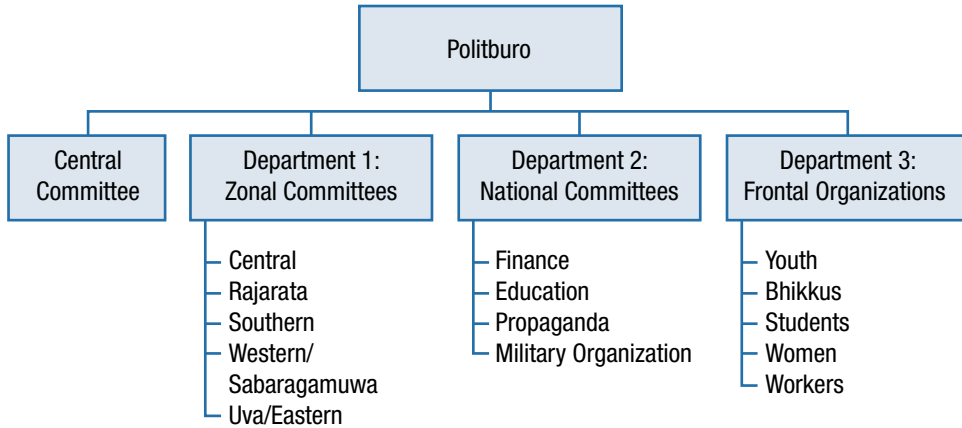


Figure 6-1. JVP organization.

One new structure was the Zonal Committee, under which district committees were geographically grouped. Each zone had political and military secretaries, and the five zones were Western/Sabaragamuwa, Central, Rajarata, Uva/Eastern, and Southern. All districts except those in the north and east¹⁶ had their own committees led by a district secretary that reported to the Central Committee and that tended to all JVP activities within the district. And as shown in Figure 6-2, the group’s base was in the districts of the Southern Province, although in late 1988 its center of power shifted to the districts in the Central Province.¹⁷

Additionally, within each district committee were both functional and geographic units, with the former addressing issues that fell under the purview of one of the national committees (e.g., education, finance, etc.) or frontal organizations. Geographically, district committees were also broken down into town committees, and, finally, village cells, which were present in most villages, and consisted of five to ten members.

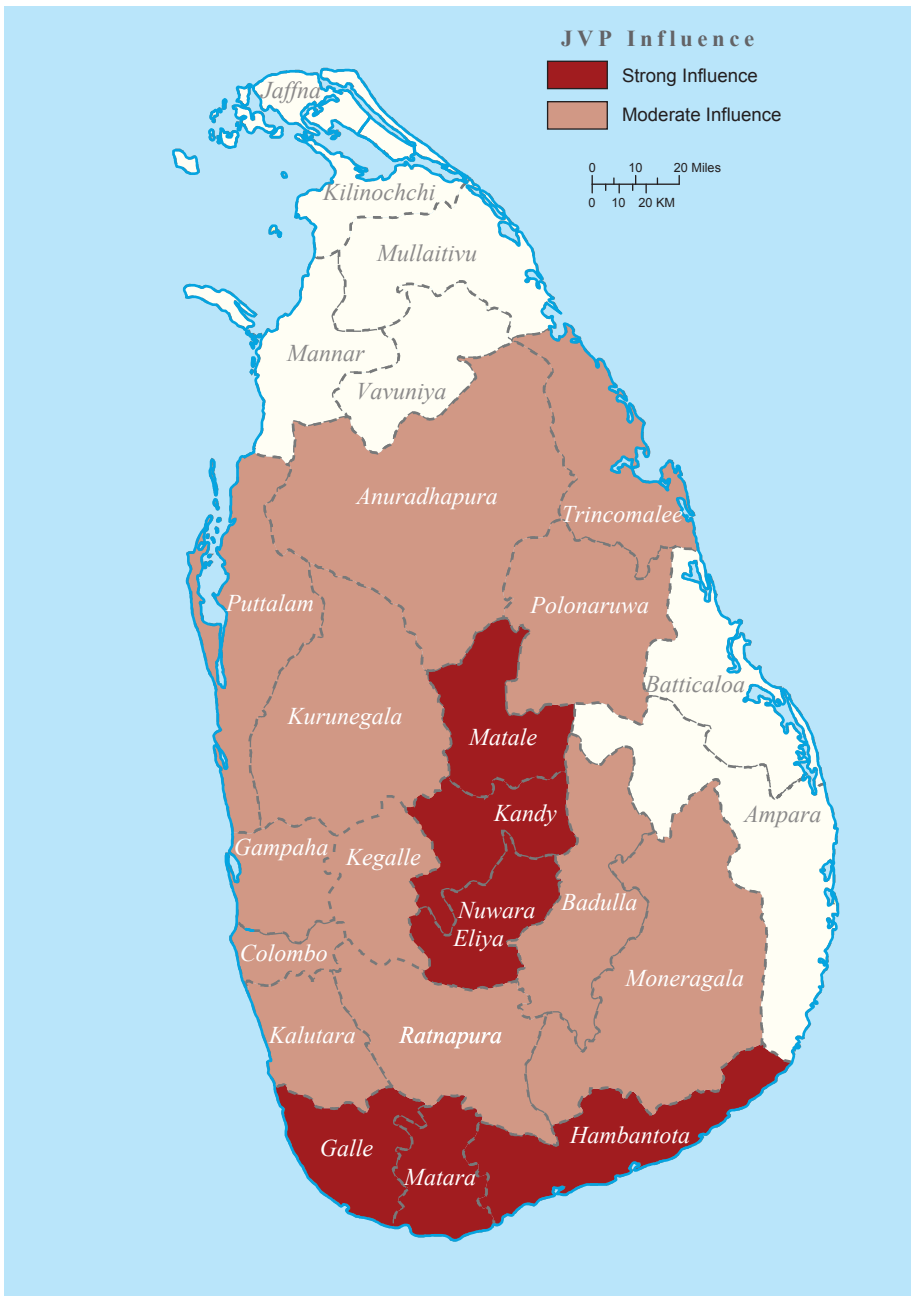


Figure 6-2. JVP influence map.

The reversion to a hierarchical cell-based structure in the mid-1980s represented a logical adaptation for the organization, given its operating environment and the goals it ultimately set for itself. By 1984, the organization was proscribed and it would eventually settle on the policy goal of affecting the overthrow of the government and economic system by force. It therefore had to design an organizational form that would minimize the possibility of infiltration by the government's

security apparatus, and so to maximize secrecy, it settled on a compartmentalized and pyramidal cell-based structure in which cell members were aware of only the cell leader and a limited number of other members. Cadres were prohibited from requesting or divulging personal information,^a and communication was managed through elaborate means involving leaving written notes within bottles at prearranged locations.¹⁹ This structure ensured that if relatively junior cadres were apprehended, they would not be in positions to divulge the identities or locations of other members throughout the organization, and it was only the top leadership that had insights into the overall organizational structure and identities of leaders throughout the organization.^{20,21} Additionally, another precaution taken by the organization when carrying out an armed action was to rely on cadres from a different area to carry out the action (after contacting the local informant), which mitigated the possibility of detection and identification.²²

Armed Component

The JVP never developed a conventional military capability comparable to that of the LTTE. Direct confrontations with the Sri Lankan military were avoided, and most of the tactics consisted of hit-and-run actions that did not require a large number of personnel. Trained operatives could be mobilized to attack a particular target and then return to civilian life once the mission was completed (and be available for subsequent missions).²³ The military wing was known as the *Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya* (People's Patriotic Organization), or DJV, and it was represented at the district level by entities known as *balakayas*.^b Whereas JVP cadres carried out hijackings of motor vehicles, robberies of arms and ammunition from police stations and security installations, and robberies of jewelry and cash from banks and government institutions, the DJV carried out (on instruction from JVP leaders) assassinations of political figures as well as government sympathizers among the police, Buddhist monks, and prominent citizens.²⁶ Some of these assassinations involved entering homes in masks and killing both the designated targets and their families.²⁷ The DJV consisted of full-time members who had received military training, but the group also relied on common criminals, contract killers, army deserters, and

^a JVP members addressed each other using the word *Mahathhya* (gentleman) rather than by their individual names, which were not shared.¹⁸

^b Assigning a different name to the military wing proved useful for plausible deniability, especially because the JVP conducted discussions with the SLFP and UNP over the 1987–1989 period, even though members of both of these two parties were attacked and killed by the JVP/DJV. The DJV was led by a member of the JVP politburo.²⁴ For information on *balakayas*, see Chandraprema.²⁵

service personnel suspended for disciplinary reasons.²⁸ The group was also able to infiltrate members into the security services with false papers so that their men could receive training, after which they would desert with their weapons.²⁹

Auxiliary

One of the more remarkable aspects of the JVP campaigns against the state in 1971 and 1987–1989 was the extent to which students were mobilized into a children’s crusade to take both violent and nonviolent actions to overthrow the state. This phenomenon is perhaps most vividly encapsulated by the failed effort in late 1989 to assassinate Mr. Ranjan Wijeratne, the minister for foreign affairs and the state minister of defense. The leader of the team tasked to carry out this mission was a second-year engineering student at the University of Moratuwa.³⁰ Other members included a veterinary science student at the University of Peradeniya and mostly secondary school students who had not yet matriculated into university.

Undoubtedly, many of the incidents of student involvement with the JVP occurred without the awareness of parental supervisors or other adults. For instance, in March 1987, students at the University of Ruhuna were arrested for holding secret discussions regarding the overthrow of the government.³¹ Also in 1987, army personnel arrested six tenth-grade students from a school in the Colonne area despite the protests of other students and teachers. Several days later, the students were brought back to the school, where they voluntarily admitted to having undertaken violent acts on behalf of the JVP.³² And in mid-1987, schoolgirls from a high school in Kandy were arrested after evidence emerged that they had attended JVP lectures and participated in manufacturing bombs.³³

From its earliest beginnings, youths and students played a prominent role within the organization. Obeyesekere analyzed a survey of 10,192 suspected insurgents in the 1971 uprising and found that nearly seventy-two percent were within the fifteen to twenty-four age range, and twenty-two percent were in the twenty-five to thirty-four range.^{34,c} Additionally, the JVP had at its disposal 800 students within the Colombo District who were organized into groups of twenty-five for assignments ranging from attacking an army camp to arresting prominent individuals.³⁶ The JVP’s student wing, the Socialist Student Union (SSU), was also active in various universities at that time, and by

^c For comparison, approximately 16,500 JVP suspects either surrendered or were arrested, and between 4,000 and 6,000 were killed in April 1971.³⁵

the late 1980s, it was led by a nine-member Headquarters Committee that consisted primarily of current university students.^{37,38} Each university had a branch of the SSU represented in action committees, which were informal student bodies within universities where student activists came together.^d By the mid-1980s, the JVP came to dominate student activism within the universities through the Inter-University Students Federation, which consisted of members from action committees in different universities.^{40,41}

As part of an effort to keep antigovernment tensions high and to prepare the groundwork for a protracted guerilla campaign, the JVP was able to use this infrastructure to organize considerable agitation and violence within universities during 1987–1989. Thus, during the first week of April 1987, students at Galle Polytechnic held a demonstration calling for the release of eight soldiers held hostage by the LTTE.⁴² In June 1987, students at the University of Colombo boycotted classes in sympathy with demands for general elections made by a number of political parties.⁴³ During this period at Kelaniya University, undergraduate students agitated against the proposed merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, as called for in the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord.⁴⁴ Students at the Universities of Sri Jayawardenapura and Moratuwa went on a hunger strike, demanding the abrogation of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord and the removal of Indian troops from the island.⁴⁵ And in 1988, the JVP sent threatening letters warning academic staff in a number of universities not to administer examinations in May.⁴⁶

The government estimated that there were between twenty and forty combat-trained JVP members in each university,⁴⁷ and the group took actions that veered into intimidation and violence. In May 1987, JVP students took five senior lecturers at the University of Colombo as hostages, and two days later, fourteen members of the academic staff of the University of Sri Jayawardenapura were taken as hostages.⁴⁸ Throughout most of the 1987–1989 period, the university system was paralyzed by the JVP, with many universities shut down for large stretches of time. In the spring of 1989, the government hoped to reopen the universities, but the JVP attempted to forestall this effort by assassinating the outgoing vice chancellor of the University of Colombo.⁴⁹ The group also assassinated the vice chancellor of Moratuwa University as he was in his office.⁵⁰

The JVP also put considerable effort into mobilizing schoolchildren in many schools, to considerable effect. For instance, in the second half of 1986, the government recorded actions in support of the JVP in more than 2000 schools.⁵¹ In mid-1988, the group established a front

^d In early 1983, formal student councils were abolished in Sri Lanka.³⁹

organization, the Jathika Sisya Madyasthanaya (National Students Center), led by a third-year arts student from the University of Ruhana, which mobilized protests among school children in 1987–1988.⁵² It was largely run through the SSU and was very successful in mobilizing schoolchildren throughout Sri Lanka. Thus, as part of the effort to disrupt the December 1988 presidential elections, in early October, 2,000 children from elite schools in Galle, St. Aloysius, Mahinda, Richmond, Southlands Balika, Sangamitta Balika, and Ripon Balika demonstrated in Galle.⁵³ Children left their homes that day on the pretext of attending schools but instead joined the demonstration. Additionally, 1,000 schoolchildren demonstrating in Kalutara were tear-gassed and chased away by the police, and schoolchildren in Ambalantota attacked an army detachment with stones.⁵⁴ Some prominent secondary schools had covert Students' Action Committees consisting of four or five students with ties to members of the JVP or DJV.⁵⁵

The JVP also took efforts to infiltrate the labor movement in Sri Lanka. By early 1987, the group did control seventeen trade unions, but their total membership was only 8,400.⁵⁶ For the purpose of comparison, in September 1983, the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions had a membership of 55,000, and the Public Services Trade Union Federation had a membership of 65,000.⁵⁷ However, the group was very effective in establishing covert cells within a number of public and private-sector establishments, which were used to bring the economy close to collapse on several occasions, such as in late 1988 before the December presidential elections. During this episode, buses were not running, banks were shut down, the Colombo harbor did not operate, and water, electricity, and food distribution were severely affected.⁵⁸ And in July 1989, the JVP took over a strike waged by the Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB), which severely impacted transportation on the island.^{59,60}

To coordinate the infiltration of economic organizations, the JVP established a front organization, the Jathika Kamkaru Satan Madyasthanaya (Center for National Worker's Struggles).⁶¹ Its general secretary, propaganda secretary, and financial secretary were each members of the politburo, and it organized its activities both regionally (according to the five zones of the overall organization) and by industry sector. These sectors and their main components were as follows:

- State sector: ministries, departments, banks
- Private sector: private companies, free trade zone
- Transport: harbors, SLTB, government railways, private transport
- Public administration: urban/municipal councils
- Energy and public utilities: water, electricity, gas

- Communication: newspapers, radio
- Estate sector: workers
- Education: teachers and staff at universities and schools

By the late 1980s, most banks, corporations, and government institutions had JVP sympathizers who could potentially use their positions to sabotage the economy at critical junctures.⁶²

Public Component

In 1970, the party pursued a dual strategy of secretly arming itself while holding a number of events for the public.⁶³ Of the four functional divisions previously mentioned, the propaganda division was the only one that operated overtly.⁶⁴ Its activities consisted of undertaking poster campaigns, publishing newspapers, and organizing public meetings and rallies. After the failure of the 1971 insurrection, the government set up a Criminal Justice Commission that indicted Wijeweera and most of the top JVP leadership. After his release in early November 1977, Wijeweera set about rebuilding the JVP along electoral lines to contest elections. In mid-November 1977, he held a meeting of the Central Committee and appointed district secretaries, and between 1978 and 1980, he established JVP district and electoral offices.⁶⁵ As part of this effort, the group established a political presence in Chunakam and Kilinochchi in the Tamil-dominated north, where traditional leftist parties had some popular support.⁶⁶ Additionally, a year later, it established a general fund that reached 220,000 rupees.⁶⁷

The JVP's participation in the District Development Council (DDC) elections in June 1981 proved beneficial for organizational development, because it allowed the party to establish district coordination committees throughout the island.⁶⁸ However, its participation in the formal political process generated contradictions, given the party's revolutionary aims. In fact, during its earlier incarnation, one of its main criticisms of leftist parties in Sri Lanka was that they had forsaken the revolutionary path in favor of democratic politics. Hence, the JVP managed these contradictory impulses during this period by maintaining a clandestine core of activists, and it reportedly maintained a secret politburo at this time that was known only to a select few within the party.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it restarted its education camps in 1978, and the lecture on the path the revolution in Sri Lanka should take (see the *Operations: Administrative* section) still emphasized that it was not possible to effect a peaceful transition to socialism.^{70,71}

LEADERSHIP

Patabendi Don Nandasiri (Rohana) Wijeweera was born on Bastille Day in 1943 in Tangalle. His father was a member of the Communist Party, and in his youth Rohana read the Sinhalese version of Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* as well as *How to Be a Good Communist* by Lui Shao-Chi.⁷² In 1960, he read an article in the magazine *Soviet Land* announcing the establishment of the Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University in Moscow, which would cater to youth and activists from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Wijeweera won a scholarship to study medicine at the university, and on September 25, 1960, he departed for Moscow. In July 1961, he spent time working in a village in the Soviet Moldavian Republic, and at the university he organized the Marxist Study Circle and took a keen interest in lectures given on materialism and political science.^{73,74} He gradually concluded that the Chinese form of Communism was closer to the original intent of Marx and Lenin than the Russian version, and he made his views known publicly in Moscow and Ceylon.⁷⁵ In March 1964, he returned to Ceylon on academic leave, but once Soviet authorities became aware of his doctrinal preferences, he was denied a visa to return to Moscow to complete his studies.

In Ceylon, he became a member of the Communist Party (Peking Wing), but he grew disillusioned with the party and its leader, N. Sanmugathan, whom Wijeweera did not think was a true Communist. For Wijeweera, Sanmugathan was guilty of promoting false consciousness among the proletariat, as he emphasized national and racial themes over class-based concerns when he contested the Colombo municipal elections and the general election of 1965.⁷⁶ Wijeweera developed ambitions to assume leadership of the party, which drew the suspicions of Sanmugathan, and in mid-1966 Wijeweera was expelled from the party.

In the late 1960s, Wijeweera and his colleagues formed the JVP with the intention of establishing a doctrinally pure Marxist-Leninist revolutionary party that would mobilize and lead the proletariat toward social revolution. In party publications and public rallies held in 1970 and 1971, the party made bold statements regarding the need for a social revolution in Sri Lanka. These statements drew the attention of the government, and in March 1971 Wijeweera was arrested and imprisoned. The JVP launched an uprising on April 5, 1971, attacking police stations throughout the island and taking control of a number of them. However, after a few weeks, the government quelled the rebellion, and most of the top JVP leaders were apprehended and imprisoned.

After his release from prison, Wijeweera quickly started to rebuild the party to compete in elections. Additionally, in 1980, he married into an upper-middle class family, and in October 1982 he was the JVP

candidate for president, placing third in the election. In the aftermath of the July 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom that swept the island, the JVP was banned on false charges that it had a hand in the violence, and Wijeweera took the organization underground again and prepared it for an armed struggle against the government. That struggle took off in 1987 and lasted until the end of 1989, and this campaign of hit-and-run attacks on political officials and widespread economic sabotage brought the government to the brink of collapse on several occasions. Beginning in August 1989, the government launched a vicious unconventional campaign against the JVP, wiping out many of its cadres, and Wijeweera himself was captured in November 1989 by the government and killed soon thereafter. “Yes, very soon you can rest permanently,” he was told, after a tired Wijeweera asked his government handlers for permission to rest.⁷⁷ Wijeweera was clearly the mastermind and driving force behind the JVP, and he was described as charismatic and ruthless, with little tolerance for those who opposed his views or would challenge his power within the JVP.

IDEOLOGY

The JVP’s economic program called for a fully centralized economy in which private ownership of the means of production would be outlawed. Following are some of the key elements of a 1977 policy declaration issued by the program:⁷⁸

- A fully planned socialist economic structure shall be established, and the existing capitalist mixed economy shall be completely abolished.
- Banks and credit institutions and all monopoly industries shall be nationalized without any payment of compensation.
- The payment of debts and interest due to imperialist banks and institutions shall be abolished.
- Foreign trade shall be carried on only by the state.
- Heavy industrialization shall be the monopoly of the state, while in the field of small industries, state industry shall be speedily developed.
- Systematic steps will be taken to abolish private ownership even in the field of small industries.
- Essential steps will be taken immediately for collectivization, mechanization, and modernization in the field of agriculture.
- A revolutionary land reform shall be immediately implemented, and landlessness shall be abolished.

The group also regarded the tea plantations established by the British in the central highlands as a degenerate colonial inheritance imposed on the country as they were the cause of various ecological problems. Thus, once in power, they intended to dismantle the plantations and reforest the area to prevent soil erosion and ensure adequate rainfall.⁷⁹ This policy was summed up by Wijeweera when he stated,

We should change the entire economy. The neo-imperialist economy should be changed to a socialist economy. The basic aim is to do away with the plantation industry, the hill slopes should be reforested, reservoirs should be built, and rivers should be tapped to harness electricity and diverted to the Dry Zone.⁸⁰

With respect to multiparty elections, although the 1977 policy declaration did indicate that the group would retain democratic elections and the multiparty system,⁸¹ there are reasons to doubt that the JVP would have upheld this commitment if they ever did rule the country. In the early 1970s, Wijeweera was skeptical of parliamentary democracy and, specifically, whether a capitalist class would permit a revolutionary socialist party to attain power through the ballot box.⁸² Hence, the group was skeptical of the possibility of building a socialist state through parliamentary means. Indeed, one of its main criticisms of existing leftist parties in Sri Lanka was that they eschewed the revolutionary path in favor of parliamentarianism, incrementalism, and compromise on socialist principles, which inevitably results if one is forced to make political agreements with capitalist parties.⁸³ Thus, the group's commitment to parliamentary democracy was debatable, particularly in the case where a party that wishes to undo a socialist economy is likely to capture power in Sri Lanka.

The group's attitude toward India went through several revisions during the period under review. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the JVP's perception of India was highly influenced by Chinese perceptions that emerged after the 1962 border war between the two countries. The Chinese viewed India as an expansionist power that sought to incorporate smaller neighbors into its orbit, given India's dependency on foreign investment and aid and its need to find outlets for the products of India's merchant class.⁸⁴ These ideas resonated with the JVP, who viewed India as a threat to Sri Lanka's economy and independence. Additionally, the group also feared India's cultural influence within Sri Lanka. Films from Tamil Nadu were very popular among Tamils in Sri Lanka, and given the close ties between the independence-minded Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Association for Dravidian Progress, or DMK) in Tamil Nadu and the local film industry in that Indian state, DMK ideology tended to be reflected in these films.⁸⁵ The JVP also

looked warily upon the popularity of Hindi films among the Sinhalese, where the latter enthusiastically consumed Hindi cultural products despite not being able to understand the language.⁸⁶ This fascination was likely due to cultural similarities between the Sinhalese and North Indians, yet to the JVP, it represented a potential avenue for India to exert soft power to influence the hearts and minds of the Sinhalese.

By 1984, the JVP's attitude toward India exhibited a subtle evolution. The JVP was opposed to the separatist struggle waged by various Tamil groups, and while it was aware that India was sponsoring several of these groups against the government, it viewed this policy as a logical response to the pro-American foreign policy of the UNP government in Sri Lanka. In his 1985 book *Solutions to the Tamil Eelam Struggle*, Wijeweera⁸⁷ argued that the United States wanted to support separatist movements in India to balkanize the country and thereby incorporate the detached parts within the American orbit. As precedent, he cited the detachment of Pakistan from India and Bangladesh from Pakistan and noted that in each case, the resulting country was successfully incorporated into the American alliance network, and that the United States was trying to repeat this success by supporting the Sikhs in Punjab and the Gurkhas in Nagaland.⁸⁸ Hence, the Indian government was supporting Tamil separatist groups in Sri Lanka to punish the country for the Jayewardene government's pro-American foreign policy, despite the close links between the DMK and Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka. As stated by Wijeweera:

The pro-American stance of the Jayewardene government and the link it has built up with countries like Pakistan and China which are regarded as traditional enemies of India has given rise to very serious and unprecedented contradictions between India and Sri Lanka. Thus it appears that the Indians have formed a tactical alliance with the Tamil Eelam movement as a way of opposing the pro-Jayewardene regime . . . This manifests itself as a contradiction between India's tactical interests and strategic interests . . . As long as the government's pro-American and pro-Pakistan foreign policy is in existence, the Tamil Eelamist military camps in Tamil Nadu will not be removed. It is only with the removal of the pro-American and pro-Pakistani foreign policy that the Tamil Eelam camps in Tamil Nadu will be removed.

In order to fully solve the national question in Sri Lanka, to defeat the Tamil Eelam attempt, to continue the maintenance of Sri Lanka as a multinational unitary state, it is necessary to win the support of India.

However, by pursuing a regional policy detrimental to India's interests, by consorting with forces that threaten India militarily, we are certainly not going to win this support.⁸⁹

However, beginning in 1986 and 1987, JVP attitudes toward India became more hostile once they noticed that opposition to India could be a useful tool to mobilize the masses against the UNP government. During this time, India was putting pressure on Sri Lanka to grant greater autonomy to the Tamils, which was opposed by most Sinhalese, and JVP literature began to emphasize that Indian foreign policy was under the control of India's "monopoly capitalist class," which sought to absorb Sri Lanka. A May 1988 statement issued by the JVP Central Committee noted,

Ever since the Indian capitalist class became the ruling class, their plans, strategies, tactics, and activities were directed at making India an imperialistic superpower. Their objective was first to become a regional power and later a superpower. The underlying strand which runs through all the economic, political, military and foreign policies of the Indian capitalist class was this.

India has turned Bhutan—a 18,000 square mile country with a Buddhist population into one of its colonies...Sikkim, a small nation of 23,000 square miles has been annexed as India's 25th state. In both these instances, the Indian capitalist class has acted in a like manner as they are doing now in Sri Lanka. In both instances, Indian troops were sent in, Indian agents in the country were well utilized, the economy was swallowed up, unequal treaties were signed to the benefit of the Indian capitalist class. Thus gradually, these countries were annexed.⁹⁰

And a document put out in September 1988 noted:

The Indian ruling class that took upon itself the task of building up Indian imperialism followed an aggressive policy from the time India gained independence from the British. This policy was to swallow up—annex—the smaller states that were once under the control of the British. To implement this policy the Indian ruling class used as its fifth column the Indian immigrants brought to these regional countries by British imperialists as traders, racketeers, money-lenders, contractors and laborers.⁹¹

Hence, a patriotic struggle was the vehicle through which to effect a social revolution. However, the JVP never actually fought against the Indian troops that were stationed on the island in the north and east after the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of July 1987. One potential reason is that although the JVP viewed the harnessing of anti-Indian sentiment as a useful means to mobilize the public, in private it realized that an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka would have disastrous implications for Indian unity, given separatist desires in Tamil Nadu.⁹² Thus, the group may have seen India as a useful ally in the struggle against Tamil separatism once the JVP assumed power.⁹³

The JVP's stance toward the Tamil separatist movement was also characterized by a divergence between public pronouncements and private attitudes. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Tamil separatist cause was a secondary issue for the JVP. During the 1982 presidential campaign, Wijeweera did not take a strong stance on the issue, and Lionel Bopage, the general secretary of the party at the time, opposed Tamil separatism, although he acknowledged that Tamils had legitimate demands concerning language and state employment.⁹⁴ Bopage was in favor of establishing links with leftist elements among the Tamils to further the anti-capitalist struggle, yet the JVP never pursued this option, because its main concern at the time was building up the party as a major opposition force, and so it did not want to risk drawing the government's ire by initiating an outreach effort toward Tamil militants.⁹⁵

However, in the aftermath of the virulent anti-Tamil riots of July 1983, the JVP began to view the Tamil issue in a vein similar to how it would eventually view India—namely, that the party could use anti-Tamil sentiment to mobilize the Sinhalese masses to support an armed uprising against the government to bring about a social revolution.⁹⁶ Hence, some of their public pronouncements during this time charged that the government would not be able to secure the unity of the nation, as indicated by statements made in a December 1984 leaflet:

They do not mind the loss of the Northern and Eastern Provinces as long as they were able to continue their luxurious and degenerate lifestyles, and they seek to cover up their impotence by victimizing the left movement. The JVP is resolutely opposed to the division of the country. The JVP policy declaration very clearly states that it is opposed to both the division of the country as well as to autocratic centralism.⁹⁷

Nonetheless, in private, the JVP acknowledged that the Tamils had legitimate grievances that had to be addressed, a sentiment that was also expressed in Wijeweera's book *Solutions to the Tamil Eelam Struggle*.⁹⁸

LEGITIMACY

After the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord in July 1987, the JVP was able to legitimate itself through appeals to Sinhalese-Buddhist patriotism and opposition to the presence of Indian troops in the country. The group's propaganda during this time emphasized that the government had betrayed the country to the Indians and was overseeing the gradual partition of the country and the establishment of a separate Tamil Eelam (homeland). For instance, a communiqué calling for a strike in late October 1988 stated:

It is more than one year since the corrupt J. R. Jayewardene regime sacrificed our country secretly to the Indian imperialists. The Indian army has occupied the North and the East as a result of the so-called JR-Rajiv Peace Accord. Hundreds of thousands are destituted by the Indian invasion army. It will not be long before our country becomes an Indian colony. The Provincial Councils established under the so-called peace pact have become a weapon to make real the dream of Eelam.⁹⁹

The September 1988 JVP document stated:

To escape the national calamity facing Sri Lanka it is necessary to drive away the illegal, treacherous, murderous, fascist Jayewardene-Thondaman^e government without delay, for it is the prime cause of this calamity. Without doing this, the Indian imperialist efforts cannot be defeated, national independence cannot be achieved, territorial integrity cannot be protected, democracy cannot be restored, human rights cannot be insured, national unity on a basis of equality cannot be established and the disaster brought about through the creation of Provincial Councils cannot be averted.¹⁰⁰

In addition in its later incarnation, the group placed less emphasis on opposition to capitalism, and combined with its emphasis on patriotism, it was able to broaden its support base into the middle class, to include doctors, lawyers, engineers, and university lecturers.^{101,102}

^e Saumiyamoorthy Thondaman was the undisputed political leader of the Indian Tamil community in Sri Lanka. In 1950 he formed the Ceylon Workers Congress, which represented this population group, and beginning in 1978 he served in the Sri Lankan government for twenty-one years.

Unlike the LTTE, the JVP, during either of its incarnations, never established parallel state-like institutions to provide social services, such as in health or education, or carry out basic functions such as tax collection. In 1971, the group did not have a political program to consolidate its rule once it took over an area and hoisted a red flag over the building it designated as a headquarters.¹⁰³ In the late 1980s, the group did take a number of actions to build legitimacy, such as punishing drug dealers and illegal liquor vendors, countering prostitution and corruption, repairing roads, and helping flood victims.¹⁰⁴ But it never established parallel institutions to compete with corresponding government counterparts. Such a strategy would have required the group to develop a conventional capability, which it never set out to do, to conquer and hold large swaths of territory.^f

MOTIVATION AND BEHAVIOR

The main motivating factor behind the 1971 uprising was the phenomena of educated unemployment among rural Sinhalese youth and corresponding grievances against an English-educated elite based out of Colombo. Between 1946 and 1970, Sri Lanka's population grew by eighty-nine percent, and by 1971, sixty-eight percent of the population was under the age of thirty-five.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the expansion of education in the 1930s and 1940s was very successful; in the early 1970s, Sri Lanka had the second highest rate of literacy (eighty percent) in Asia, after only Japan.¹⁰⁷ A fundamental problem, though, is that universities were producing an overabundance of graduates in the arts, humanities, and social sciences (in fields such as Sinhala language, Sinhala literature, and Buddhist civilization) rather than in science, medicine, and engineering, and for the former it was exceedingly difficult to find suitable white-collar employment.¹⁰⁸ This phenomenon was particularly acute for graduates who came from rural secondary schools, because these schools lacked the funds to afford laboratory equipment and found it difficult to attract the few available teachers capable of teaching science in Sinhala.¹⁰⁹ Hence, the majority of students studying science, medicine, and engineering within universities tended to come from wealthier urban schools, whereas students from rural schools tended to concentrate in the arts and humanities once

^f In 1988, the JVP did, however, manage to establish territorial control in the districts of Matara and Hambantota. Sri Lanka then (and now) had more than twenty districts.¹⁰⁵

at the postsecondary level.⁸ These latter students had significant difficulties finding white collar-employment, yet they were not inclined to return to the paddy fields or the estates and plantations that employed their parents.

An additional barrier faced by rural students is that the public and private-sector job markets favored English-educated students, who were more likely to come from elite urban schools. One of the inheritances of the British era was an English-educated political, administrative, and commercial elite based out of Colombo that controlled the levers of political and economic power in Sri Lanka. This elite crossed political boundaries, as leaders of all the major parties on the left and right were educated at elite secondary schools and then at Oxford, Cambridge, or the London School of Economics.¹¹¹ Privileged graduates from this class benefited enormously in the job market because they were in position to take advantage of connections that their parents maintained with politicians and other elites. Obeyesekere has argued that the 1971 insurrection could be viewed as an indigenous uprising against this class by a frustrated, rural Sinhalese-educated sector of the youth population with dim prospects.¹¹² In the sample of 10,192 suspected JVP insurgents that he analyzed, he found that 94.2 percent were Buddhist (and therefore Sinhalese); 71.9 percent were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, and 22.1 percent were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four; eight-five percent were educated at *Maha Vidyalyayas* or *Madya Maha Vidyalyayas*, rural secondary schools that taught in an indigenous language and lacked the facilities to provide an education in science and technology; and only 0.2 percent occupied elite occupational positions, while forty percent were underemployed, 17.5 percent were unemployed, 12.5 percent were students, and twenty-one percent occupied lower-level positions.^{113,114}

The themes of elite resentment and the lack of job opportunities for Sinhalese-educated rural youth were also motivating factors in the 1987–1989 uprising. Additionally, in the 1980s, elite resentment was a key feature of a Sinhalese intellectual movement known as *Jathika Chintanaya* (The National Ideology), which reaffirmed Sinhalese language and culture and drew adherents among middle-class Sinhalese professionals who were only one or two generations removed from the villages and held resentments against the entrenched English-educated

⁸ Data from 1967 show that 53.1 percent of the arts entrants at the university level came from labor or peasant backgrounds, whereas only 5.2 percent of the medicine and dental entrants, and only 11.3 percent of the engineering students, came from this socio-economic class. At the same time, students of parents with professional backgrounds constituted 9.2 percent of the arts entrants, 32.9 percent of the science entrants, 33.6 percent of the engineering entrants, and 41.4 percent of the entering medicine and dentistry students.¹¹⁰

urban elite.¹¹⁵ Followers of this movement were also drawn to the JVP, which allowed the group in its second incarnation to establish a base of support among a segment of educated urban professionals.

OPERATIONS

Paramilitary

During the 1971 insurrection, the main tactics of the group consisted of attacks on a large number of police stations and security installations on a single day (to include the possibility of a prolonged guerilla campaign against the government from jungle areas), as well as the arrest of important political figures, including the prime minister (which was not successful).¹¹⁶ In contrast, in the late 1980s, the party envisioned a more protracted and comprehensive campaign against the state, one that would ultimately result in a terrifying campaign of killings and economic sabotage that would decimate the UNP and other political parties and bring the country close to economic and political collapse on several occasions. As detailed in Figure 6-3, the group’s wide-ranging campaign is reflected in the diversity of its targets, as the government, police, military, and various economic sectors were subjected to the group’s attacks in the late 1980s.

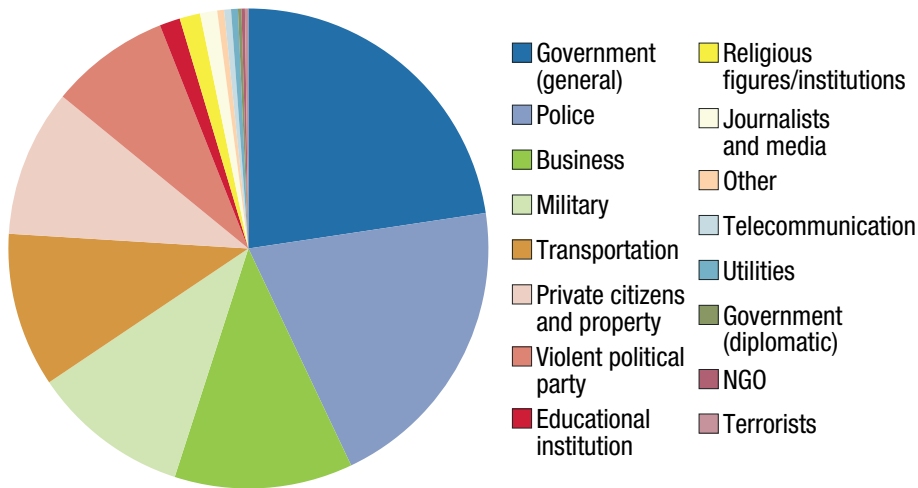


Figure 6-3. JVP target types.

Its most spectacular attack was undoubtedly the one on parliament in August 1987, which nearly eliminated Sri Lanka’s top leadership. Two grenades were lobbed into a parliamentary meeting in which President J. R. Jayewardene, Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa, and various other ministers were in attendance. One of the grenades rolled

under the chair of Minister of National Security Lalith Athulathmudali, and the prime minister had to pull the president behind a table to protect him from the attack.^{117,118} One parliamentarian was killed, and several ministers and other members of parliament were injured. The group followed up this attack by issuing a statement that read, “Traitors! These are the reasons why we threw bombs at you!” and it proceeded to list a number of accusations, the most prominent of which was the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord and the arrival of Indian troops on the island.¹¹⁹ This attack was indicative of the pattern of attacks the group unleashed. As shown in Figure 6-4, assassinations and bombings were two of the main attack types of the group, and the group also undertook a number of armed assaults.

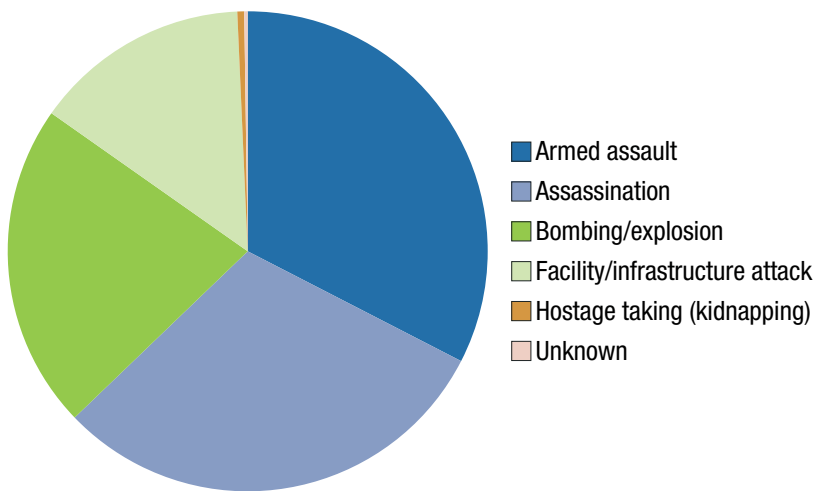


Figure 6-4. JVP attack types.

In addition to the August 1987 attack on parliament, the group also launched attacks against other prominent officials. Generally speaking, the group carried out raids and attacks by first commandeering private vehicles, giving them false license plates, and carrying out surprise attacks on targets, often with inside information (and making an escape along a carefully designed plan).¹²⁰ For instance, in September 1987, the JVP planned to assassinate a member of parliament from Panadura using an army vehicle that transported a number of weapons.¹²¹ Fortunately, this attack was thwarted, but there were many other attacks against prominent officials that were successful. In December 1987, the UNP chairman and three others were shot and had a grenade thrown into their car, and in May 1988, two JVP activists on a motorcycle shot and killed the UNP general secretary.¹²² The group also managed in December 1987 to assassinate the director of the Counter Subversive Division, and in July 1988, militants set ablaze the residence of the deputy inspector general of police, Premadasa Udugampola, killing

his mother, brother, sister-in-law, and two children.^h Various other members of parliament were attacked by the group, including G. V. S. de Silva (member of parliament for Habaraduwa), Jinadasa Weerasinghe (member of parliament for Tangalle), and Dr. Neville Fernando (member of parliament for Panadura).¹²⁴ The JVP also undertook a campaign to liquidate leftist rivals. One hundred members of the SLFP perished during 1987–1989, and both the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party, another left-of-center political party, and the Communist Party lost seventeen members each to JVP violence.¹²⁵ Even former officials were attacked; the former deputy minister for cultural affairs was shot dead at his house in June 1989.¹²⁶

However, the group did not just attempt to collapse the political system by initiating operations to decapitate the country's top leadership. It also disrupted the political machinery of the state by threatening officials at the local level. A UNP branch meeting in Kotahena was attacked with grenades, and in January 1988, the deputy chairman of the Ukuwela District Development Council was shot and killed.^{127,128} The group issued death threats to lower-level UNP officials, and throughout 1988, it was a common occurrence to see posters, banners, and signs at various public places in which targeted individuals had resigned their posts and begged for forgiveness for past sins.¹²⁹ The threat of death was also extended to everyone holding office in the government, and the DJV's *Vedihanda* publication carried the constant refrain, "all traitors from the village level up to the ruling house will be exterminated."¹³⁰ Many UNP and government officials did indeed resign. For instance, the chairman of the Panadura Urban Council resigned without giving any reason.¹³¹ In addition, various attacks on local-level political institutions took place. In January 1988, the Matara Urban Council was attacked with grenades, and in June 1989, a car bomb exploded at Galle Town Hall while the Provincial Council was in session.¹³² Even candidates defeated in elections were targeted, as the JVP reasoned that they were inadequately protected.¹³³ Overall, over a 2.5-year period, the JVP was estimated to have killed approximately 17,000 people,¹³⁴ and as shown in Figure 6-5, most of its operations were conducted during 1988 and 1989.

^h This attack proved to be costly to the JVP. Udugampola subsequently tracked down and apprehended the fourteen men responsible for this attack, and he played a major role getting the government to adopt an unconventional strategy in its fight against the JVP.¹²³

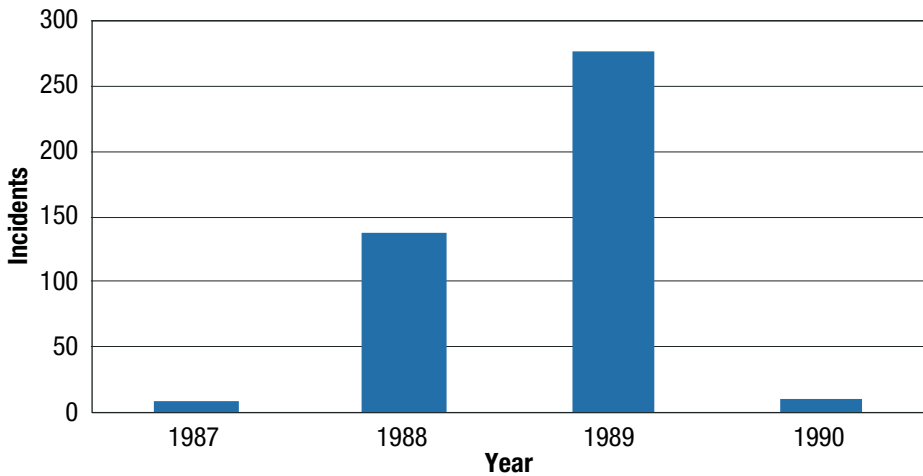


Figure 6-5. JVP incidents over time.

The JVP was also quite successful in its campaign of economic sabotage against the state. A senior academic worked with the group to develop a plan for the economic destruction of the country, which was based on the idea that hardships imposed on the general populace would lead to a revolt against the government.¹³⁵ To implement this strategy, the group organized *hartals* (general strikes) that brought the country to the brink of economic collapse. As previously noted, in November 1988, the JVP brought the economy to a near standstill to protest the holding of presidential elections in December. Work stoppages paralyzed the transport and petroleum sectors, and shops were closed for weeks in certain areas of the country, leading to food shortages.¹³⁶ Additionally, the banking and telecommunications industries were severely impacted. The army was called on to run buses and distribute fuel, while the navy operated the port of Colombo.¹³⁷

This campaign of economic pressure was waged in support of a number of political demands leading up to the elections, including the removal of President Jayewardene and the assumption to office of a senior member of the supreme court in a caretaker role, as well as the dissolution of both the provincial councils and parliament, followed by the formation of a temporary government.¹³⁸ Although elections were held, the campaign did succeed in convincing a number of important civil society actors and prominent individuals to place pressure on the government to accede to JVP demands. For instance, nineteen prominent trade unions called for the dissolution of parliament, a demand that was echoed by prominent Buddhist institutions, which also called for elections to be held under a caretaker government.¹³⁹ Opposition leader Sirimavo Bandaranaike also called for the dissolution of parliament as well as the provincial councils, and she also called

on the government to disband all paramilitary groups and to release all political detainees and students before holding elections.¹⁴⁰ These public calls for accommodation to JVP demands ultimately swayed the president, who agreed to dissolve parliament and establish an interim government if the JVP renounced violence and participated in the elections.¹⁴¹ Sensing victory, the JVP refused, and the insistence on holding elections reportedly led close friends of President Jayewardene to pose the following question to him: “Your Excellency, is this a time to hold elections?”¹⁴²

In a June 1989 meeting of the JVP politburo, the group decided to overthrow the government in July and assume power.¹⁴³ They devised a detailed plan that called for attacks on key security installations, prominent politicians and bureaucrats, and media organizations. Additionally, various economic sabotage actions were undertaken in the critical summer months of 1989 to force the collapse of the government, including overtaking (and subsequently leading) an SLTB strike. This action was followed by strikes of port and railway workers, and eventually telecom and postal workers were also forced to go on strike. Banks, markets, and stores were also closed.¹⁴⁴ The army again was asked to operate buses, and the navy took over the task of unloading ships carrying food and docked at the Port of Colombo.¹⁴⁵ Despite the economic calamity inflicted on the country, the government was able to maintain power, because it had advance warning of this plan, and it responded by instituting a curfew that derailed the effort to topple it.¹⁴⁶

Nonetheless, while the campaign of economic sabotage did put severe pressure on the government at this time, there is evidence to suggest that the group may have carefully calibrated its actions so as not to cause excessive hardship on the populace. By July 1989, Sri Lanka’s foreign exchange reserves covered only a few days’ imports, and exports of tea, the country’s main export, were delayed.¹⁴⁷ An attack on the tea sector at this time would have caused enormous damage to the economy, yet the group refrained from attacking tea factories until September, after the government’s unconventional campaign began to cause significant losses within the group.¹⁴⁸ A possible explanation for the delay is that the group initially held off on attacking the tea industry because of concern that such an action would severely impact livelihoods and result in less support for the group.

The JVP also undertook numerous actions to protest the presence of Indian troops on the island. The DJV threatened Indian High Commissioner J. N. Dixit with death, and in March 1989, it organized work stoppages to protest killings by the IPKF and LTTE in the north.¹⁴⁹ DJV posters and leaflets requested the public not to leave their houses, to boycott places of work, and to refrain from driving and using televisions,

radios, and lights.¹⁵⁰ The group also organized a *hartal* to commemorate the second anniversary of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord, and the public was instructed to hoist black flags and to demonstrate against the Indian presence on the island.¹⁵¹ The JVP also issued leaflets with highly charged slogans against Indian forces, including, “Drive away the Indian monkey army from our motherland!” and “Save our motherland from Indian imperialism.”¹⁵² The campaign against India also had an economic component. Sri Lankan women were barred from wearing Indian saris, and in May 1989, Wijeweera issued an order calling for Sri Lankans to boycott all goods produced in India, sever all relations with Indian insurance companies and banks, and cease all commercial activity with India.^{153, 154}

Administrative

As previously indicated, in the early 1970s, the JVP consisted primarily of lower-middle-class youth of Sinhalese-Buddhist background from the rural south, many of whom had attained at least some level of secondary education. By the 1980s, though, the appeal of the JVP had expanded into urban and quasi-urban areas, especially in the densely populated surroundings of Colombo.¹⁵⁵ New members were recruited largely on the basis of personal relationships with existing members, and relationships were often originally established within an academic (secondary school or college) setting. Those potentially interested in membership would be approached and engaged in a discussion of the current political and socioeconomic situation in Sri Lanka and whether prevailing conditions had an impact on any economic difficulties the recruit was facing.^{156, 157} On the basis of these discussions, existing members would decide whether to extend an invitation to the potential recruit to attend a set of lectures organized by the JVP (see below).

After a recruit attended the lectures, he or she was given a set of tasks. If the recruit performed well on the tasks and was rated highly by a JVP town or village committee, a JVP district or division secretary would recommend him or her for attendance at a JVP educational camp.ⁱ At these camps, attendees continued their education in Marxism by attending classes in subjects such as Marxist economics and Marxist philosophy.¹⁶⁰ At one camp held in August 1969 at Bogahawewa, lectures were held between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., after which attendees

ⁱ The first education camp was held at a house in Akmeemana in 1968, and camps were held in at least twelve other locations. These camps could accommodate twenty to thirty participants, and they would last seven days, with attendees participating in lectures and discussions for twelve to sixteen hours a day. Camps were also held in the mid to late 1980s as well.^{158, 159}

were given military training.¹⁶¹ When curious villagers approached the camp, lecturers switched from the topics they were discussing to more benign topics, such as chicken farming.¹⁶²

Once admitted, new members were expected to recruit at least five other friends or relatives.¹⁶³ Additionally, loyalty played a prominent role in the sorting of individuals during the recruitment process. All individuals were classified into one of two lists, List A and List B.¹⁶⁴ List A consisted of the most trustworthy members who had attended the five indoctrination lectures and had indicated a willingness to fight.^{165,166} They were assigned to combat units and tended to be more active within the party. List B consisted of the others who had attended the fifth lecture and who may not have been accepted yet into the organization. They were used primarily for propaganda activities, such as poster campaigns.¹⁶⁷

In the late 1960s, the JVP developed a collection of lectures known as the five lectures, which served to introduce new members to the group's ideology. The lectures were initially developed and presented by Wijeweera, and they would often last many hours spread over several days.¹⁶⁸ The initial lectures were titled:¹⁶⁹

- “The Economic Crisis of the Capitalist System”
- “Independence”
- “Indian Expansionism”
- “The Leftist Movement”
- “The Path the Sri Lankan Revolution Should Take”

The first lecture consisted of a Marxist interpretation of the ills of Sri Lanka's economy, with emphasis placed on the unemployment of educated youth, poverty, a rising cost of living, inflation and the devaluation of the currency, Sri Lanka's foreign debt, and the financial policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.¹⁷⁰ This lecture also presented the JVP's interpretation of how Sri Lanka fell under the control of colonial powers and how capitalism and the plantation economy were introduced into the country.

The second lecture addressed anticolonial movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and emphasized that “neocolonial” arrangements were instituted by Western powers to ensure that newly independent nations remained enslaved through economic, political, religious, ideological, and cultural dependence.¹⁷¹ The United States was seen as inheriting the mantle as the world's predominant “imperial” power from Britain. Additionally, the lecture on Indian expansionism emphasized that India desired to absorb or subjugate its neighbors by employing expatriate communities of traders and workers in neighboring countries as fifth-columnists.¹⁷²

Once a recruit had attended his or her first four lectures, the party would determine whether the recruit was trustworthy and shared the views expressed during the lectures.^{173,174} If a positive determination was made, the recruit would attend the fifth lecture, which addressed the JVP's strategy for revolution. The content of this class was both theoretical and practical. It examined different models of social revolution, including an analysis and comparison of the Cuban, Russian, and Chinese revolutions, and emphasized that, throughout history, the pathway of social revolution was contingent on existing conditions within a particular country at a point in time.¹⁷⁵ More controversially, the class emphasized that it was not possible to effect a peaceful transition to socialism, and as evidence it pointed to the 1973 overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile by Pinochet and the decimation of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965 by the Indonesian army.¹⁷⁶ From a practical perspective, it advocated a particular set of military tactics to seize power in Sri Lanka, namely an island-wide attack on police stations and government institutions within a single day, rather than a protracted struggle.¹⁷⁷ This was indeed the strategy followed by the group in April 1971.

The lecture topics were revised to take into account changing political and socioeconomic circumstances. Once the JVP entered mainstream politics in 1977, other lectures included "The Building Up of the Bolshevik Party" and "The Menshevik Movement of Sri Lanka," and after the insertion of Indian troops in Sri Lanka after the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord in 1987, the JVP formulated another lecture titled, "Save the Motherland from Indian Imperialism."¹⁷⁸

Additionally, in the early 1970s, List A members received military training at camps located in jungle areas.¹⁷⁹ Military training camps were also established in the mid-1980s once the JVP decided to wage a protracted campaign against the government. Training was imparted by army deserters to groups of twenty-five to thirty cadres in camps located in the jungle areas of Wellawaya, Moneragala, Pottuvil, and Ampara, as well as areas surrounding the Sinharaja forest.¹⁸⁰

Psychological

The JVP established a number of outlets and methods to communicate with and influence the broader Sri Lankan public. For instance, the party established a number of newspapers, including *Janatha Vimukthi* (*People's Liberation*), which was distributed throughout the island, as well as *Deshapremi* (*Patriot*) and *Rathu Balaya* (*Red Power*).¹⁸¹ It was *Deshapremi* that praised Rohana de Silva, the sailor who assaulted Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi with his rifle as Gandhi was to depart

after signing the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord.¹⁸² Another JVP publication was *Niyamuwa* (*The Vanguard*), a Sinhalese weekly with a circulation of approximately 50,000 to 75,000, and in Angoda, the party maintained a printing press that in 1983 employed thirty full-time activists.¹⁸³ Additionally, the party maintained a radio station, with posters in Colombo announcing its schedule and radio frequency.¹⁸⁴ Incidentally, this station was used to issue the August 1989 threat against the families of armed forces personnel.¹⁸⁵

The party was very effective in using psychological operations to attempt to undermine the political system. In August 1987, after the attack on parliament, the DJV issued a leaflet threatening parliamentarians that stated, "All those MPs and their lackeys who like to live, should resign their seats and confess their faults and rise up against Jayewardene."¹⁸⁶ The group followed this in May 1988 by sending letters to all parliamentarians, ministers, UNP officials, and senior government officers threatening them with death if they did not resign.¹⁸⁷ Threats were also used to dissuade citizens from participating in the political process. Before April 1988 provincial council elections in six Sinhalese majority provinces, the JVP put up posters stating, "Death awaits those who vote" and "The first ten who vote and their families will be killed."¹⁸⁸ And in November 1988, it issued leaflets calling on Sri Lankans not to participate in presidential elections scheduled for the following month.¹⁸⁹

The JVP also issued orders and sent threatening letters to coerce individuals into participating in curfews, demonstrations, and work stoppages. In October 1988, the JVP issued threatening letters to workers, calling on them to agitate for general elections. In response, thousands of workers in Galle, Matara, Kalutara, and Panadura left their workplaces.¹⁹⁰ To protest the death of a prominent human rights lawyer (and alleged high-ranking member of the JVP) in the beginning of September 1988, the JVP issued a special order declaring September 12 a national day of mourning. It ordered all shops and offices closed and white flags hoisted in honor of the slain lawyer. Compliance was widespread; streets were deserted, most shops closed down, and public buses did not operate.¹⁹¹ Curfews subsequently became a common occurrence in villages, towns, districts, and provinces, and those who defied them were killed.¹⁹²

In another example, after the deaths of a JVP student leader and a politburo member, the DJV declared November 3, 1988, a national day of mourning, and it issued a statement ordering all commercial establishments to close down, all state institutions and government industrial establishments to remain closed, all transport to stop and fuel stations to remain closed, and all private homes to switch off their lights until

midnight and hoist red and white flags to honor those killed.¹⁹³ This action was highly successful; streets were deserted, and businesses and government institutions closed. Residents in Kandy were reportedly so fearful that those who turned on their lights for even a few minutes often found neighbors banging on their doors demanding that they turn off the lights.¹⁹⁴

Personnel in the armed forces were some of the main targets of psychological operations, because the JVP realized that this institution functioned as the bulwark preventing the state's collapse amidst the JVP onslaught against the central government. The JVP instituted various campaigns to sow dissension and undermine morale in the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. For instance, a leaflet issued sometime in the April to July 1987 time frame appealed to the frustration felt within the armed forces that they were not given free rein to destroy the LTTE. This leaflet was addressed to the "Patriots of the Armed Services, Police and Secret Police," and it stated:

It is your responsibility to protect the legally-elected government, the people and the country. But what is Jayewardene trying to get you to do these days? To protect the country or the people? Definitely not! Jayewardene is consciously and deliberately betraying the nation and the country to the Rajiv Gandhi-MGR-Prabhakaran-Amirthalingam gang. The lives of soldiers and ordinary people are being sacrificed to the Tigers.^{195,j}

An April 1989 issue of *Ranabima*, a bulletin put out by the DJV, also emphasized the theme of the government's betrayal of the nation through its foreign policy toward India and its handling of the Tamil issue (the bulletin also decried government attacks against JVP "patriots"):

Soldiers! Open your eyes! While some scoundrels continue to kill patriots by the thousands in the South, what is happening in the North and East? Indian imperialists who captured Jaffna yesterday are trying to capture Trincomalee today. Tomorrow it will be Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura, and the day after it will be the plantation areas and the whole island. Are you going to be deceived by the treacherous Jayewardene and Premadasa and permit this crime? Are you going

^j M. G. R. are the initials of Marudhur Gopalan Ramachandran, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu. He was often referred to by his initials. Appapillai Amirthalingam was a leading Sri Lankan Tamil politician who was assassinated by the LTTE in July 1989.

to be a party to handing over the country to the Indian imperialists after murdering the patriots who love the people and the country? Soldiers! You need not be a party to this crime. You need not act against the people, country and nation in subservience to a salary of two or three thousand. Do not lift your weapons against the country. Realize that this amounts to lifting your gun against your children. Also realize that such an act would amount to getting the guns of the patriots turned against yourselves.^{196,k}

The JVP also charged the government with wanting to eliminate left-leaning elements within the armed forces. It issued a leaflet alleging that the government had classified all personnel into one of three categories: “forward,” consisting of loyalists who would do anything to keep the “fascist clique” in power; “neutral,” consisting of personnel who maintained more moderate views; and “against,” consisting of left-leaning elements opposed to the government.^{197,198} The leaflet went on to claim that the task of eliminating members of the “against” group had been given to elements within the Rapid Deployment Force, the Special Task Force, and to personnel within the “forward” group.¹

The JVP was also very successful in infiltrating the police and armed forces. Informants played an important role in JVP weapons raids on security installations, and there were also a number of egregious penetrations of various security institutions. For example, an accountant staffed at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Sri Lanka Police was suspected of being a JVP sympathizer. Allegedly, this individual passed CID files to the JVP and also provided the group with information on the movements of the senior superintendent of the police before the latter was killed.²⁰⁰ Another example is that of the sub-inspector of police assigned to the Sapugaskanda police, who was a member of the JVP. He enabled an attack on this station by fifty rebels by placing at the station a ten-kilogram bomb that killed several individuals, and he had previously taken an arrested JVP leader to the station to familiarize him with the premises and the guard points.²⁰¹ Indeed, even a member of a military police team that was with Wijeweera shortly before his death was a JVP member.²⁰² He did not attempt to stop the killing of Wijeweera, but he did provide to the JVP the names of the team that executed Wijeweera, and he had

^k Ranasinghe Premadasa was the president of Sri Lanka in April 1989.

¹ Chandraprema notes that the services never categorized its personnel in this manner.¹⁹⁹

previously provided the names and addresses of individuals engaged in operations against the group.

The JVP also relied on threats and violence to encourage desertions from the armed forces. More than one hundred homes of military personnel were set on fire in the Southern and Northwestern Provinces, and many members of the Special Task Force were killed when they went on sick or family leave.²⁰³ By late 1988, the number of army deserters exceeded 2,000, which is a considerable figure, given that at one time during the conflict, the number of army personnel fighting the JVP in the southern and western parts of the country was just 6,129.²⁰⁴ Some deserters did indeed join the JVP, and some key members of the JVP military wing consisted of deserters and personnel still in service.²⁰⁵

Nonetheless, in mid-1989, the JVP was confronted with a temporal dilemma.²⁰⁶ Its campaign of economic sabotage against the state was inflicting significant costs on the populace, but the government had not yet collapsed. Fearing that the populace would eventually turn against the group for the severe economic disruptions inflicted on the economy, the group initiated a desperate measure to force the collapse of the armed forces, which was seen as the only institution holding the state together. In April 1989, in response to government and paramilitary attacks on JVP cadres, the group issued a threat in the bulletin *Ranabima* to the families of service personnel:²⁰⁷

The blood relatives of the blood suckers in the Army and Police who are engaged in massacring patriots should take steps to stop this crime immediately. If they do not do so, the patriotic people's armed troops will adopt merciless measures against them (the relatives) as well . . . Since there are a lot of innocent people in the armed forces, we have acted with care and responsibility, so as not to cause any harm to them. But now in the new situation, we have been forced to abandon this policy. The only response to massacre, is massacre. There is no other legitimate response.

The group followed this threat in the beginning of August 1989 by issuing a direct threat against the families of armed forces personnel: personnel had until the twentieth of the month to leave their posts, and if they refused, their families would be targeted for death.

The armed forces and sponsored paramilitary groups responded quickly and in a similar manner. Shortly after this threat was made, posters began to appear throughout the country stating, "Twelve of Yours for One of Ours!" One vigilante group, the Deshapremi Sinhala

Tharuna Peramuna (Patriotic Sinhala Youth Front) issued the following chilling announcement to the families of suspected JVP members:²⁰⁸

Dear Father/Mother/Sister,

We know that your son/brother/husband is engaged in brutal murder under the pretense of patriotism. Your son/brother/husband, the so-called patriot, has cruelly taken the lives of mothers like you, of sisters, of innocent little children. In addition, he has started killing the family members of the heroic Sinhalese soldiers who fought with the Tamil Tigers and sacrificed their lives in order to protect the motherland,

Is it not among us, ourselves, the Sinhala people that your son/brother/husband has launched the conflict in the name of patriotism? Is it then right that you who are the wife/mother/sister of this person who engages in inhuman murder or your children should be free to live? Is it not justified to put you to death? From this moment, you and all your family members must be ready to die!

May you attain Nirvana!

Patriotic Sinhala Youth Front

The response was ferocious. Beginning in August 1989, an estimated twenty-five to fifty bodies were found dumped on roadsides each day.²⁰⁹ The Mahaweli River had an average of seventy bodies floating down its pathway every day.²¹⁰ Within a few months, Wijeweera and most of the top leadership were eliminated.

Political

Although the JVP called on Sri Lankans to support the leftist United Front in the May 1970 general elections, it intended to launch an uprising to seize power regardless of which party was in power.^{m,n} It hosted a number of public rallies between August 1970 and February 1971, and a number of its public pronouncements suggested

^m The JVP expected the UNP to postpone elections on the pretext of a fabricated security incident that they would blame on radical left elements. Nonetheless, they called on voters to support the United Front to defeat the UNP.²¹¹

ⁿ According to Loku Athula, one of the key participants in the 1971 uprising, in statements presented before the Criminal Justice Commission, the objective of the JVP in 1971 was to seize state power by force regardless of which government was in power.²¹²

revolutionary ambitions. For instance, the August 1, 1970, edition of *Janatha Vimukthi* stated:

The whited sepulchre of imperialism erected on the dead bodies of the people with the blood, tears and sweat of the people can be demolished not by kneeling and bowing before it, but by pitiless sledge hammer blows. The people drawn towards destruction by the curse of colonialism can be saved not by having round-table conferences with imperialists, but by treading the fallen across their dead bodies. Only their blood can wash clean their motherland stained with black spots of infamous imperialism.²¹³

An article from the September 5 edition of the same paper stated:

Yes we shall destroy the entire various revolutionary scourges which deny us our freedom and our civic rights. Until capitalist freedom and capitalist democracy are wiped away along with reactionary henchmen the real freedom and democracy we may inherit will be plainly false and illusory.²¹⁴

Wijeweera was released from prison in 1977 with UNP blessing and the hope that he would mobilize the JVP to undermine the leftist SLFP, as both groups counted on rural Sinhalese for support. The UNP government provided the JVP with money, vehicles, and protection to launch an anti-SLFP campaign, and the JVP was able to stage meetings against Mrs. Bandaranaike and sabotage several meetings she held by attending them in SLFP uniforms.²¹⁵

During this time, the party commenced with the electoral process in April 1979, when it submitted a list of nominations for the Colombo Municipal Council elections (despite the elections commissioner refusing to designate the group as a legitimate political party qualified to contest the elections).²¹⁶ It was able to contest the District Development Council elections of June 1981, where it won thirteen seats, and during this period, it held various talks with other leftist parties. One such discussion involved the fielding of a common candidate to take on the UNP in the October 1982 presidential election, but an agreement was not reached because Wijeweera insisted that he should be the common candidate.²¹⁷ In the end, Wijeweera ran as the JVP candidate, coming in third, with 4.2 percent of the vote (J. R. Jayewardene of the UNP won, with 52.9 percent of the vote).

EXTERNAL ACTORS AND TRANSNATIONAL INFLUENCES

The JVP had some contacts with foreign governments and groups, but overall these were minimal and did not result in assistance in the form of weapons or financial aid. In the early 1970s, the group did try to establish cells in the Maldives and in the Indian state of Kerala and to make contact with the vice president of Tanzania, who was a class-mate of Wijeweera at Lumumba University.²¹⁸ Contact was made with the government of South Yemen, who offered “revolutionary greetings” to the JVP, and Wijeweera and other JVP leaders traveled to Iraq (where they established contact with the Baath Party) and Cuba and also corresponded with Basque separatists in Spain and with the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) of Namibia.²¹⁹ Additionally, the JVP did send a letter to Fidel Castro requesting the establishment of relations but received no response, and the group did not receive much assistance from the Chinese embassy when it tried to send a letter to Mao Zedong.²²⁰

There were, though, several notable transnational influences on the group. The Indo-Lanka Peace Accord in July 1987 proved a boon to the JVP. The agreement came at a time when government forces were on the verge of capturing the critical town of Jaffna, located in the north of the island in the Tamil heartland. The agreement led to protests and riots throughout the country, and Sinhalese revulsion toward the agreement provided the JVP with a pathway toward social revolution through patriotic struggle. Additionally, Wijeweera and other JVP leaders were highly influenced by the Cuban Revolution and by Che Guevara in particular.^o Wijeweera sometimes reminded JVP cadres of a statement attributed to Guevara: “There are only three places for a true revolutionary in these times. He should either be among the dead, in a dark prison cell or in the battlefield.”²²² Furthermore, after the death of Guevara in Bolivia, the Cuban embassy in Colombo made available a number of Castro’s and Guevara’s writings and speeches, which were read by Wijeweera and his colleagues. These writings included *History Will Absolve Me*, *The Second Declaration of Havana*, *Those Who Are Not Militant Revolutionaries Are Not Communists*, and *From Moncada to Victory*.²²³ Wijeweera also read with interest the biographies of Guevara, Castro, Mao, Marx, Lenin, and Kim il-Sung.²²⁴

^o Interestingly, in April 1970, the government established the Che Guevara Bureau within the inspector general of police to report the activities of the JVP to the prime minister.²²¹

FINANCES AND ARMAMENTS

Armaments

In 1970, the JVP armed itself by manufacturing crude bombs and by purchasing guns and ammunition from firearm dealers.²²⁵ Additionally, the group also purchased explosives, and on several occasions it acquired firearms through thefts from private citizens. It stored armaments and explosives in underground bunkers that it built and in Buddhist temples in remote parts of the country, where the monks were either members or sympathizers of the movement.²²⁶

In the mid-1980s, the group adopted the maxim that the enemy should supply it with weapons, and so it staged a number of raids and pilferages on military and police facilities to acquire arms. For instance, the group robbed 500 modern weapons and 50,000 rounds of ammunition from the Pannala army camp, and in a 1989 raid on the Tissamaharama police station, it was able to acquire the entire armory of the station, consisting of fifty weapons and large amounts of ammunition.²²⁷ Additionally, in 1987, the group conducted successful raids for weapons on the General Sir John Kotalawala Defense Academy and the Katunayake air force base.²²⁸

Deception and infiltration figured prominently in these operations. In the raid on the Tissamaharama police station, JVP cadres dressed in army uniforms arrived at the station with two “JVP rebels” who they wanted to turn over to the police, and they proceeded to steal the arms and ammunition in the facility.²²⁹ In the Katunayake attack, some of the assailants wore air force uniforms, and deserters participated in this attack and in the Pannala raid.²³⁰ The benefit of having deserters in the JVP ranks was that they would have inside information on the military facility, the location of the armory, and any military procedures that were followed.²³¹ In the case of the Pannala attack, the JVP was able to obtain inside information from the camp cook regarding the number of personnel in the camp and information on the deployment and number of security vehicles on nearby roads from a petrol shed owner living near the camp.²³²

In addition, in late 1987 and 1988, the group is believed to have acquired land mine technology and training from the People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), whose relations with the IPKF were always strained.²³³ Finally, in the late 1980s, the JVP also put effort into manufacturing an effective weapon known as a *galkatas*, which consisted of short pipes with a trigger device that could fire a cartridge over a short range.²³⁴

Finances

There is no evidence that the JVP received foreign financial assistance.²³⁵ In its earlier incarnation, the group was able to raise funds during public meetings and rallies, and it also required every member to donate three to thirty percent of any earnings, depending on his or her level.²³⁶ Additionally, it carried out a number of bank robberies. For instance, in September 1970, it stole 65,000 rupees from a rural bank in Okkampitiya, and in February 1971, it was able to obtain 57,000 rupees through a bank clerk employed at the Bank of Ceylon.²³⁷ Similarly, to fund its second insurrection, the group collected money through membership fees and donations, as well as robberies staged by the DJV.²³⁸

ENDNOTES

- ¹ A. C. Alles, *The JVP, 1969–1989* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Lake House Publishers, 1990), 13.
- ² *Ibid.*, 14.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.
- ⁶ S. V. D. Gamini Samaranayake, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1971–1987* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2008), 205–206.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 206–207
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 209
- ¹⁰ Alles, *The JVP, 1969–1989*, 281.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 286.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 283–285.
- ¹³ Rohan Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Institute of Fundamental Studies, 1990), 44, 324.
- ¹⁴ C. A. Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror. The JVP Insurrection 1987–89* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Lake House Bookshop, 1991), 15–18.
- ¹⁵ Samaranayake, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka: 1971–1987*, 205–206.
- ¹⁶ Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka, A Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP*, 44.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 294.
- ¹⁸ Samaranayake, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1971–1987*, 196.
- ¹⁹ Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka, A Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP*, 58, 324.
- ²⁰ Samaranayake, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka: 1971–1987*, 209.
- ²¹ Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka, A Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP*, 324.
- ²² Alles, *The JVP, 1969–1989*, 308.
- ²³ Alles, *The JVP, 1969–1989*, 306.
- ²⁴ Mick Moore, “Thoroughly Modern Revolutionaries: The JVP in Sri Lanka,” *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 3 (1993): 622, fn. 81.
- ²⁵ Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror. The JVP Insurrection 1987–89*, 17–19.

- ²⁶ Alles, *The JVP, 1969–1989*, 305.
- ²⁷ Alles, *The JVP, 1969–1989*, 316.
- ²⁸ Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka, A Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP*, 221.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
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CHAPTER 7.

LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE)

TIMELINE

1948	Ceylon independence from British rule is established by cooperation of Sinhalese and Tamil elites.
1956	Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) wins national election on the basis of “Sinhalese Only” platform. Sinhala Only Act of 1956 sparked the first anti-Tamil riots.
1958	Riots and protests against proposals of Tamil self-rule.
1961	Sri Lankan army is stationed in northeast Sri Lanka to suppress peaceful Tamil protests against discrimination.
1972	Anti-Tamil policies are formally incorporated into the constitution. The Tamil New Tigers (TNT) are established in 1972.
January 1974	Police attacked the Fourth International Tamil Conference in Jaffna, killing eleven Tamils.
1976	LTTE is formed from the TNT under Velupillai Prabhakaran.
1981	Burning of the Jaffna Library, which housed 90,000 Tamil books and manuscripts.
July 1983	LTTE ambush a Sri Lankan army convoy, killing thirteen soldiers and sparking riots that kill 2,500 Tamils.
1987	LTTE employs first noted suicide bombing of a Sri Lankan army camp followed by conventional tactics.
July 1987	India and the Sri Lankan government sign the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord; India deploys military forces to Sri Lanka.
March 1990	India withdraws forces from Sri Lanka.
May 1991	LTTE employs a suicide bomber to assassinate Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.
May 1993	LTTE employs a female Black Tiger to assassinate Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa.
October 1997	LTTE is placed on the US State Department list of foreign terrorist organizations.
2002	Norway brokers cease-fire agreement between LTTE and the Sri Lankan government.
2004	A tsunami hits Sri Lanka and causes 40,000 deaths.
March 2004	Colonel Karuna splits LTTE Eastern command away from Prabhakaran-led Northern command.
2005	The Sri Lankan government incorporates a national military draft system that substantially increases the size of the Sri Lankan army.
May 2005	LTTE assassinates Sri Lankan government Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar.

November 2005	Anti-LTTE hard-liner Mahinda Rajapaksa wins national elections.
2006	Colonel Karuna founds the <i>Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal</i> (TMVP) in opposition to the LTTE. The Sri Lankan government begins a military campaign against LTTE and the Tamil population with support of anti-LTTE Tamils (including the TMVP).
2007	LTTE Air Tiger attack against the Colombo airport.
July 2007	The Sri Lankan army controls Eastern Sri Lanka.
December 2007	The US government suspends military aid to Sri Lanka because of the Sri Lankan government’s human rights violations.
January 2008	The Sri Lankan government formally withdraws from the cease-fire and Norwegian monitors depart Sri Lanka.
2009	250,000 civilians are displaced because of fighting in northern Sri Lanka.
May 2009	The Sri Lankan government claims victory over LTTE after a large military operation.



Figure 7-1. The flag of Tamil Eelam.^a

ORIGINS OF THE LTTE AND THE TAMIL MILITANT MOVEMENT

The first stirrings of ethnic mobilization of Tamil militants occurred in 1961 after the suppression of a nonviolent Gandhian civil disobedience movement led by the Tamil Federal Party. An underground group,

^a The only substantial difference between the LTTE emblem and the Tamil Eelam flag is that the latter omits the letters inscribing LTTE’s name.

Pulip Padai (the Army of the Tigers), formed in August 1961, and its members pledged to fight for a Tamil homeland.¹ By the mid-1960s, elements of the Tamil population, and in particular the youth, became frustrated with the parliamentarianism and nonviolent methods of the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress, and the idea of secession gained a wider audience during this period.² Tamil youth began to mobilize within the Tamil *Ilainar* *Iyakkam* (Tamil Youth Movement), the youth wing of the Federal Party and within the Tamil *Manavar Peravai* (Tamil Students' Union).³

At the age of seventeen, Velupillai Prabhakaran joined the Tamil *Manavar Peravai*, and in 1975 he was one of the key members of a break-away faction known as the Tamil New Tigers, which renamed itself the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in May 1976. Numerous other groups emerged around this time, and an important one that was founded in 1975 was the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO). Up until 1983, it was second to the LTTE in terms of membership and military strength.⁴ In the mid-1970s, Tamil militants drew inspiration from the demonstration effect of the 1971 JVP insurrection, which caught the government by surprise, and from the creation of Bangladesh in that same year.⁵

Several other important militant groups emerged at this time. The Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS) was formed in London in 1975 and was placed on a Marxist-Leninist foundation by A. R. Arudpragasam, an engineer who had earned a master's degree from the Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University in Moscow.⁶ The group developed a strong presence in the districts of Batticaloa and Ampara.⁷ The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) was formed in 1981 as a breakaway faction of EROS. Its military wing was the People's Liberation Army, and the group had six regional leaders in Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu/Kilinochchi, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Mannar.⁸ Lastly, the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) was formed by Uma Maheswaran, a former chairman of the central committee of the LTTE. Many high-caste *vellalars* left the LTTE to join PLOTE.

These groups were divided by differences of opinion regarding military tactics and important political issues, including whether "liberation" necessarily required a separate state or whether autonomy within Sri Lanka was sufficient; whether negotiations should be held with the Sri Lankan state and, if so, what compromises were acceptable, and what sort of relationship should be maintained with the Indian central government.⁹

Although the LTTE did form the Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF) with TELO, EPRLF, and EROS in April 1985 to form a united

front before the Thimpu talks that year, during and after Eelam War I, the LTTE undertook operations against the other groups to establish its leadership of the Tamil militant movement. In late April and early May of 1986, the LTTE killed 150 TELO members, including Sri Sabaratnam, the leader, and in December it killed seventy to eighty EPRLF members.^{10,11,12} And during a meeting of the EPRLF central committee in Madras in June 1990, the LTTE eliminated EPRLF leader K. Padmanabha and fourteen others.^b Additionally, after the departure of the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF), the group decimated the Civilian Volunteer Force (CVF) and the Tamil National Army (TNA), two militias set up by departing Indian troops and led by experienced military personnel from TELO, EPRLF, and the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF).¹⁴

Thus, by the time of the Indo-Lanka Accord and certainly after Indian troops left, the LTTE had established itself as the predominant Tamil militant organization spearheading the drive for independence.

COMPONENTS OF THE INSURGENCY

Command and Control

The LTTE mirrored the organizational structure of many separatist and revolutionary groups in that it was composed of two primary wings, one military and one political, where the latter was subservient to the former and known as the People's Front of Liberation Tigers (PFLT).¹⁵ The Central Committee, the supreme leadership group, oversaw both wings (see Figure 7-2), and was led by LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, who also led the military wing. The military structure consisted of conventional and special forces, including ground forces (the Tigers), naval forces (the Sea Tigers), air forces (the Air Tigers), an elite conventional unit (the Charles Anthony Regiment), a commando unit often tasked with suicide missions (the Black Tigers), and an intelligence unit.¹⁶ Each of these units was led by a special commander, and there were also special commanders responsible for ordinance, military intelligence, military planning, and the women's wing.¹⁷ By 1986, the military wing had established twenty-five military bases and numerous sub-bases in the north.¹⁸

^b The operation to eliminate the leadership of the EPRLF was initiated by a directive from LTTE Chief of Intelligence Pottu Amman and Prabhakaran in February 1990. Initial reconnaissance was carried out by an LTTE cadre who joined an engineering technology institute near the apartment where the EPRLF leaders lived. An LTTE hit team arrived in Tamil Nadu on June 10, 1990, and they eliminated the EPRLF leadership after being informed that the EPRLF leaders were holding a meeting in the apartment.¹³

Geographically, the LTTE assigned a regional commander accountable to Prabhakaran to each of the eight districts in the north and east, and personnel within these eight regional commands constituted the political and military wings of the organization.^{19,c} While Prabhakaran held absolute authority within the LTTE, field commanders may have had a role in planning tactical operations and formulating strategy.²¹ Additionally, once operations were completed, regional commanders reported the outcome to a superior officer^d or to Prabhakaran himself.²³

The LTTE's global network was overseen by an international secretariat, with responsibility for publicity and propaganda, arms procurement and shipping, and legal and illegal (e.g., via extortion) fundraising.²⁴ Additionally, before the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, the group maintained fourteen divisions in India, including those focused on intelligence, communication, shipping, propaganda, arms production, purchase of explosives, and political work.²⁵ The LTTE also established an extensive civil administration that managed a wide array of political, legal, economic, and social organizations, including a police force, law courts, postal services, banks, administrative offices, and a television and broadcasting station.²⁶

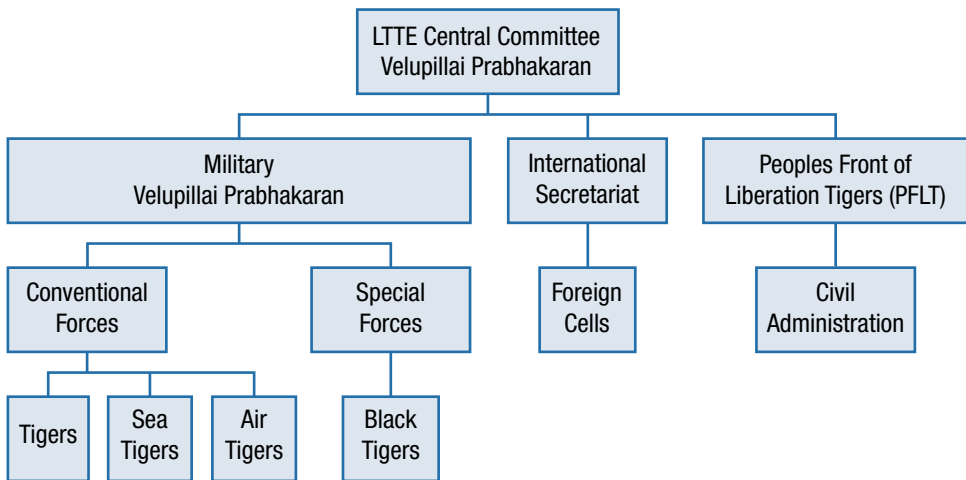


Figure 7-2. LTTE organization.^e

^c In an analysis of the group up to the late 1980s (before the group developed conventional units), Samaranayake noted that below the regional commands were local councils and individual cells.²⁰

^d Sahadevan and DeVotta noted that although personnel who showed exemplary bravery in combat were rewarded with higher command responsibilities, they were not promoted to higher ranks. This policy was instituted in the interest of promoting an egalitarian military structure and culture.²²

^e Adapted from various sources.

Underground

In the mid-1970s, the LTTE started out as a clandestine underground organization focused on urban guerrilla warfare in the north, with the key target being the state's intelligence network deployed against the emerging Tamil militant movements.²⁷ It had four full-time members in 1974, and its growth over the next few years was rather limited; by the July 1983 riots, its total membership was approximately thirty individuals.^{28,29} Although by Eelam War III the group had managed to develop conventional formations that inflicted notable defeats on government forces, it still maintained underground cells that caused significant concerns for Sri Lankan defense planners. Urban terrorist operations such as the January 1996 attack on the Central Bank in Colombo, which killed ninety and injured 1,400, the October 1997 attack on the World Trade Center in the capital, and attacks on prominent political and military leaders forced the government to withdraw troops from the frontline and station them in Colombo, thereby relieving pressure in the war zone.^{30,31}

The underground had success in eliminating prominent military officials, often through suicide operations. In March 1991, an LTTE suicide bomber rammed a vehicle into the car that contained the Minister of State for Defense Ranjan Wijeratne. The minister, the architect of the unconventional campaign that decimated the JVP in the late 1980s, was killed, along with eighteen others. Later in June, the group managed to destroy the headquarters of the Joint Operations Command, which functioned as the nerve center of the Sri Lankan security forces, killing eleven service personnel.³²

Often the underground would perform dry runs or mount surveillance on targets before actual operations. For instance, before the assassination of Chief of the Navy Clancy Fernando, an LTTE team had spent more than a month monitoring Admiral Fernando's movements.³³ Additionally, before an October 1995 LTTE attack on oil storage facilities outside of Colombo, the LTTE had conducted extensive reconnaissance on the facilities and constructed models and rehearsed the attack. Additionally, a Black Tiger suicide squad, operating from a safe house in Colombo, had also conducted reconnaissance on the facility before the operation.³⁴

At times the underground benefited from the assistance of sympathizers. For instance, in November 1997, two sympathizers used magnetic explosive devices to cause damage to two diesel tanks at the Kelanitissa power station in Orugodawatte.³⁵ Sympathizers posed particularly difficult challenges to Sri Lankan security officials, as there

were often no photographs of them or record of them having joined the LTTE. Only their LTTE handlers were aware of their identities.³⁶

The government had some success in penetrating and dismantling underground LTTE cells in Colombo. Beginning in 1990, covert teams from the Special Task Force and the Directorate of Military Intelligence had targeted LTTE cells, and by 1995 sixty cells in Colombo were neutralized.³⁷ Between 1995 and 1998, more than two dozen cells were neutralized, but the LTTE was still able to build operational, backup, and sleeper cells during this period, with operational cells managing accommodation, reconnaissance and transport and LTTE hit teams penetrating and attacking prominent political and military officials.³⁸ By 2007, it was estimated that the underground maintained 150 Black Tiger suicide bombers in Colombo, and the extensiveness of the LTTE intelligence network in the capital was such that many members of Karuna's faction, which defected in March 2004, preferred employment far afield in the construction sector in Qatar rather than risk their chances in Colombo.³⁹

Auxiliary

The auxiliary component of the organization played a prominent role in weapons procurement. Before the mid-1980s, the LTTE had chartered vessels to ship arms into India and Sri Lanka.⁴⁰ Around this time, though, it began to develop a merchant shipping network known as the "Sea Pigeons" with the help of a Bombay shipping magnate.⁴¹ This fleet eventually consisted of ten to twelve freighters with an average tonnage of 1,200 and equipped with advanced radar and communication technology.⁴² Although ninety-five percent of the time these vessels were used to transport legitimate commercial goods, including hardwood, tea, rice, cement, and fertilizer, on the rest of their voyages they carried explosives, arms, ammunition, and other war-related equipment.⁴³ These ships often sailed under Panamanian, Honduran, and Liberian flags (colloquially known as "Pan-Ho-Lib"),⁴⁴ and at times the legitimate commercial activities of these ships facilitated military objectives. For instance, after LTTE vessels were contracted to ship timber from Myanmar to Thailand, these contracts enabled the LTTE to build a relationship with the Myanmar military.⁴⁵ By 1992, the LTTE had established a base in Twantay, a small town in the Irrawaddy delta south of Rangoon, which served as a trans-shipment point and communications facility before it was closed down in 1995.

This merchant shipping network was led by Tharmalingham Shanmugham (alias Kumaran Pathmanathan), who was known as "KP," and his weapons procurement team was known as the

“KP Department.”⁴⁶ These individuals received training in forgery, gun running, international freight and shipping, investing, and communication. Additionally, they were relatively easy to manage because most of them lacked a criminal record or were not involved in guerrilla or terrorist activity, and so overseas intelligence and security agencies typically did not have records of them.⁴⁷

The LTTE also established front companies in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rangoon, and Kuala Lumpur to procure military equipment.⁴⁸ The group also established communications hubs in Singapore and Hong Kong for its overseas weapons procurement and to manage cells in Thailand, Pakistan, and Myanmar.^{49,50} In addition, the group established a number of front organizations in South Africa, where there was a significant Tamil population.^f Some of these organizations included the Tamil Federation of Gauteng, Dravidians for Peace and Justice (based in Gauteng), the Natal Tamil Federation, and the South African Tamil Federation.⁵² Hard-liners within the African National Congress viewed the LTTE as a liberation movement,⁵³ yet Smith noted that there is no evidence that the LTTE exploited the market for illegal weapons in South Africa.⁵⁴

Armed Component

LTTE Ground Forces: The Tigers

The LTTE evolved significantly over its lifetime. It largely waged a guerrilla campaign during Eelam Wars I and II,⁵⁵ and it eventually became a regular uniformed army with conventional warfighting capabilities complemented by special forces with guerilla warfare capabilities.⁵⁶ The army was composed of four brigades known as *padaipirivu*, which each consisted of 1,200 personnel.⁵⁷ These were the Charles Anthony *padaipirivu*, the Jeyanthan *padaipirivu*, the Vithusha *padaipirivu*, and the Leopards *padaipirivu*. The Charles Anthony *padaipirivu* was the first conventional unit established by the LTTE, in the early 1990s.⁵⁸ The Jeyanthan *padaipirivu* was established in 1993, and it undertook both conventional and guerilla attacks. The Vithusha *padaipirivu* was the women’s wing of the army, and it consisted of three sub-brigades, female members of the Sea Tigers, and members within the Black Tigers. Two of the sub-brigades were regular fighting units, and the other was the LTTE’s main artillery unit. The Leopards were regarded as the fiercest unit within the LTTE, and this unit was composed of experienced personnel from other units and orphaned youths provided with extensive military training.⁵⁹

^f Most of this population, however, consisted of Tamils from India.⁵¹

By the late 1990s, the LTTE was able to inflict conventional defeats on government forces. In July 1996, it killed more than 1,200 government troops when it overran the Mullaitivu army camp, and in September 1998 it killed 1,700 soldiers in an assault in Kilinochchi.⁶⁰ It followed up these victories in November 1999 when it launched Operation Unceasing Waves III, during which it captured nine army camps in five days, as well as all of the territory the Sri Lankan army had won during the previous nineteen months.⁶¹ And in April 2000, it captured the strategic Elephant Pass military base, located in territory that connects the Jaffna peninsula to the rest of the island. Only the small size of its forces prevented the LTTE from taking the rest of the peninsula.⁶²

LTTE Naval Forces: The Sea Tigers

Early in the First Eelam War, the LTTE recognized that its success depended on the creation of a naval capability to carry out and protect the flow of manpower and equipment to strongholds. The Sea Tigers were formed in 1984,⁶³ and initially this unit used fast dinghies and fishing boats equipped with small arms and grenades, primarily to transport men and materiel between Tamil Nadu and the Jaffna peninsula.⁶⁴ As the military moved its forces into the central and north-central regions, severing the LTTE's freedom of ground movement between the north and east sectors, use and control of the seas became an essential lifeline of the LTTE. Sea Tiger equipment eventually included attack, high-speed, logistics, and suicide craft; mini-submarines, submersibles, and scuba-diving equipment; and GPS and satellite communications systems.⁶⁵ Reportedly, some Sea Tiger members received glider, micro-light, and speedboat training in Europe and Southeast Asia.⁸ Sea Tiger tactics included not only ship-to-ship attacks using onboard arms but also suicide ramming attacks by fast boats laden with explosives.

The Sea Tigers were tactically important in several different ways. By 1991–1992, they posed a threat to Sri Lankan forces stationed in the north by disrupting their sea-based supply lines, and in important campaigns they served as a deterrent against the landing of Sri Lankan forces.⁶⁷ They also transported LTTE forces between the north and east, which assumed greater importance whenever government troops occupied land between these two regions.⁶⁸ Additionally, through 2006, the Sea Tigers were able to conduct operations off both the west and east coasts to deny the Sri Lankan navy the ability to supply High Security

⁸ Chalk reports that LTTE fighters have received glider, micro-light, and speedboat training in Europe and Southeast Asia.⁶⁶

Zones^h in the north of the Jaffna peninsula, which impacted the government's ability to undertake operations in the peninsula.⁷⁰

Gunaratna noted that the Sea Tigers maintained twelve divisions, including sea battle regiments, an underwater demolition team, the Sea Tiger strike group, a radar and telecommunications unit, a political, finance and propaganda section, and an intelligence section.⁷¹ Some of the major operations of the Sea Tigers included a successful May 1995 attack on the island of Mandathivu, off the Jaffna peninsula, and in 1996 they played an important role in attacking a coastal army base in Mullaitivu.⁷²

LTTE Air Forces: The Air Tigers

The LTTE's air capability was a relatively late addition to the group's military arsenal. The Air Tigers unit was founded by Colonel Shankar, who worked as an aeronautical engineer with Air Canada.⁷³ In 2002, the group acquired an airstrip south of its main base in Kilinochchi, and in January 2005, two light aircraft were spotted by a military drone at the airstrip.⁷⁴ It is believed that LTTE pilots were trained at flying clubs in France and the United Kingdom.

The Air Tigers conducted their first bombing raid on the Sri Lankan air force's main base, Katunayake Air Base, in March 2007, killing three personnel and damaging two helicopters. The next month they conducted their second air operation by bombing an army engineering unit in northern Sri Lanka, and in October 2007, the LTTE undertook a coordinated air and ground assault at the air force base in Anuradhapura, managing to destroy eight government aircraft. To counter the Air Tigers, the government purchased new MiG-29 combat aircraft and Mi-24 helicopter gunships from Russia.⁷⁵

LTTE Special Forces: The Black Tigers

Especially gifted fighters were selected for membership in the Black Tigers, believed to date back to 1987. This special unit was tasked with the most difficult missions—including suicide bombings and assassinations.⁷⁶ Reportedly, the members of the Black Tigers—who were handpicked by Prabhakaran—were held in almost mythical esteem by the other LTTE fighters.⁷⁷ Although some analysts have theorized that groups are more likely to use suicide missions during periods when insurgent tactics were deemed to be less effective, the LTTE's use of the Black Tigers did not appear to conform to this model.⁷⁸ Instead, the

^h High Security Zones were set up around strategic military installations to afford them greater protection. There were eighteen High Security Zones in the Jaffna peninsula.⁶⁹

Black Tigers were employed as part of the overall insurgency strategy once the LTTE became the dominant Tamil opposition force.⁷⁹ Indeed, their first suicide attack with a truck bomb was used as a breaching action for a much larger operation, allowing LTTE regular forces to storm the target site (a Sri Lanka army camp) to halt an impending army offensive.^{80,i}

LTTE Personnel Totals

The number of members within the LTTE fluctuated somewhat during the course of the conflict. Starting with less than five members in 1974, it had about thirty-three members just before the July 1983 riots, after which it expanded rapidly, reaching 2,500 in 1986.⁸¹ It suffered combat losses in fighting with the IPKF, and in 1989 its strength was estimated at 1,500.⁸² By 1990, this figure had increased to 4,000, reaching 14,000 in 1997 and 20,000 in 2003.^{83,84}

Public Component

As previously noted, the public component was known as the People's Front of Liberation Tigers (PFLT). The PFLT appears to have emerged sometime after 1990,⁸⁵ although in July 1992 it was abandoned for a time by Prabhakaran, who wanted to redeploy PFLT cadres for military actions.⁸⁶ The leader of the PFLT was appointed by Prabhakaran, and this wing assumed a decidedly subordinate role to the military wing.⁸⁷ Whereas the military wing oversaw policing, recruitment, finance, intelligence gathering, and special operations, the political wing was responsible for propaganda and oversaw the various aspects of the LTTE's civil administration.^{88,89} As described more fully within the *Legitimacy* section, this civil administration took an active role in economic development, education, health care, and the judicial and legal system of the territory under LTTE supervision.

LEADERSHIP

The founder and only leader of the LTTE was Velupillai Prabhakaran (see Figure 7-3), an elusive personality about whom little accurate information is known. It is believed that Prabhakaran, born in 1954, was a member of the *karaiyar* caste from Valvettiturai. He is the son of

ⁱ Hopgood provides evidence that this attack might not have been one of intentional suicide, and indeed that the incorporation of suicide attacks and the existence of the elite Black Tigers might have been constructed after the attack to enhance the LTTE's reputation. Another LTTE fighter launched a similar attack shortly after this initial bombing but was able to flee the scene before the bomb exploded.

a district land commissioner and he was the youngest of four children, although none of his siblings are known to have joined the LTTE. Although his family background suggests that he would have had more extensive opportunities for education than the average rural Tamil, Prabhakaran completed just seven years of schooling. Prabhakaran is said to have joined the Tamil Manavar Peravai in 1972 during the standardization debate.^j A faction broke away in 1975 to found the Tamil New Tigers, the precursor to the LTTE. He married in 1984 and had three children. In one description, Prabhakaran is characterized as

a traditional Tamil hero-ascetic: fiercely faithful, practicing and exacting strict discipline by shunning alcohol, tobacco, stimulants and forbidding his men to have extra- or pre-marital affairs, norms of conduct which are based on and justified with traditional and Hindu classics.⁹⁰

In 1993, an interviewer further described Prabhakaran as follows:

He is 37, on the small side, and a bit overweight. With his black hair and moustache and large eyes, he looks a little like the hero that turns up regularly in Tamil films. He dresses in army fatigues, and carries a gun. Around his neck is a black cord at the end of which is a capsule, presumably containing the cyanide which Tigers are supposed to swallow rather than be taken prisoner.

His house—at least, the house where he gave his interview—is small and modern, and a bit of a drive from the town of Jaffna. There are maps on the walls, but no radio or television or books, although Mr. Prabhakaran appears well informed about affairs outside Sri Lanka, especially wars, in Afghanistan, or in Indochina. Much of the talk was over dinner: noodles and a soft drink. Mr. Prabhakaran's portliness does not seem to arise from over-eating. He appears to speak only Tamil.⁹¹

Still, Prabhakaran was not believed to be either strongly religious or staunchly ideological.^k Yet, insofar as strong leadership was a critical

^j For more information regarding the policy of "standardization" with respect to university admission, see the section *Tamil and Sinhalese Economic Concerns* in *Chapter 4. Socio-economic Conditions*.

^k Narayan characterized Prabhakaran as "quietly pious" and "disinterest[ed] in Marxist politics and ideology."⁹²

aspect of the Tamil struggle, he allowed a Stalin- or Mao-like personality cult to develop around him.



Figure 7-3. Velupillai Prabhakaran.

The only significant challenge to Prabhakaran’s leadership may have occurred in the latter half of the 1970s. Reportedly, in 1977, when Uma Maheswaran—a member of the *vellalars* caste and a university-educated surveyor—joined the movement, Prabhakaran “turned the leadership over to him”⁹³ or at least shared some aspects of authority. In 1979–1980, Prabhakaran purportedly sought to regain sole authority but was denied. Unwilling to concede, the two contenders for power are said to have engaged in a shoot-out in the south Indian city of Madras, for which Prabhakaran was arrested by Indian police. Allegedly with the aid of Indian Premier Indira Gandhi, Prabhakaran was released and returned to Sri Lanka, where he reconsolidated his authority and secured the expulsion of Maheswaran “for disciplinary reasons.”^{94,1}

Prabhakaran’s one-time second in command was Sathasivam Krishnakumar, also known as Kittu, a member of the *vellalars* caste from Valvettiturai. Kittu became involved in the Tamil movement as a volunteer helper engaged in Tamil relief efforts after the 1977 riots. In 1978, he joined the LTTE and worked on an LTTE farm for five years, but he also received military training in both Sri Lanka and India. He rose to second in command in Jaffna in 1983 and then to commander in Jaffna in 1984. After recovering from injuries suffered in 1987, Kittu became the LTTE spokesman in London.⁹⁵

¹ Subsequently, Maheswaran went on to establish the rival PLOTE.

Mahathiya, a deputy leader of the LTTE after 1986, was, like the LTTE founder, a member of the *karaiyar* caste from Valvettiturai. Indeed, Mahathiya may have been a childhood acquaintance of Prabhakaran and was said to have been a classmate of Kittu. In 1977, Mahathiya left school and joined the Tamil movement.⁹⁶ Yogaratnam Yogi, one-time commander of Jaffna, was reportedly a member of the *karaiyar* caste from Kondavil.⁹⁷ Lawrence Thilakar, an LTTE spokesman in Paris, was member of the *karaiyar* caste from the city of Jaffna.⁹⁸

IDEOLOGY

Tamil nationalism and socialism were the twin pillars underpinning the ideology of the LTTE, but the former assumed a clear precedence over the latter, as for the LTTE the primary contradiction in Sri Lanka was nationalism rather than capitalism.⁹⁹ Furthermore, its conception of socialism also contained an important ethnocentric component that rejected Western culture and elevated traditional Tamil culture, as suggested by the following passage in an LTTE publication:

If a national race loves its history, filled with greatness and its language and culture, its traditions and ancient customs, that, we call patriotism. One who discards this progressive patriotism, this love of the nation and calls for cosmopolitanism, is not a true socialist. People like that are bourgeois cosmopolitans.¹⁰⁰

In this regard, the notion of a traditional Tamil homeland was inextricably linked to the LTTE's ideology, and the importance of this homeland to a resolution of the conflict was expressed by the following statement issued by an LTTE official to a representative of the Tamil Nadu state government:

This "homeland" is a clearly identifiable, contiguous, single region composed of the Northern and Eastern provinces. This region is the historically constituted homeland of the Tamil speaking people and therefore indivisible. The recognition of the territorial integrity of the region as the "homeland" of the Tamil is cardinal to any meaningful lasting solutions to the Tamil national question.¹⁰¹

The LTTE regarded the Jaffna kingdom that flourished in Jaffna before it was conquered by the Portuguese as a golden era in Tamil

history,^m and the ethnic conflict was in part the fault of the British, who conjoined Tamils with the Sinhalese when they unified the administrative system of the island in 1833. Additionally, the LTTE viewed Ceylonese independence as a farce, with the British transferring power to an anglicized Sinhalese national bourgeoisie.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the group regarded itself as the true ideological heir of Tamil politician S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, whom they referred to as *Tantai Selva*, or “Father Selva.”¹⁰⁵ Chelvanayakam spent much of his political career seeking to establish greater autonomy and rights for the Tamils (albeit nonviolently, and within a unified stateⁿ).

Hellmann-Rajanayagam argued that the LTTE reserved its hostility primarily for the Sri Lankan government rather than the Sinhalese people, as the latter were viewed as having been duped by government propaganda into accepting racist and chauvinist ideology.¹⁰⁶ Yet the LTTE seemed to believe that the Sinhalese since time immemorial have been brainwashed into hating Tamils, as indicated by the following passage in an LTTE publication:

Since 2500 years were the Sinhalese majority racists engaged in the destruction of the Tamil race in Ilankai. This hatred lies deep in their hearts till today. Every Sinhalese is fed hatred for the Tamil race with his mother’s milk.¹⁰⁷

Hence, because the LTTE viewed the Sinhalese public as unwitting dupes conditioned to feel hatred for Tamils, the group saw no possibility for collaborating with left-wing Sinhalese groups such as the JVP, owing to the ingrained ethnic hatred of the Sinhalese.¹⁰⁸

In contrast, the ideological predilections of some of the other Tamil groups did permit cross-ethnic cooperation with left-wing Sinhalese groups. The EPRLF emphasized Marxism-Leninism rather than ethnonationalism, and the relative unimportance of Tamil history and culture was captured by the following passage in one of their publications: “We do not deceive you with talk about our ancient greatness.”¹⁰⁹ The EPRLF viewed its struggle as one in support of all suppressed peoples struggling against imperialism, neocolonialism, and fascism, and so members were open to cooperating with the Sinhalese working class, whom they viewed as equally oppressed and exploited as the Tamils.¹¹⁰

^m Samaranyake¹⁰² notes that the LTTE also appropriated the notion of a glorious Chola kingdom, as there is compelling evidence that the Jaffna kingdom did not extend to the Eastern Province, and the territorial limits of the Chola Empire remained vague. The Cholas were a south Indian-based dynasty that invaded Ceylon on multiple occasions, and indeed the LTTE’s tiger emblem was inspired by the royal emblem of the Chola Empire.¹⁰³

ⁿ However, by the early 1970s, a few years before his death, his outlook had changed and he supported an independent Tamil state.

Hence, the group advocated close links with the Communist Party and the Nava Sama Samaja Pakshaya (New Social Equality Party, or NSSP).¹¹¹ Reportedly, the group also had links with the JVP, as Gunaratna noted that JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera had visited an EPRLF training camp in Madurai in south India.¹¹² Wijeweera also had a strong relationship with Uma Maheswaran, one-time leader of PLOTE, and the relationship between the JVP and PLOTE involved the transfer of explosives, weapons, and land mine technology.^{113,114}

Regarding the political and economic organization of Tamil society, Prabhakaran was opposed to a multiparty parliamentary system and seemed instead to support a benevolent dictatorship under his rule.¹¹⁵ In an interview in 1986, he stated:

The government of independent Eelam will be a socialist government; there will be only one party supported by the people; I do not want a multi-party democracy. Under a one-party government Tamil Eelam can develop and change faster. In a socialist constitution the needs of the people will have a priority.¹¹⁶

The LTTE was also suspicious of a free-market economic system. Uyangoda noted that during the Norwegian-led peace process beginning in 2002, the group appeared to view the spread of market forces in Tamil areas as a threat to its state-building project, with the potential to undermine the regional administration that the group established in the territory under its control.¹¹⁷ Hence, it favored a state-led economic development process in which the market was subject to strict regulation and control.

LEGITIMACY

The LTTE derived considerable legitimacy from its military achievements, its provision of social services to Tamil populations, and the merits of its appeals for Tamil autonomy. The LTTE's string of successes against the numerically superior Sri Lankan army, as well as its consolidation of power after years of intra-Tamil violence, contributed significantly to its popularity locally and within expatriate populations.¹¹⁸ The group's extensive networking with other revolutionary and secessionist movements not only provided the group with training in new techniques but also ensured that the Tamil struggle was included in popular transnational narratives of self-determination and minority rights.¹¹⁹ The perceived commitment of the group and the dedication of Tamils more generally and LTTE fighters specifically was highly

coveted by Sinhalese commentators, who blamed their own continued military failure on a lack of Sinhalese cohesiveness.

The group's state-building activities in the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka were a significant source of legitimacy. Very little state building occurred in rebel-held areas during Eelam War I. The central government still handled the administration of justice and the provision of security, and while the political wing did maintain a planning division before 1987, it accomplished very little.¹²⁰

State-building efforts took on added importance after the withdrawal of Indian peacekeeping troops in 1990. One of the first components of the emerging civil administration was the Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organization (TEEDO), whose purpose was to assess damage to rebel areas and coordinate rebuilding efforts.¹²¹ In 1994, TEEDO established several commissions that consisted of civil servants, civil society actors, and university personnel who provided assessments on reconstruction for different sectors. As these commissions began to focus on specific sectors, they became the precursors of various agencies within the LTTE civil administration, which eventually included ministries for health, education, finance, justice, protection (police), and economic development.¹²²

The provision of justice began with the establishment of village mediation boards (*inakka saphai*) in the 1980s, and in the 1990s the group proceeded to establish a more extensive legal and judicial system in the territory under its control. It set up a law college capable of training 300 lawyers a year, and by 1992 a system of courts was established throughout rebel territory. The Tamil Eelam Penal Code was enacted in 1994, which incorporated elements of the British-inspired Sri Lankan Penal Code as well as LTTE interpretations of *thesavalamai*, or Tamil cultural norms (which were codified by the Dutch) that regulated marriage, inheritance, and other civil matters.¹²³ Interestingly, the LTTE excluded elements of this code that went against its social agenda, such as regulations on caste and dowries.^o

The LTTE made efforts to ensure that legal services were accessible to the population. It provided free legal advice to the poor, and it set a fee of twenty dollars to cover the cost of a court-appointed lawyer.¹²⁵ In areas of the northeast controlled by the government, the rebel judicial system often had an uncertain relationship with the Sri Lankan legal system. In these border areas, residents could engage in legal arbitration by choosing which legal system offered them the most advantages, and residents sometimes noted that LTTE supporters would use

^o Additionally, the LTTE interpreted the Thesavalamai Code as permitting land transfers only to relatives or members of the local community, which significantly restricted land transfers to Sinhalese and Muslims in Tamil-dominant areas.¹²⁴

the group's court system to overturn judgments made against them in official courts.¹²⁶

The judicial system also featured land courts, which assessed property values in consultation with property owners.¹²⁷ These courts thereby facilitated the imposition of property taxes, which provided an important revenue stream to the insurgent organization. The LTTE tax regime also included a number of other taxes, including taxes on manufacturers and service providers, who were taxed a percentage of their monthly income, as well as taxes on farmers and fishers, who paid in cash or in kind.¹²⁸ The LTTE also collected taxes in the form of custom fees on goods brought into LTTE territory, as well as through taxes on vehicle registration and property transactions.¹²⁹

The Tamil Eelam police force was formed in 1991 by a retired officer from the Sri Lankan police force, and its headquarters was in Kilinochchi, with local police stations scattered throughout LTTE territory.¹³⁰ At one point, the force grew to approximately 3,000 officers, and it attained a high level of legitimacy among the Tamil population in LTTE territory, who viewed the force as lacking in corruption and as a stabilizing force in the region.¹³¹ The Tamil Eelam police reportedly had several wings, including those focused on traffic, crime prevention, crime detection, and administration, as well as an information bureau and a special force.¹³²

In matters of health and education, the Sri Lankan government still attempted to provide services to the Tamil population in LTTE territory, and so the relevant rebel ministries focused on regulating and supplementing government provision of health and educational services. In the case of health, the group played a largely advisory role, as it relied on international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières, in addition to the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), which provided a limited number of mobile health centers.¹³³ The TRO was formed in 1985 to assist Tamil refugees in south India, and it mobilized resources among the diaspora to provide aid to war-affected populations in the north and east of Sri Lanka. The group has drawn concern regarding its autonomy from the LTTE.¹³⁴

Given the traditional importance Tamil society placed on education, the LTTE worked with the central government to ensure the provision of education during the conflict. The LTTE established the Tamil Eelam Education Council (TEEC) to coordinate education in LTTE-controlled areas, and the TEEC encouraged the establishment of advisory committees composed of parents and educators to regulate and supplement the provision of education.¹³⁵ This cooperation facilitated the continuity of the educational system even during wartime.

For instance, before the 2002 cease-fire, 1,994 primary and secondary schools, with a total enrollment of 648,000, operated in the north and east.¹³⁶ Yet this arrangement often led to unique challenges for teachers. In the east, teachers preferred to live in government-controlled Batticaloa and enter into rebel territory each day through a series of checkpoints.¹³⁷

As has been described, both rebel and official agencies sought to provide public goods to the population residing in LTTE territory. Mampilly argued that both sides had little choice but to work with each other to provide such goods through a hybrid administrative system, given the history of strong state institutions that had penetrated deeply into Tamil society and had provided a substantial amount of public goods, such as food subsidies, health care, education, and subsidized transportation, to residents throughout the island.¹³⁸ Rebel and government officials developed a working relationship under such circumstances. In LTTE territory, a district-level official called a *porupalar* appointed by the LTTE worked with the government agent^P (known as the district secretary beginning in 1997) to ensure that the government provision of public goods was in accordance with LTTE policy.¹³⁹ Typically, government agents in rebel territories were ethnic Tamils who were acceptable to the LTTE and were sympathetic to the needs of the local population, and they usually had a positive working relationship with their LTTE counterparts.¹⁴⁰

Effective provision of public goods suggests that the governing authority has a legitimate right to rule, so clearly each side would have preferred to have been the sole authority providing such goods to the Tamil population in the north and east. Nonetheless, each side benefited from this arrangement. The government continued to provide welfare services to residents in LTTE territory because it still wanted to maintain even a tenuous link to a population that it claimed to represent.^Q Its abdication of the provision of public goods may have led the LTTE to develop an even more extensive and capable civil administration, thereby bolstering its image as a Tamil government-in-waiting for the region.¹⁴² Additionally, beginning in 1977, the government became heavily reliant on external aid, and in the aftermath of the brutal

^P Recall that the appointment of a government agent to each district with responsibility for carrying out government policy was a holdover position that originated during the colonial era and was maintained in the post-independence period.

^Q It should be noted that some members of Kumaratunga's government wanted to cut off all financial support to the regions under LTTE control. Also, while the government did continue to provide services to the north and east, it also imposed an economic embargo, covering more than sixty items, on the region once fighting resumed in 1990. The embargo had a significant impact on the provision of health care, and it continued until the cease-fire of 2002, only to be reintroduced once fighting restarted in 2006.¹⁴¹

repression of the JVP, donors did not want to be seen as financing a government tied to a significant humanitarian catastrophe.¹⁴³ Hence, the government decided to continue to provide welfare benefits to the region to avoid this possibility, even while it engaged in a brutal campaign against the LTTE.

The LTTE also benefited from this arrangement, as it did not have to allocate a greater share of scarce resources to provide public goods, thus freeing up resources for combat activities. This arrangement also contributed to the tax base of the region under its control, as the government continued to pay the wages of government teachers, doctors, and other professionals in the health and education sectors in the region.¹⁴⁴ The LTTE imposed a tax of twelve percent on government workers, so in effect, central government funds used to pay civil service personnel working in the north and east helped finance the organization.^f

Mampilly argued that the LTTE sought to use the response to the December 2004 tsunami to upset this carefully crafted dependent relationship between the government and the insurgent organization, as the massive inflow of foreign aid to the afflicted Tamil region provided an opportunity for the group to wean itself off of a reliance on government funds to finance welfare spending in the north and east.¹⁴⁶ Before the tsunami, in January 2004, the LTTE established a Planning and Development Secretariat (PDS) to coordinate the activities of NGOs that had increased their activities in the north and east after the 2002 cease-fire. The PDS sought to formulate an agenda for economic development for the north and east, and it required that NGOs register with them, submit plans for approval, and find a local partner, which the LTTE hoped would promote capacity building within the north and east.¹⁴⁷

The PDS expanded after the disaster, opening district offices throughout LTTE territory to manage the influx of foreign aid agencies, and it was embraced by the World Bank, who sent representatives to meet with LTTE officials.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, the LTTE insisted that all external aid destined for the north and east be remitted directly to the PDS, which the government adamantly opposed as it would have undermined the sovereign authority of the government to direct the reconstruction response.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, direct control over external aid would have given the group access to a funding source that they could use to break their dependence on the state for the provision of public goods in the north and east.

^f Mampilly noted that the government was aware that state funds were helping finance the LTTE through taxes on civil servants in the north and east, and it regarded this cost as a necessary price to pay to maintain a link to people living in insurgent territory.¹⁴⁵

After the tsunami, the LTTE sought to ensure that it was viewed as the organization with the most effective aid response, and it appears as if the group was successful: evaluations of the post-2004 tsunami relief efforts were nearly universal in their praise for the LTTE-affiliated Tamils Rehabilitation Organization and almost as universal in their condemnation of the bungled government response to the disaster.^{150,s} This success had political ramifications, as it bolstered LTTE claims of being the sovereign political authority over the north and east, to the detriment of the Sri Lankan state.¹⁵¹

Finally, the organization's use of female fighters also provided a source of legitimacy, especially considering the intensity with which patriarchal and caste-based structures restricted women's freedom in Sri Lanka. Driven partly by demographic imperatives, notably the shortage of males eligible for recruitment, the LTTE's employment of female fighters was also a tool in siphoning off support from rival Tamil groups that did not employ women and a direct response to women's demands to be incorporated into the struggle.¹⁵²

MOTIVATION AND BEHAVIOR

The motivation of the LTTE is summarized by the following open letter penned by Prabhakaran to then Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa after the enactment of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1979:

We wish to state clearly and emphatically that we are not a group of amateur armed adventurers roaming in the jungles with romantic illusions, nor are we a band of terrorists or vandals who kill and destroy at random for anarchic reasons...on the contrary, we are revolutionaries committed to revolutionary political practice . . . we are the armed vanguard of the struggling masses, the freedom fighters of the oppressed. We are not in any way isolated and alienated from the popular masses but immersed in and integrated with the popular will, the collective soul of our nation...in the deluded eyes of your government, our movement appears to be a spectre of terrorism and anarchy. In reality, who are the terrorists? We assert, and we hold that we are right in our assertion, that it is the State... and those who poison the minds of the innocent

^s The cited report includes fifty-seven individual and group interviews with inter-governmental organization and NGO organizers, as well as indigenous civil and religious authorities.

Sinhala masses with racial fanaticism and chauvinism who are the real terrorists...we are fighting for a noble cause, the freedom of the oppressed nation. The revolutionary process towards national liberation and socialism will be long and arduous. Yet we are convinced that no force on earth, however repressive it may be, can stop the revolutionary struggle we are committed to. Long Live Tamil Eelam!¹⁵³

With these words, Prabhakaran thereby sought to situate the movement within a broader context of a liberation movement similar to, say, the Palestinian Liberation Organization or the African National Congress, agitating for self-determination for an oppressed people.

Besides its overarching desire for Tamil Eelam, the LTTE also sought to upend Tamil society by seeking to orchestrate a social revolution that would abolish caste distinctions. One passage from the LTTE publication *Socialist Tamil Eelam* stated:

the nature and structure of economic organization underlying our social system is oppressive and based on social injustice . . . the LTTE is committed to the abolition of all forms of social oppression . . . the caste-system is another social evil that perpetuates inequality and inhumanity. It is an oppressive system inextricably linked to class-structure and based on exploitative economic practice...the LTTE is committed to the total eradication of the caste-system. The institution of an equalitarian socialist economy and the introduction of a revolutionary system of education will pave the way for the elimination of casteism.¹⁵⁴

Although Samaranayake noted that the Tamil militant movement swept up all elements of Tamil society,¹⁵⁵ there were some caste distinctions within the movement. Prabhakaran and many members of the LTTE came from the relatively lower-level *karaiyar*, or fisherman, caste, which may account for the virulent anti-caste orientation of the group,^t

^t Hellmann-Rajanayagam¹⁵⁶ noted that while Prabhakaran had become a legend among Sri Lankan Tamils, many members of high castes maintained equivocal attitudes toward him, as they admired his military prowess but doubted his leadership qualities. Similarly, *vellalars* respect for the LTTE's military capabilities mixed with doubts regarding the group's fitness to rule, as demonstrated in the following passage: "The conservative Jaffna Tamils will not suffer mere teenagers with questionable political ideas and of questionable caste background lording it over them gladly: in Jaffna the high-caste, land-owning vellalars have dominated political life and intend to continue to do so. Yet the LTTE is the group with the widest-ranging caste mix. Thus, Jaffna Tamils might accept them as bodyguards, but not as their rulers. Their leaders will not willingly give up their dominant role to a youthful karaiyar, thought to be inferior to the vellalars."¹⁵⁷

while elite *vellalars* supported PLOTE. Bose noted that the LTTE placed importance on mobilizing youths from lower castes, those from rural backgrounds, and women.¹⁵⁸

The social revolution that the LTTE sought to institute also had profound implications for women. Besides being forced by population pressures to incorporate women into fighting units, the LTTE regarded women as an oppressed segment of a very conservative Tamil society. One passage from the *Socialist Tamil Eelam* stated:

Tamil women . . . are subject to dual modes of oppression, national and social. Tamil women bore the brunt of national oppression and have suffered immensely at the hands of the State terrorists . . . at the same time, Tamil women are also victims of oppression emanating from their own social structure. The notorious dowry system and other forms of male-chauvinist domination that degrade women and deprive them of human dignity are typical features of our repressive social system...the LTTE assures that the dowry system will be legally proscribed, and that equality of status and opportunity for women will be constitutionally guaranteed . . . education will be made compulsory for all girls, and the practice of sexual division of labour will be abolished. Our organization will encourage the formation of a radical women's movement to organize women on a national level and agitate for improvements in their condition.¹⁵⁹

Although it was motivated by such strategic and ideological concerns, the LTTE was not averse to taking tactical actions to advance the material interests of the organization even if such actions did not promote the cause of Eelam in the near term. For instance, once Indian troops were deployed to Sri Lanka in July of 1987 as part of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government both began to see IPKF troops rather than each other as greater threats to their immediate interests. This new perception of threat led the LTTE to form a temporary tactical alliance with the government and also led to the following curious statement by the LTTE deputy at the time, Mahattaya:

Sinhalese and we belong to this island . . . who are the Indians to come and dictate terms . . .? They are aggressors. After they finish with the Tamils, they will turn against the Sinhalese...public opinion . . . (in Tamil Nadu, will demand this.¹⁶⁰

As another example, Korf noted that the LTTE did not take action against Sinhalese settlers and farmers in the eastern town of Dehiwatte, who were encouraged to move into the area as part of a government settlement scheme. These Sinhalese farmers took action against an irrigation tank that negatively impacted local Tamil farmers, yet throughout the late 1990s the LTTE did not take any action against them since they were extracting taxes from both Sinhalese and Tamil farmers in the area.¹⁶¹ Although the desire for Eelam would have motivated the LTTE to clear the area of Sinhalese farmers and settlers, instead the group prioritized its immediate organizational and financial interests even though its inaction in this case did not further the goal for Eelam.

Lastly, Uyangoda noted that, as a result of a string of LTTE military victories over the Sri Lankan government during 1999 to 2001, by the start of the 2002 peace process, the group had begun to see itself as a “regional state” of the “Tamil nation” or a “state in the making” rather than as a mere “non-state actor.”¹⁶² This new self-perception, which followed from a more equilibrated military balance of power, led the group to propose an expansive confederal solution to the conflict in the form of the proposal for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA), which envisioned a coming together of two state entities within a confederation involving substantial self-rule, perhaps akin to the relationship between member countries of the European Union.¹⁶³ In contrast, the Sri Lankan government envisioned a federalist solution whereby autonomy was granted by the state to the Tamil region, and with a dominant component of shared rule.¹⁶⁴ After the inevitable breakdown of talks, some observers laid at least part of the blame on the Sri Lankan government and the international community for failing to recognize the LTTE’s bargaining position resulting from the new military balance of power.¹⁶⁵

Cult of Martyrdom

Although by no means a religious movement, the LTTE actively propagated a “cult of martyrdom” to support recruitment.¹⁶⁶ This incorporated the use of religious symbolism, but it was seldom of an explicitly Hindu variant. Much of the symbolism used Judeo-Christian terminology, including the idea of a “Zion” for the Tamil people and a sort of death and resurrection narrative that constructed the physical Eelam from the bodies of martyred fighters. Elements of mysticism and ceremony were present in the ritual dissemination of cyanide capsules to fighters, as well as in a “planting ceremony” that symbolically transferred a martyr’s impending death into an act of fertilizing the soil of the Eelam.¹⁶⁷ LTTE leaders also substituted the word *thadkodai* (to

give one's self) for *thadkolai* (committing suicide) when discussing suicide missions and emphasized the role of such operations in hastening the establishment of a homeland that would spare Tamil civilians from the hardship of a more lengthy struggle.¹⁶⁸ Some observers believe that the success of the Tiger's suicide missions contributed to a culture that internalized this tactic as part and parcel of the Tamil nationalist movement, suggesting that suicide missions would have continued regardless of their efficacy or the environment of political accommodation.¹⁶⁹

OPERATIONS

Paramilitary

LTTE operations can be roughly separated into four categories: conventional warfare, guerrilla warfare, assassinations, and suicide bombings.¹⁷⁰ As shown in Figure 7-4, overall the group overwhelmingly favored armed assaults and bombings.

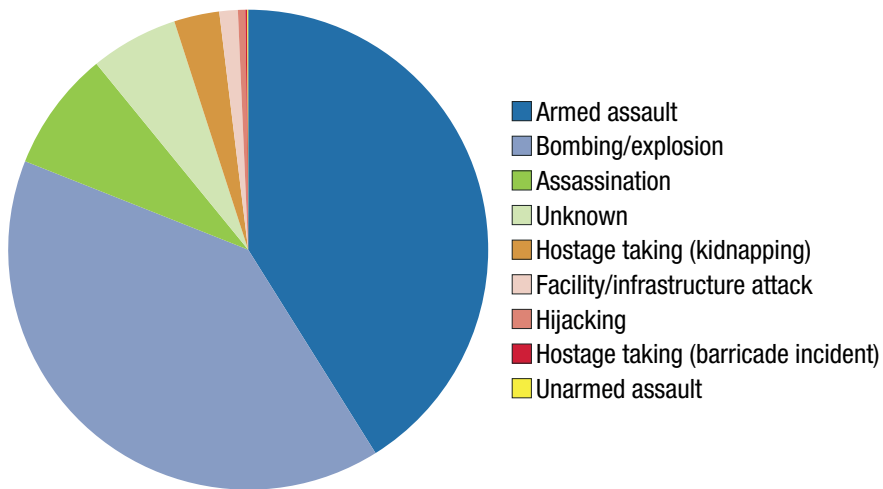


Figure 7-4. LTTE attack types.

Geographically, as shown in Figure 7-5, the group had a strong presence in the north and east of the country, and at one point in 2000 it controlled about seventy-six percent of the territory in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.¹⁷¹ However, its grip on the Eastern Province was weaker, and it effectively lost control of that area for good in 2004 with the defection of the forces of Colonel Karuna.

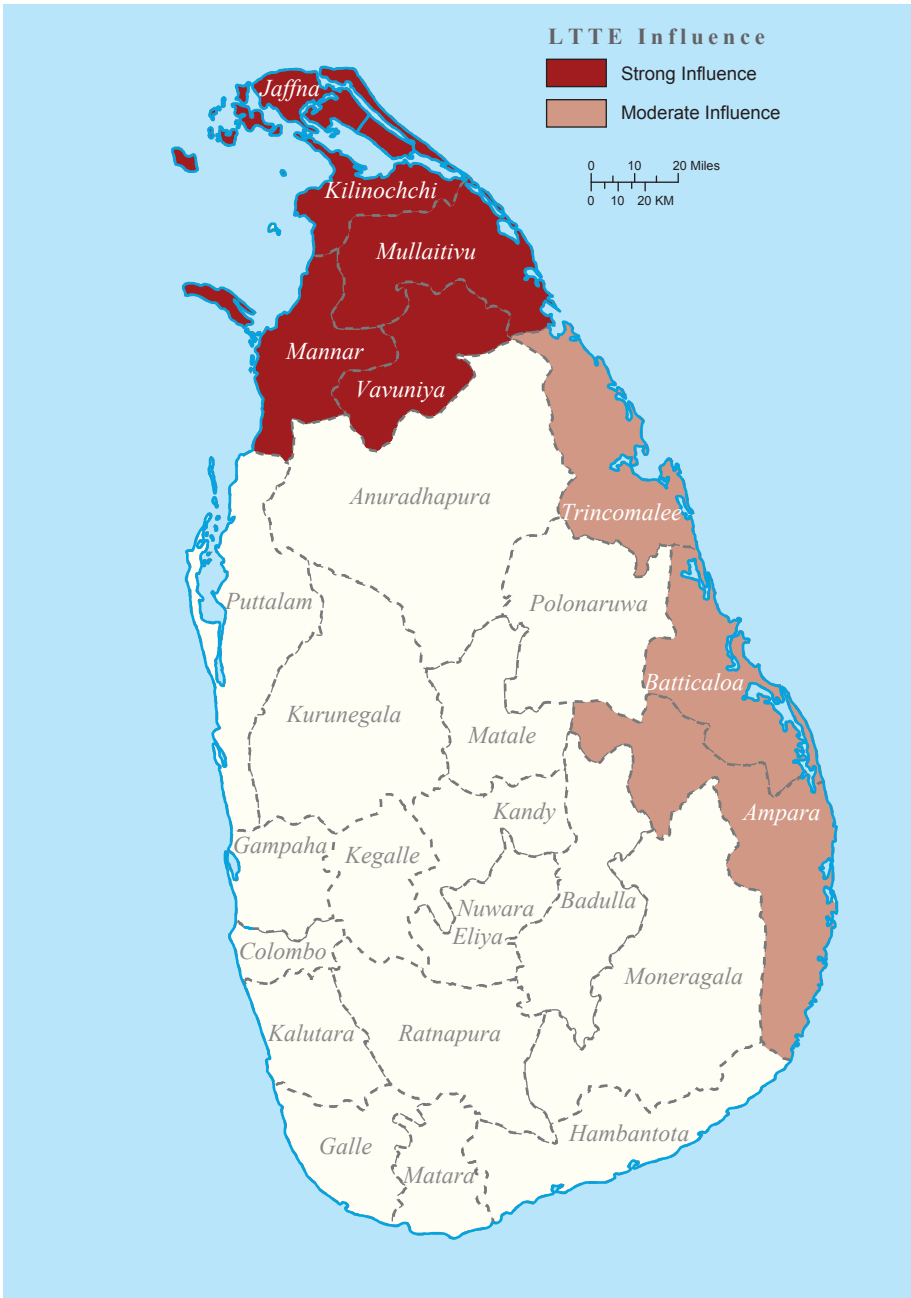


Figure 7-5. LTTE influence map.

In general, LTTE conventional and guerrilla activities were focused on Tamil-dominant areas in the north and the east. LTTE assassinations and suicide bombings took place not only in the north and east but also in government-held areas in the south and west, especially the capital of Colombo. As shown in Figure 7-6, about half of the targets across all four attack categories were security personnel (military

and police), and the group also heavily targeted private citizens and property.

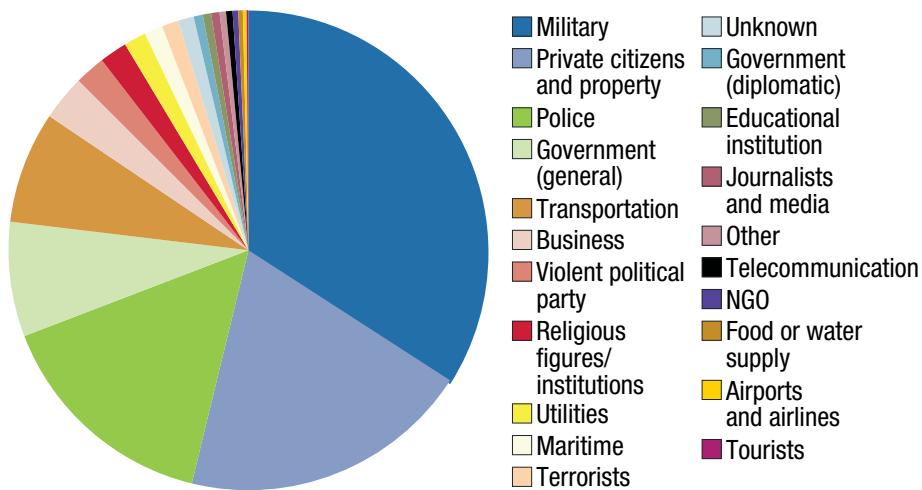


Figure 7-6. LTTE target types.

These assassinations and bombings were carefully selected and planned and were neither haphazard nor simply targets of opportunity. The overwhelming majority of LTTE assassinations targeted government officials; consequently, political officials and police became the group's most predominant victims. Bomb attacks encompassed a wide array of targets with major political, economic, and psychological impact, such as army camps and naval bases, Colombo's international airport, large oil depots, and popular religious structures.

Conventional Warfare

As noted in the *Armed Component* section discussing the LTTE ground forces, Eelam War I was largely waged as an irregular campaign by the group, as was the campaign against the IPKF, yet by the early 1990s, the group began to develop a conventional capability, beginning with the Charles Anthony *padaipirivu*. As shown in Figure 7-7, it was around this time that the pace of operations picked up, with the number of incidents reaching full intensity during the peak years of the various Eelam Wars after 1990.

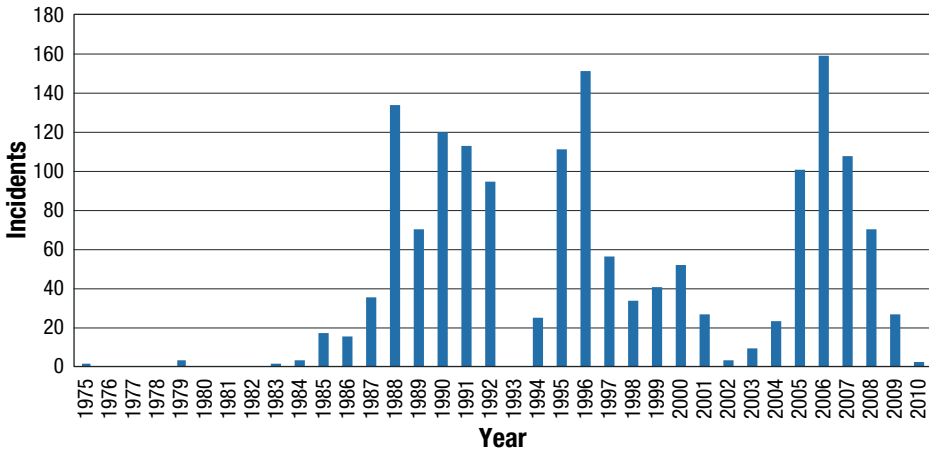


Figure 7-7. LTTE incidents over time.

During Eelam War II, the estimated number of LTTE cadres killed, 6,220, exceeded the number of deaths of government security personnel, estimated at 4,988.¹⁷² However, during the first few years of Eelam War III, this trend reversed itself, as the number of deaths of government security personnel (5,441) exceeded LTTE losses (4,030) from April 19, 1995 to August 10, 1997.¹⁷³ And as previously noted in the *Armed Component* section discussing the LTTE ground forces, by the late 1990s, the group was able to inflict notable conventional defeats on the Sri Lankan military, including during Operation Unceasing Waves III, launched by the group in November 1999, and in the capture of the military base in Elephant Pass in April 2000.

Assassinations

Tactically, the LTTE relied heavily on assassinations of rival Tamil separatists and politicians, as well as police informants. In fact, twenty-four of the thirty-seven high-ranking politicians assassinated by the LTTE were Tamils, and the rest were Sinhalese (nine), Muslim (three), and Indian (one).¹⁷⁴ The first assassination for which Prabhakaran claimed responsibility was that of Alfred Duraiappah, the Tamil mayor of Jaffna and an SLFP member who was killed in 1975.^u Few large operations were carried out by the LTTE between 1977 and 1983, during which time the Tigers killed eleven Tamil politicians, thirteen informants, and sixteen civilians.¹⁷⁵ After the riots of 1983, however, operations and assassinations expanded. Many assassinations attributed to the LTTE were impossible to verify because its practice was to neither

^u This assassination probably took place when the LTTE was still operating as the Tamil New Tigers (TNT)—an organization that Prabhakaran took over after its founder Chetti Thanabalingham was arrested. The TNT under Thanabalingham primarily targeted Tamil collaborators—a characteristic that stuck with the LTTE in subsequent years.

claim nor deny involvement in specific activities, instead pointing to continued paramilitary and police violence against Tamil civilians as contributing to specific assassinations. Some of the suspected LTTE assassinations and attempted eliminations include the following:

- The death of TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) Vice President Neelan Thiruchelvam
- The death of Appapillai Amirthalingam, leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front
- The attempt on then-President Kumaratunga in 1999
- The death of Rajiv Gandhi, whom it was feared would redeploy the highly unpopular IPKF if elected again as prime minister of India, and in whose death Prabhakaran took the unusual step of denying LTTE involvement (although they subsequently admitted responsibility for Gandhi's assassination)
- The death of President Premadasa, who was killed by LTTE suicide bomber Kulaweerasingham Weerakumar, who went by the alias Babu^v
- The death of Lalith Athulathmudali, the minister of education and one-time minister of defense
- The death of Ranjan Wijeratne, Minister of State for Defense
- The death of Lakshman Kadirgamar, a two-time foreign minister and ethnic Tamil. Kadirgamar was a harsh LTTE critic and central to the government's successful efforts to have the LTTE listed as a terrorist organization in the United States and the United Kingdom, a legal step that severely hampered the organization's ability to raise funds.¹⁷⁷ LTTE leaders denied involvement in Kadirgamar's death, as they often did in cases of high-level assassinations, and investigations produced little credible evidence.¹⁷⁸
- The attempt on Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, secretary to the ministry of defense and urban development, in December 2006

Suicide Missions

Suicide missions were also a key component of LTTE tactics. How the organization assimilated the ideas and tactics associated with suicide bombing is of some dispute, but the first attack occurred in 1987,

^v The LTTE leadership, however, explicitly denied involvement in the murder of Premadasa, who was also very unpopular with right-wing Sinhalese parties.¹⁷⁶

four years after the commencement of major hostilities.^w Strategically, suicide operations appear to have been initiated in response to the government's economic blockade that cut off the flow of raw materials to LTTE-controlled areas, rendering the group's weapon caches insufficient to launch conventional attacks against the large concentrations of soldiers stationed in cities in the north and east as part of a stepped-up government offensive. The first suicide attack, on a former Tamil high school in Jaffna that had been turned into a makeshift army camp, involved a vehicle laden with explosives, similar to the attack by Hizbollah against the US Marine barracks in Lebanon four years earlier.^x However, unlike the attack in Lebanon, LTTE regulars were stationed nearby and rushed to the camp after the explosion. Some forty soldiers were killed, and a planned Sri Lankan offensive was scrapped as a result of this preemptive LTTE strike.¹⁸² Analysts disagree as to whether this first mission was intended to be suicidal or the LTTE hierarchy constructed the story of a suicide mission after the operative failed to make it clear of the bomb.¹⁸³ Regardless, the group's commitment to self-immolation was made clear in 1991 when a female Black Tiger (or Freedom Bird, as they were often called) detonated the first concealed suicide vest to assassinate former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

In the LTTE case, the use of suicide missions appears to have depended more on their efficiency—they were estimated to have achieved their instrumental aim eighty percent of the time—than on simple symbolism.¹⁸⁴ Nonetheless, Prabhakaran portrayed suicide missions as a way of achieving a Tamil homeland more quickly and thereby reducing the suffering inflicted on the Tamil population in the long run.¹⁸⁵

Some analysts also believed that in conventional LTTE battles, suicide bomb units would be deployed initially to take out enemy fortifications and breach the lines ahead of an assault by regular forces.¹⁸⁶ Suicide missions against the Sri Lankan army were highly effective, but when India sent in peacekeepers in 1987, their superior numbers and weaponry forced the LTTE to adopt guerrilla-style tactics once more.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, from the mid to late 1990s until the 2002 cease-fire, the Sri Lankan army became increasingly well equipped (benefiting from a market flush with excess Cold War weaponry) and elicited higher

^w Hopgood suggests that this time lapse indicates reservations about the efficacy and appropriateness of suicide bombing within the LTTE's leadership.¹⁷⁹ For a listing and description of LTTE suicide bombings between July 1987 and October 2000, see "Suicide Bomber Detonates Bomb in Colombo 19 Oct, 19 Wounded."¹⁸⁰

^x Swamy claims that the LTTE sent sixteen fighters to be trained by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1983, implying that they certainly would have been familiar with the truck bombing in Lebanon.¹⁸¹

casualty rates from the LTTE, who themselves began to make more extensive use of Black Tiger suicide missions.¹⁸⁸

Naval and Air Suicide Missions

The LTTE also incorporated suicide tactics into naval and air operations (see Figure 7-8). For increased speed and maneuverability, Sea Tigers often used fiberglass boats that were outfitted with penetration rods to puncture the outer hulls of target ships and amplify the shock waves caused by the explosion. Some forty such assaults were carried out between 1990 and 2004, frequently by injured Tiger fighters unable to carry out other operations. Their success dramatically reduced recruitment into the Sri Lankan navy. The government also reported the discovery of seven LTTE airstrips, two that were in frequent use and five that appeared to be emergency landing strips, in the months after the LTTE's 2009 defeat. Interviews with recruits demonstrate that the narratives offered by the LTTE leadership regarding the principles of self-sacrifice were effectively internalized by members of the Black Tigers, who carried laminated cards during missions instructing those who would interfere (in English and Sinhala) that, "I am filled with explosives. If my journey is blocked I will explode it. Let me go."¹⁸⁹ Overall, the LTTE's innovation of the suicide vest; use of female fighters; execution of suicide missions on land, sea, and air; and the use of cyanide pills by captured LTTE fighters contributed greatly to the "elite" image the group cultivated.^y

^y Cyanide capsules were carried in class vials around the neck of fighters, who would bite the glass, thereby lacerating the gums and allowing the poison to quickly enter the bloodstream. The distribution of the vials became a highly ritualized aspect of the recruitment process, and high-ranking members always displayed the vials prominently for photos. Interestingly, Roberts traces the first use of cyanide in the Sri Lankan conflict to the student leader of a small cell who swallowed the poison after a failed assassination attempt in 1974.¹⁹⁰ Hoffman, on the other hand, traces this tactic to an announcement made by Prabhakaran much later in 1983.¹⁹¹



Figure 7-8. A LTTE Sea Tiger fast attack fiberglass boat passing a Sri Lankan freighter sunken by the Sea Tigers just north of the village of Mullaitivu, North-eastern Sri Lanka.

Administrative

Training

Prospective members underwent a fairly grueling training process. Regular personnel first underwent an intensive three-month basic training program where they received instruction in guerrilla warfare, weapons handling, tactics, intelligence and counterintelligence, ambush and camouflage methods, and escape and evasion techniques.¹⁹² They then underwent three months of advanced training, and cadres were selected for more specialized divisions including commandos (special operations),^z the Black Tigers, and the Tigers Organization of Security Intelligence Service (TOSIS). TOSIS personnel were instructed how to eat, act, talk, and think in numerous environments, thereby enabling them to infiltrate a range of institutions, such as a government bureaucracy or a church.¹⁹⁴

Prospective suicide bombers within the Black Tigers were subjected to perhaps the most rigorous training, involving substantial physical endurance and indoctrination sessions.¹⁹⁵ They were also instructed on avoiding detection and where to place themselves and their bombs to maximize destruction. Those who successfully completed this “death course” were subjected to intense security, with their identity known only to those at the highest levels of the LTTE leadership.¹⁹⁶

^z Chalk noted that Sri Lankan special forces personnel admitted that the LTTE’s advanced commando training was probably more mentally and physically demanding than their own.¹⁹³

All prospective personnel were continually assessed and monitored during basic and advanced training, with performance assessments detailing their strengths and weaknesses stored within a central database known as “Zero-Zero Station.” After training, full-time personnel were assigned different tasks, such as political propaganda or social welfare, depending on their interests and capabilities.¹⁹⁷ However, they were required to participate in military actions if called on by a regional commander.

Membership and Recruitment

LTTE membership (1) was made up of essentially ethnic Tamils; (2) was overwhelmingly Hindu, although there were some Christians; (3) was mostly very young, except for a number of long-surviving members; and (4) included primarily members of the *karaiyar* caste, although some were drawn from the *vellalar* caste. Geographically, members were drawn primarily from the Tamil population in the north, but also from the east.¹⁹⁸ There are also indications that a small percentage of Muslims and Indian Tamils participated in LTTE activities.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, the LTTE inner core was composed mainly of *karaiyar* caste members from the area around Valvettiturai.²⁰⁰ This corresponded to Prabhakaran’s reported vision of the LTTE in its early years as a very small, closely integrated group of professional and well-disciplined fighters.²⁰¹

Many of the LTTE’s recruitment activities were essentially passive, with their ranks swelled by indiscriminate bombing campaigns.²⁰² The island’s large number of well-educated yet unemployed or underemployed youth provided a reserve of radicalized opposition, as did the families who were targeted for persecution by local Sinhalese security forces, on whom the Tigers often focused their recruitment efforts.^{aa} In addition to this latent source of fighters, the LTTE did engage in active recruitment, with varying degrees of voluntarism and conscription.^{ab} Human Rights Watch noted that the LTTE routinely visited Tamil homes to inform parents that they must provide a child to the organization,²⁰⁶ a policy probably linked to the group’s 1999 attempt to establish a Universal People’s Militia that would impose military training on anyone over the age of fifteen living in LTTE-controlled territory.²⁰⁷

^{aa} Hoffman cites interviews with local NGO workers and militants, all of whom identify abuse by the Sinhalese security forces as the primary motivating factor behind joining the LTTE.²⁰³

^{ab} Hellmann-Rajanayagam noted, however, that the LTTE did sometimes demand money from families who were keen to keep their children out of the movement.²⁰⁴ Additionally, she noted that many middle-class families attempted to first send their sons to Colombo and then overseas so that they did not wind up joining the LTTE.²⁰⁵

Women in the LTTE

Historically, women in Tamil society were viewed as living within “a highly patriarchal and caste-ridden Hindu cultural ethos” and, thus, secondary in importance and status to men.²⁰⁸ Even during the early years of the Eelam Wars, women were popularly perceived as “victims” in the armed conflict, an image fueled by the brutal rapes of several Tamil women by government and IPKF soldiers in the late 1980s.²⁰⁹ By the mid-1980s, however, the position and role of Tamil women underwent rapid and significant change. Women began to achieve social, political, and military equality. As one observer reported on the basis of a first-hand conversation:

Women who suffer domestic violence and are physically abused by their spouses could complain to the LTTE cadres who take appropriate action. At the first complaint the abusive spouse is given a warning, on the second he is fined, and if there is a third complaint he might end up in the LTTE’s jail.²¹⁰

The same observer went on to note that, even outside of marriage, women were gaining new prestige. For example, they could sit on LTTE local courts and arbitrate local disputes.

Likewise, the organization’s use of female fighters also provided a source of legitimacy, especially considering the intensity with which patriarchal and caste-based structures restricted women’s freedom in Sri Lanka. Driven partly by demographic imperatives, notably the shortage of males eligible for recruitment, the LTTE’s employment of female fighters was also a tool in siphoning off support from rival Tamil groups that did not employ women and a direct response to women’s demands to be incorporated into the struggle.²¹¹

Female Tigers (many of whom constituted the all-female fighting unit known as the Freedom Birds) proved to be as eager and as lethal as their male counterparts. Stack-O’Connor noted that women constituted thirty-three percent of the ranks of the Black Tigers, and as mentioned in *Chapter 3. Historical Context*, during a morning raid in September 1999, the Freedom Birds “systematically cut and chopped to death” Sinhalese villagers and torched houses in revenge for a Sri Lankan air force bombing that killed twenty-two Tamils.²¹²

Stack-O’Connor also surmised that demographic pressures in the mid-to-late 1980s led the LTTE to incorporate women into combat roles. Between 1982 and 1987, the LTTE was estimated to have lost about eight percent of its (male) fighters, while the Sri Lankan government had instituted a draft in 1985 and India deployed the IPKF in July 1987.²¹³ The LTTE also lagged behind other Tamil separatist groups

that incorporated women into their operations much earlier, owing in part to the other groups' explicit Marxist orientation and the tenets of gender equality within the Marxist dogma.^{ac}

Child Soldiers and Shields

Like women members of the LTTE, children, referred to as Tiger Cubs, were brought into the LTTE during the First Eelam War. They received military training in India at the age of sixteen and were formed into their own brigade. However, after heavy troop losses in 1987, the child soldiers were integrated into the regular units with older soldiers.

The issue concerning the use of child soldiers by the LTTE is highly politicized, and it is unclear to what extent children were incorporated into LTTE operations. In the absence of other sources of data on child soldiers, most studies rely on assessments from the Directorate of Military Intelligence. These statistics report incredibly high numbers of child soldiers, with recruitment and fatality rates of fighters under eighteen years of age as high as sixty percent.²¹⁵ Other sources identify child soldiers as an elite unit within the LTTE, citing a 1997 battle between the Leopard Brigade (LTTE orphans) and a commando unit from the army that ended with 200 army casualties.²¹⁶

Psychological

The LTTE used newspapers, journals, magazines, books, pamphlets, songs, poems, and plays to spread its message.²¹⁷ One of its magazines, *Tamil Eelam*, included accounts of IPKF atrocities, and some of the personal letters it published verged on worship of Prabhakaran as a hero.²¹⁸ In the newspaper *Viravenkai (Brave Tiger)*, questions from sympathizers in Sri Lanka and India were answered by the group. The LTTE also answered questions from sympathizers in the English-language paper *Tamil Voice International*, and Kittu, Prabhakaran's one-time second in command, edited a question and answer column in *Erimalai*, in which he expanded on the aims of the LTTE.²¹⁹

The group's international secretariat played a prominent role in disseminating propaganda. The LTTE developed a sophisticated and extensive international operation whose messaging emphasized three key themes:²²⁰

- Tamils are the innocent victims of a government dominated by the Sinhalese.

^{ac} Gender equality was much more a feature of Marxist-Leninist groups, such as the PLOTE and EPRLF, than it was of the LTTE, with its more ethno-national platform.²¹⁴

- Sri Lankan Tamils are subjected to constant discrimination and military oppression.
- Tamils can never peacefully coexist with the Sinhalese within a unitary state.

These themes were distributed through an extensive global distribution channel. By mid-1998, the LTTE had established offices and cells in forty countries.²²¹ It had an important presence in countries with large diasporas, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, and Australia, and it also established a presence in more far-flung locales, including Botswana, Mozambique, and Liberia.^{222,223} The group's main international front organization was the World Tamil Movement, which was established in 1983 and provided a number of services and programs, including newsletters in Tamil and English, cultural and religious programs, and news and music programs over the radio. Additionally, it had separate divisions for students and women, as well as an academy to promote Tamil art and technology.²²⁴ The LTTE's foreign cells received daily faxes featuring selective battlefield reports to be disseminated to a foreign audience. The LTTE also put out videos, pamphlets, and calendars detailing the results of government strikes against LTTE strongholds,²²⁵ as well as footage of Black Sea Tiger suicide attacks against Sri Lankan naval ships and dramatizations of successful operations.²²⁶ Most LTTE international propaganda was conducted through sympathetic pressure groups, including the Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations, the Swiss Federation of Tamil Associations, the French Federation of Tamil Associations, the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils, the Ilankai Tamil Sangam in the United States, the Tamil Coordinating Committee in Norway, and the International Federation of Tamils in the United Kingdom.²²⁷

Through its international propaganda campaign, the group was able to win the support of a number of prominent international NGOs, including the Canadian Relief Organization for Peace in Sri Lanka, the International Educational Development Inc., the World Council of Churches, the Australian Human Rights Foundation, the International Human Rights Group, the International Federation of Journalists, Pax Romana, the International Peace Bureau, the International Human Rights Law Group, and the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights.²²⁸

The United Kingdom served as the nerve center of its international operations. The LTTE's international secretariat was established in England in 1984,²²⁹ and Gunaratna estimated that the LTTE maintained forty to fifty front organizations in the United Kingdom.²³⁰ Some of these organizations, as well as pro-LTTE organizations, included the

Tamil Information Center at Tamil House in London, the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization in London, and the International Federation of Tamils (IFT) in Surrey.²³¹ The IFT published several journals, including *Network* and *Kalathil* (in Tamil). Other United Kingdom-based LTTE publications included *Viduthalai Puligal* and *Tamil Land*. Also, an LTTE front organization in London published the journal *Hot Spring*, which had previously just been published in the Jaffna peninsula.²³² Gunaratna estimated that throughout the North Atlantic region, there was at one time more than forty Sri Lankan newspapers, eighty percent of which were managed by either the LTTE or a front organization.²³³

The LTTE was successful in securing several notable public relations victories. For instance, the Tamil community in Boston succeeded in having the lower house of the Massachusetts state legislature pass a resolution on May 9, 1979, in support of Tamil Eelam. Michael Dukakis, the then-governor of the state, declared May 22, 1979, which was the anniversary of the Sri Lankan government's proscription of the LTTE, as "Eelam Tamils' Day."²³⁴ And in July 1996, the group managed to secure from Nelson Mandela a letter of congratulations to an LTTE front organization in Australia.²³⁵

Political

In late 1986, the LTTE established the Tamil Eelam People's Organization (TEPO), a political party whose main task was to inform the Tamil public regarding political developments in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.²³⁶ It does not appear as if TEPO participated in any elections, although in late 1989 and early 1990 there emerged the possibility that the LTTE would participate in the political process.

Specifically, by the spring of 1989, both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government shared a mutual interest in seeing Indian troops leave Sri Lanka. The disillusionment with the Indo-Lanka Accord and the introduction of Indian troops was used as a mobilizing tool by the JVP, and the LTTE saw the IPKF as an impediment to the goal of an independent state. This convergence of interests led to a series of meetings between the government (involving President Premadasa at times) and the LTTE beginning in May 1989, as well as a cease-fire and a rapprochement between the two parties.

During this juncture, the LTTE wanted to at least appear as if it was committed to the peace process, and so on the insistence of Premadasa, the PFLT, the group's political wing, participated in an all-party conference, where it sought a repeal of the sixth amendment to the constitution (which prescribed severe penalties for those advocating a separate state) and the dissolution of the North-East Provincial Council, which

was ruled by the EPRLF (see below).²³⁷ The LTTE argued that the sixth amendment prevented the group from participating in elections, and while Premadasa understood the LTTE's reasoning, he maintained suspicions regarding the group's interest in seeing the repeal of the amendment.²³⁸ Premadasa insisted that the group surrender its arms before repealing the amendment, a demand that the group refused. The LTTE wound up not participating in any subsequent elections,^{ad} and in June 1990, both sides returned to the battlefield.

Although it did not participate in the political process, the group did undertake a number of politically motivated acts. For instance, it regarded Tamil moderates as a collection of sellouts and careerists who needed to be eliminated, because if their attempts at reaching a solution short of Eelam were successful, then LTTE members who had been killed in the fight for independence would have died in vain. Prominent Tamil politicians assassinated by the group include Appapillai Amirthalingam, the leader of the TULF, and Neelan Tiruchelvam, a TULF parliamentarian who was the architect of a government peace initiative in the mid-1990s.

The group also took efforts to disrupt elections in the areas it controlled. The Indo-Lanka Accord of July 1987 called for the establishment of the North-East Provincial Council (NEPC), and by the time the election for the council was held in 1988, open combat had emerged between the LTTE and the IPKF. To counter the LTTE, India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the country's foreign intelligence agency, had established strong links with the EPRLF, TELO, and the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF).^{ac} These groups became known as the "three stars," and RAW began to integrate these three groups into its military and political activities.²⁴¹ Amidst allegations of electoral improprieties,²⁴² the EPRLF and ENDLF won slightly more than fifty percent of the seats to the NEPC. To disrupt the elections, the LTTE issued death threats throughout the north and east, which may explain why none of the 22,000 election officials assigned to administer the poll showed up to work.²⁴³ In response, the IPKF was

^{ad} It should be noted, however, that in December 2001 the LTTE had something akin to political representation in parliament. Before the December 2001 parliamentary elections, the TULF, EPRLF, TELO, and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress formed the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which supported the view that the LTTE should represent the Tamils in negotiations with the government. This led some to speculate that the TNA would invite suicide bombers to sit within parliament.²³⁹

^{ac} After the signing of the accord, these three groups, along with PLOTE and EROS, had abandoned their support for secession and agreed to work within the framework of a unified state. As a result, their interests were more aligned with those of India, who favored Tamil autonomy within a unified state rather than an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka.²⁴⁰

forced to fly in election officials from India and work at many of the election posts.²⁴⁴

The LTTE also “dissuaded” Tamil voters from participating in the November 2005 presidential election between Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe. This action likely contributed to Rajapaksa’s slim victory over the more moderate Wickremasinghe, as the latter would have likely won the Tamil vote, given his prominent role in the February 2002 cease-fire agreement and the ensuing peace process. Smith noted that the LTTE may have preferred a more hard-line candidate less willing to offer concessions, as Wickremasinghe may have been more willing to offer a settlement short of independence that was acceptable to Sinhalese voters and the international community but unacceptable to the LTTE, Tamil nationalists, and members of the diaspora.²⁴⁵ If this was indeed the case, then the group badly miscalculated, as it was under Rajapaksa’s rule that the LTTE was finally defeated in a brutal military campaign that resulted in the death of thousands of LTTE cadres and Tamil civilians.

Additionally, as discussed in more detail in the *Government Countermeasures* chapter, the group engaged in a number of negotiations with both the Sri Lankan and Indian governments. Sadly, none of these efforts led to a lasting peace between the group and the Sri Lankan government.

EXTERNAL ACTORS AND TRANSNATIONAL INFLUENCES

Relations with India

Without a doubt, the Indian government was the most influential external actor in the LTTE insurgency, and without Indian assistance and involvement in the 1980s, the Sri Lankan government would likely have militarily crushed the Tamil insurgent movement in the 1980s. There are several factors that led India to become actively involved in the conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. First and foremost, latent desire for Tamil independence within India itself in Tamil Nadu was still a factor despite the passage in 1963 of the sixteenth amendment to the Indian constitution, which banned secessionist parties and the promotion of secession. In 1982, Indian intelligence reported to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi that the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M. G. Ramachandran, and M. Karunanidhi, the leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), one of the main ethnically based political parties in Tamil Nadu, were overtly sympathizing and covertly supporting Tamil militants in Sri Lanka.²⁴⁶ India feared

that a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka would lead Tamil Nadu and its fifty-five million inhabitants to secede from the India and create *Dravida Desam*, an ethnocratic state for Tamils, in conjunction with the detached Tamil areas of Sri Lanka.²⁴⁷

Electoral concerns also motivated Indira Gandhi. Even if secessionist impulses didn't ultimately manifest themselves in Tamil Nadu, Gandhi was concerned about the popularity of her party, the Congress (I) Party, in south India. In the 1977 Indian general election, Congress (I) did poorly in north India but retained its support in southern India.²⁴⁸ Hence, Indira had to be sensitive to opinion in Tamil Nadu, which was sympathetic to the plight of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. This sensitivity even extended to entertaining pleas from Ramachandran after the July 1983 riots for an Indian intervention in Sri Lanka along the lines of the Indian intervention in East Pakistan in 1971, which led to the creation of Bangladesh.²⁴⁹

Concerns regarding Sri Lanka's foreign policy also motivated enhanced Indian interest in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. Gandhi had a strong personal relationship with Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, as both favored nonalignment abroad and social democratic policies at home. Yet the election of J. R. Jayewardene in 1977 led to a souring of the bilateral relationship. Gandhi and Jayewardene did not enjoy a good personal relationship, and Gandhi was troubled by Jayewardene's tilt toward the United States and the West, as India at this time was a Soviet ally. Jayewardene's reorientation of Sri Lanka's foreign policy revived long-standing Indian fears that an outside power (i.e., the United States) would be permitted to station naval forces in the highly coveted deepwater port of Trincomalee, which would thereby limit India's diplomatic and military room for maneuver in a region it considered as its own "backyard."²⁵⁰

These factors led Gandhi to decide in August 1983 to covertly support Tamil militant groups through India's RAW agency, which is India's foreign intelligence agency, while at the same time play a mediating role between Sri Lankan Tamils and the central government in Colombo.²⁵¹ RAW training of LTTE members began in late 1983, with 1,351 cadres trained by mid-1985, and an estimated 649 more members were trained over the next two years.²⁵² Initial training occurred in Bangalore and Uttar Pradesh, and training occurred elsewhere in India as well.²⁵³ The LTTE was also able to establish training camps in Tamil Nadu, where LTTE members, including Prabhakaran, led the training as instructors.²⁵⁴ Additionally, as discussed below in the *Finances and Armaments* section, the LTTE established an underground procurement network in Tamil Nadu, and one armament factory in

Coimbatore (in Tamil Nadu) produced 5,000 grenades a day for the group until it was shut down in August 1992.²⁵⁵

RAW also took an active role in training other Tamil militant groups. After RAW trained seventy PLOTE cadres (along with members of TELO, EROS, and EPRLF), PLOTE established its own camps throughout Tamil Nadu, including six in the Thanjuvar District, four in Madurai, and five in the Puthukottai District.²⁵⁶ RAW also trained 350 TELO members, including leader Sri Sabaratnam, in two camps in north India and another near the airport in New Delhi.²⁵⁷ The group went on to establish its own camps in Tamil Nadu. Gunaratna estimated that within a year of Indira's policy directive, thirty-two Sri Lankan training camps were established in Tamil Nadu,²⁵⁸ and overall, by early 1987, 2,000 LTTE cadres, 8,000 PLOTE members, 1,500 EPRLF cadres, 1,250 EROS cadres, and 1,500 TELO members were trained in north and south India.²⁵⁹

The LTTE also established strong links with political parties in Tamil Nadu. It had a strong relationship with the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) Party and its leader, M. G. Ramachandran.²⁶⁰ As chief minister of Tamil Nadu and in a personal capacity, Ramachandran contributed 200 million Indian rupees to the LTTE from 1983 to 1987.²⁶¹ Once Ramachandran died in 1987, the relationship with AIADMK waned, and the LTTE began to develop a strong relationship with the DMK (the AIADMK was an offshoot of the DMK formed by Ramachandran in 1972) and its leader M. Karunanidhi.²⁶² Karunanidhi was a supporter of Tamil Eelam but was not well disposed toward Prabhakaran.²⁶³ However, the LTTE appeared to have endeared itself to the DMK leader with a forty-million Indian rupee contribution toward Karunanidhi,^{af} and Gunaratna asserted that the group financed one of Karunanidhi's election campaigns.²⁶⁵

India escalated its role in the conflict in early June 1987 once it appeared that the Sri Lankan government was on the verge of defeating the LTTE. The government had launched Operation Liberation on May 26, 1987. By the 29th, it had captured Velvettiturai, Prabhakaran's hometown, and the important city of Vadamarachchi, which curtailed the LTTE's access to Tamil Nadu.²⁶⁶ At this point, it appeared as if the rest of the Jaffna peninsula would fall with the LTTE defeated. Facing

^{af} Gunaratna noted that the LTTE's relationship with Karunanidhi provided the group, at times, with warning of Indian operations to be taken against the group. Specifically, after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, intelligence agencies in New Delhi reached a decision regarding anti-LTTE operations. This decision was relayed to the group within twenty-four hours by the Tamil Nadu Home Secretary at the instruction of Karunanidhi.²⁶⁴

pressure to intervene, Rajiv Gandhi^{ag} responded by sending a flotilla of twenty boats with relief supplies to the Jaffna peninsula, which was turned back by the Sri Lankan navy. In a show of force that hinted at a military intervention, on June 4, India air-dropped twenty-two tons of relief supplies on the Jaffna peninsula, and after a round of shuttle diplomacy, Sri Lanka was forced to agree to the Indo-Lanka Accord in July 1987.

The accord called for the following measures to occur:²⁶⁷

- A cease-fire was to come into effect, with all Tamil militant groups to surrender their arms within seventy-two hours of the signing of the accord and enter the political process.
- The Sri Lankan government was to allow the Northern and Eastern Province to merge, with the residents of the latter to decide through a referendum whether this arrangement was permanent.
- The government would introduce legislation establishing a system of provincial councils to which power would be devolved.
- India would not allow its territory to be used by Tamil militants and would acknowledge the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

The EPRLF, TELO, PLOTE, ENDLF, and EROS acknowledged the accord and dropped their demand for secession.²⁶⁸ The LTTE ultimately did not accept the accord because acceptance would have required giving up on its dream of Tamil Eelam. Yet while domestic pressures and irritation at Sri Lanka's foreign policy motivated India to assist the Tamils, an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka was otherwise unacceptable, as it may have led to *Dravida Dessam* and potentially encouraged other secessionist movements in India, such as those being waged in Assam and Kashmir, and the movement by Sikh separatists to establish the independent state of Khalistan in the Indian Punjab.

The inevitable outbreak of hostilities between the LTTE and IPKF occurred in October 1987 with the suicide of thirteen LTTE cadres after they were captured at sea by the Sri Lankan navy. The IPKF launched Operation PAWAN (i.e., "Wind"), and for the next two and a half years the IPKF would wage a counterinsurgency campaign against the LTTE that saw the total number of Indian troops in Sri Lanka exceed 100,000. By 1989, there were a total of four Indian divisions in Sri Lanka, with the 54th air assault division in charge of the Jaffna peninsula, the 4th infantry division responsible for the Vavuniya sector, the 36th infantry division in charge of Trincomalee sector, and the 57th mountain division responsible for the Batticaloa sector.

^{ag} Rajiv assumed office in 1984 once his mother Indira was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards.

During this time, the LTTE lost control of the Jaffna peninsula, and as a result it waged a guerrilla campaign against the IPKF from bases in the jungles of Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, and Ampara Districts.²⁶⁹ The IPKF's counterinsurgency campaign was assisted by the EPRLF, TELO, and the ENDLF, who assisted with tracing LTTE supporters and networks, identifying and interrogating LTTE supporters, and accompanying the IPKF on patrols in the jungles in search of LTTE members.²⁷⁰ For their part, the LTTE at every available opportunity attacked the IPKF from close proximity to Tamil civilians in order to provoke a counterattack that resulted in the death of Tamil noncombatants.²⁷¹ For instance, one LTTE ambush of an IPKF patrol in August 1989 generated an Indian response that resulted in fifty-one deaths, seventy injuries, and extensive property damage.²⁷²

By early 1989, a stalemate emerged between the IPKF and the LTTE. Although the LTTE could not defeat the IPKF, the latter could not destroy the capacity of the LTTE to wage guerilla warfare. The IPKF would eventually leave Sri Lanka in March 1990, but they left behind two militias, the CVF and the TNA, to protect the North-East Provincial Council against LTTE attacks. Both were destroyed by the LTTE, who returned to the battlefield in Eelam War II against the government later in 1990. The IPKF episode had a tragic denouement, as the LTTE assassinated Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991 over concerns that he would reintroduce Indian troops into Sri Lanka if he were reelected as prime minister.

Relations with Other Militant Groups

The LTTE made contact with a number of other terrorist and insurgent movements. Before leaving the LTTE and founding PLOTE, Uma Maheswaran, along with an EROS cadre, trained in Lebanon with Fatah, the military wing of the Palestinian Liberation Organization.^{ah} Interestingly, more than one hundred PLOTE and EPRLF cadres trained in Lebanon's Bekka Valley from 1984 to 1986 with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and during Operation Peace for Galilee,

^{ah} The training in Lebanon originated from EROS contacts with the PLO representative in London. Once he took up residence in London, the founder of EROS, Eliyathamby Ratnasabapathy, formed the General Union of Eelam Students (GUES), which was modeled after the General Union of Palestinian Students. GUES served as the student wing of EROS. Ratnasabapathy was a supporter of the Palestinians, and he developed a strong relationship with Sayed Hamami, the PLO representative in London. Before Hamami was assassinated by the Israelis, he helped Ratnasabapathy develop a link with Fatah, who offered training to EROS members. EROS sent one cadre to Lebanon for training and shared this offer with the LTTE, who sent Uma.²⁷³

Israeli forces in southern Lebanon captured two Tamil insurgents who were fighting with their Palestinian trainers against the Israelis.²⁷⁴

Gunaratna notes that the LTTE established relationships with a number of insurgent groups, including Hezb-i-Islami, which formed one of the main Afghan groups that fought the Soviets.²⁷⁵ Allegedly, the LTTE established a link with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, and it has maintained links with a number of other groups, including the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) of Namibia, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front of Ethiopia, and the New People's Army of the Philippines.^{276,277} It also established links with the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). One senior-level LTTE official was invited to attend the inauguration of the Kurdish parliament-in-exile in Brussels, and both groups invited the other's activists to attend political and cultural events.²⁷⁸ Additionally, as noted in the following section, this relation appears to have involved the LTTE acquisition of weapons from the PKK.

FINANCES AND ARMAMENTS

In its early years, similar to other Tamil groups, the LTTE raised funds through robberies, extortion, and donations,²⁷⁹ and over time the organization developed a sophisticated and diversified revenue stream. By the mid-1990s, the LTTE was able to raise approximately eighty million dollars per year, although this total declined after the group was listed as a terrorist organization by a number of countries^{ai} and after the increase in scrutiny of money transfers to terrorist organizations after the September 11 attacks.²⁸¹

As discussed in the *Legitimacy* section, domestically the group was able to extract a variety of taxes from the Tamil population in the north and east, including property taxes, as well as taxes on manufacturers, service providers, farmers, and fishers. It also raised revenue through vehicle registration fees and taxes on property transactions, as well as through custom fees on goods brought into LTTE territory. Internationally, contributions from the Tamil diaspora (see the following section) also allowed the group to raise funds through investments in gas stations, restaurants, grocery stores, farms, real estate, stock and money

^{ai} Beginning with India in 1992, the LTTE would eventually be listed as a terrorist organization by a number of countries. These were mostly in the West, including the United States (1997), the United Kingdom (2000), and Canada (2006), as well as the European Union (2006). In the US action, LTTE members were denied visas to visit the United States and, more crippling, LTTE assets were frozen and further fund-raising activities were banned.²⁸⁰

markets, finance companies, phone card companies, the gold trade, and export-import businesses.²⁸² Additionally, the revenue collected by the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization, the rehabilitation wing of the LTTE, was also used to procure weapons, a fact that was well known among its donors.²⁸³ There are also allegations that the group profited from narcotics trafficking.^{aj}

Overseas Tamil Support

The LTTE was able to raise a substantial amount of revenue from overseas to finance its war budget. Gunaratna estimated that after the loss of the Jaffna peninsula in early 1996, sixty percent of the group's war budget was generated abroad.²⁸⁶ Citing discussions with Sri Lankan intelligence and government officials, Chalk placed this figure at ninety to ninety-five percent.²⁸⁷

A significant amount of the group's financing came from the large Tamil expatriate community, especially those contingents in Western countries (Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, and Scandinavia) but also those living in the Indian province of Tamil Nadu. Indeed, many analysts identify the overseas Tamil communities as the single most important actors enabling the insurgency.²⁸⁸ A 2001 United Nations estimate put the Tamil expatriate community at 817,000,²⁸⁹ while another source estimated that one-third (or about one million) of the population of Sri Lankan Tamils were living overseas as of 2002.²⁹⁰ The early waves of migration were dominated by more economically mobile, often English-speaking, Tamils fleeing the government's discriminatory regime. The later waves, especially those that came after the 1983 riots, arrived in their new homelands having experienced much greater violence. This 1983 experience, as well as the difficulty they encountered in assimilating to their new countries, contributed to their willingness to support the separatist movement.

Chalk noted the following monthly totals were raised abroad: \$800,000 per month from Canada, \$500,000 per month from Scandinavia, \$390,000 per month from the United Kingdom, \$250,000 per month from Australia, and \$200,000 per month from the United States.²⁹¹ Expatriate support included voluntary contributions from individuals and Tamil-owned businesses, as well as extortion.²⁹² Collection methods evolved over time, from poorly coordinated, often violent, acts

^{aj} Gunaratna noted that it was believed that the LTTE ships transported heroin from Myanmar to Europe.²⁸⁴ Chalk noted that the Mackenzie Institute, a nonprofit research group based in Toronto, claimed that the LTTE profited significantly from heroin trafficking. However, Chalk also noted that definitive proof connecting the LTTE to an official policy of drug running had yet to materialize (as of 2003).²⁸⁵

of coercion to scheduled collections based on computerized databases that allowed overseas collectors to avoid paying visits to individuals who supported rival Tamil groups or who were already regular contributors.²⁹³ The collection schedule was similarly regimented on a monthly or annual basis; additional collections were made according to special dates commemorating specific battles or individual “martyrs.”²⁹⁴

Armaments

Before the Indo-Lanka Accord in July 1987, the LTTE obtained most of its weapons from four sources: (1) Afghanistan, through the Indo-Pakistani border, (2) India, (3) domestic production,^{ak} and (4) munitions captured from the Sri Lankan military.²⁹⁷ Many of the weapons acquired from Afghanistan appear to have been provided by the United States to the Afghan Mujahideen, who were at that time fighting to oust the Soviets from Afghanistan.²⁹⁸ Additionally, the accord forced India to end its sponsorship of Tamil militant groups, who before that time had received weapons and training from India. However, the LTTE was able to set up an extensive procurement network in Tamil Nadu. A number of towns and villages served as focal points for procuring and transporting supplies, including Dharmapuri, which was the LTTE’s main center for procuring explosives; Coimbatore, which was the LTTE’s arms, ammunition, and explosives manufacturing center; the Vedaranyam coast, from which most of the supplies from India to Jaffna were shipped; Tuticorin, which served as a smuggling port for the LTTE; and Tiruch, where LTTE cadres went for medical treatment.²⁹⁹

Once the accord was signed, RAW halted its supplies to the LTTE, although the group was still able to procure arms and supplies on its own from India. After hostilities broke out between the LTTE and the IPKF, the former was able to secure supplies after victories over the CVF and the TNA, the two Indian proxies stood up by the NEPC and the IPKF to deal with the inevitable LTTE backlash once the IPKF left Sri Lanka.³⁰⁰ Although they were led by experienced military cadres from TELO, ENDLF, and EPRLF, both militias were overwhelmed by the LTTE, who captured truckloads of arms and ammunition that departing Indian troops had given to the TNA and CVF.³⁰¹

As described in the *Auxiliary* section, the KP Department played an important role in procuring weapons from abroad. The LTTE

^{ak} Chalk noted that the LTTE developed a sophisticated short-range missile capability by 1990.²⁹⁵ Additionally, he noted that the group was believed to have the capacity to manufacture at least four types of maritime attack craft. The group also made extensive use of improvised explosive devices (often explosive-laden petrol cans equipped with tripwires) and was recognized internationally as experts in using these devices.²⁹⁶

searched far afield for arms and munitions, particularly after India and RAW began to crack down on the LTTE after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.^{al} For instance, in August 1994, an LTTE freighter left the Ukrainian port of Kikoleyev with sixty tons of RDX and TNT acquired from the Rubezone Chemicals plant.^{am} It was also believed to have acquired Soviet-made SAM-7s from corrupt officials and insurgents in Cambodia, and intelligence sources in Colombo believed that the group acquired more sophisticated US Stinger-class missiles from the PKK in 1996.³⁰⁴ The LTTE also approached Rosboronoeexport, the Russian state-owned defense export company, in Laos to acquire surface-to-air missiles, small arms and light weapons, and communications equipment.³⁰⁵

Thailand also played a pivotal role in the LTTE's international procurement effort. Many weapons were acquired from Khmer Rouge members selling equipment in Thailand, with weapons shipped from the Andaman coast across the Bay of Bengal to Sri Lanka, and the Thai town of Trans served as an important staging post.³⁰⁶ A number of prominent LTTE officials lived and worked in Bangkok (although Thailand cracked down on the LTTE in early 1999 as relations with Sri Lanka improved), and the LTTE maintained a submarine-building project in Phuket.³⁰⁷ Other key nodal points in Thailand included the ports of Sattahip and Rayong, and weapons were also shipped across the Gulf of Thailand to the southern Thai provinces of Chumporn and Songkhla, after which they were moved across the Kra Isthmus to the Andaman Sea coast. From that point, either the Sea Tigers or the Arkanese maritime mafia operating from Ranoug would transport them across the Bay of Bengal.³⁰⁸

The group also developed links with arms suppliers. In 1997, the Sri Lankan government had concluded a three-million-dollar deal with the Zimbabwe Defense Industries (ZDI) for the purchase of 32,000 mortar bombs to be used in the army's campaign to secure the strategic A9 highway.³⁰⁹ On May 23, 1997, the Sri Lankan government was informed that the munitions left the port of Beira, in Mozambique, en route to Sri Lanka. However, on July 11, the LTTE sent the following fax to the US embassy in Colombo:

We, the Tamil Tigers, inform you by the present that on 11 July 1997 we have hijacked a vessel carrying arms . . . destined for Colombo. We know that the

^{al} For more information regarding RAW activities against the LTTE after May 1991, see Gunaratna.³⁰²

^{am} The transaction was arranged through Carlton Trading, an LTTE front company in Dhaka, which produced a forged user end certificate indicating the Bangladeshi military as the approved recipient.³⁰³

manufacturer and the supplier of the mortar bombs in ZDI from Harare . . . The cargo [has been] confiscated. We make known and warn that we will take action against all persons participating in the supply of military equipment used against the legitimate rights of Tamil people and we will severely punish those concerned.³¹⁰

The LTTE was aware of the transaction because it had infiltrated the Sri Lankan National Intelligence Bureau.³¹¹ It bribed the Israeli arms subcontractor who had arranged the original deal to let one of the group's own freighters pick up the munitions from the Croatian port of Rijkei. The Israeli's company, L.B.J. Military Supplies, persuaded ZDI to provide false information to the Sri Lankan government confirming that the shipment had been loaded, with L.B.J. Military Supplies then informing Colombo that the munitions were en route.³¹²

Chalk noted that, overall, the LTTE's international procurement efforts focused on five main geographic zones: northeast and southeast Asia, particularly China, North Korea, Cambodia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Burma; southwest Asia, especially Afghanistan and Pakistan; the former Soviet Union, particularly Ukraine; southeastern Europe and the Middle East, including Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey; and Africa, in particular Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.³¹³

ENDNOTES

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CONCLUSION TO PART II

This section has profiled two highly potent and virulent insurgent movements in Sri Lanka, and their juxtaposition provides an interesting and useful comparison for the special operator. In particular, we draw the reader's attention to the useful distinction raised by Kaufmann between ethnic civil wars and ideological wars. The latter represent competitions between the government and an insurgency for the loyalty of the people, and this type of war describes the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the JVP. The key features of these conflicts are that ideological loyalties are changeable and difficult to assess, and the same population (i.e., the Sinhalese) serves as the shared mobilization base for both sides.¹ Winning the "hearts and minds" of the population is necessary for victory, and control over access to the population is important to facilitate recruitment and to undertake political, economic, and social reforms (and to prevent the other side from doing the same).²

In contrast, in ethnic wars individual loyalties are rigid and transparent, as they are based on ethnic identity, and each side's mobilization base is limited to members of its own group in friendly territory.³ As a result, these conflicts are primarily military struggles in which victory depends on physical control over disputed territory and not on appeals to members of the other ethnic group (such as through a "hearts and minds" campaign). Clearly the LTTE was engaged in an ethnic war with the central government, although some of the other Tamil groups, such as the EPRLF, were engaged in an ideological war that happened to originate in the Tamil regions of the island. Additionally, whereas the LTTE saw no possibility of collaboration with the JVP, the latter did interact with PLOTE, and within the JVP's Central Committee were two members with responsibility for outreach to and coordination with Tamil groups.^a

Another feature of an ethnic wars, like that between the government and the LTTE, is that they generate intense security dilemmas.⁵ Originally developed within the context of relations between nation-states, political scientists use the term *security dilemma* to refer to a situation in which the actions taken by a group to enhance its security create insecurity for other groups.^b Ethnic civil wars produce security dilemmas between opposing ethnic groups because they typically feature (perhaps defensive) ethnic mobilization by one side implemented

^a Within the JVP Central Committee, P. Thangarajah was responsible for organizing Indian Tamil workers in the plantation sector, and Ranjitham Gunaratnam, a Sinhalezed Tamil, maintained links with Tamil militant movements in the north and east.⁴

^b To learn more about security dilemmas, see John Herz.⁶

through nationalist rhetoric that other groups perceive as threatening.⁷ Additionally, the intermixing of different ethnic groups (as occurred in Sri Lanka) leads to conditions that facilitate the emergence of security dilemmas. This is the case because the military capability acquired for defense often can also be used for offense, and offensive operations tend to have advantages over defensive actions when populations are intermixed, because isolated ethnic pockets are harder to hold than to take.⁸

In the case of Sri Lanka, a sizeable portion of the Tamil population lived outside of the north and east, while many Sinhalese “settlers” lived in the Northern and Eastern provinces. These ethnic enclaves created defensive vulnerabilities and offensive opportunities, and in the case of the LTTE the group had incentives to use its military capability in an offensive manner to drive out enemy populations from the regions it controlled, both to create a homogenous enclave that was easier to defend and to prevent the other side from potentially using enemy territory to launch attacks. Hence, actions taken by the LTTE to enhance its security created insecurity for Sinhalese. From a practical perspective, what this means is that in the case of ethnic conflicts, undoing initial causes of a conflict (i.e., settlement schemes, language rights, lack of political representation, or lack of access to education or jobs, etc.) may not be enough to resolve the conflict, as any stable resolution may also require dealing with the unsettling dynamics of the conflict itself, whether the intense security dilemmas that fanned the flames of conflict or any negative outcomes or grievances associated with actual fighting, such as civilian atrocities.

Another interesting aspect for the special operator to consider is the important role of leadership and human agency in propelling an insurgency forward. Certainly legitimate grievances related to economic, social, and political marginalization fanned the flames of both the JVP and LTTE insurgencies, but arguably neither of these two insurgent movements could have inflicted such widespread damage throughout Sri Lanka and challenged the territorial and political integrity of the state absent the fundamental roles played by Rohana Wijeweera and Velupillai Prabhakaran, their respective leaders. One analysis of the JVP insurgency located the cause of the JVP insurgency primarily (although not entirely) in the leadership role played by Wijeweera. As Moore noted:

To a considerable extent, I interpret the JVP as an exercise in political entrepreneurship. An intelligent, creative and highly ambitious political leadership, dedicated to the achievement of state power but blocked from achieving it by electoral means, exploited both

the reservoirs of political alienation found within Sri Lankan society and its own long experience of revolutionary endeavor to design political strategies and tactics that enabled the movement (temporarily) to achieve impressive results with relatively few resources and no external support. This emphasis on the creative role of the JVP leadership—and especially of the dominant individual leader, Rohana Wijeweera, who created the movement in the late 1960s and controlled it until he was captured and killed in November 1989—in seeking out and exploiting opportunities to make revolution as a means to achieve power will no doubt seem excessively “voluntaristic” to those observers who would emphasize the structural features of Sri Lankan society which made revolution so attractive to many people. I adhere to my view because of what appears to me to be an abundance of evidence about the extent of opportunism displayed by Wijeweera during his long quest for power.⁹

The leadership variable was also highly salient in the case of the LTTE, and one observer indicated that Prabhakaran’s resistance to a deal was a significant obstacle to a resolution of the LTTE’s conflict with the Sri Lankan state:

Most informed sources within Sri Lanka agree there is simply no way that Prabhakaran will ever agree to come out of the jungle and live the life of a normal politician within the context of an autonomous Tamil region. Such a move would effectively destroy the omnipotent illusion and near mythical status that the LTTE supremo now enjoys as well as greatly increase his exposure to assassination. Prabhakaran has made many enemies over the years, with Indians, Sinhalese and other Tamil groups all openly vowing to kill him at the first available opportunity. Such dynamics ensure that Prabhakaran will never concede to peace unless it is established under his leadership and in accordance with his own exclusive and absolute terms. However, this is neither something that organizations such as PLOTE, EROS and TELO will accept; nor is it something that Colombo has the power, political mandate or willingness to grant.¹⁰

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security*, 20, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 139.
- ² *Ibid.*, 139–140.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 140.
- ⁴ C. A. Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror. The JVP Insurrection 1987–89* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Lake House Bookshop, 1991), 11, 14.
- ⁵ Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," 139.
- ⁶ John Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (1950): 171–201.
- ⁷ Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," 147.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.
- ⁹ Mick Moore, "Thoroughly Modern Revolutionaries: The JVP in Sri Lanka," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 3 (1993): 596–597.
- ¹⁰ Peter Chalk, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam insurgency in Sri Lanka," in *Ethnic Conflict and Secessionism in South and Southeast Asia: Causes, Dynamics, Solutions*, eds. Rajat Ganguly and Ian Macduff (New Dehli: Sage Publications, 2003), 139.

PART III.

GOVERNMENT COUNTERMEASURES

CHAPTER 8.

GOVERNMENT COUNTERMEASURES

A recurring dilemma in the government's efforts to reach a political accommodation with the Tamils centered on determining the appropriate distribution of power and authority between the central government and Sri Lanka's regional administrative units, particularly with the Tamil regions in the north and east of the country. In the 1980s, with the emergence of the JVP the government also had to contend with negative feedback from its effort to reach an accommodation with the LTTE, as potential concessions to Tamils on devolution and autonomy fed antigovernment rhetoric used by the JVP in its campaign to overthrow the government.

Before the mid-1970s, the Tamils had challenged the unitary nature of the Sri Lankan state not by seeking outright independence but by seeking to remain within a reformed state featuring a federalized political structure that devolved substantial political authority to the Tamil regions of the country. These efforts, specifically the B-C and S-C pacts, faltered as a result of Sinhalese fears that federalist concessions would eventually give way to Tamil demands for independence, leading to the detachment of the Tamil areas from the country and their potential incorporation into a "greater Tamil Nadu" (see Figure 8-1).



Figure 8-1. Greater Tamil Nadu.

Thus the B-C Pact negotiated by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and S. J. V. Chelvanayakam in the mid-1950s was ultimately abrogated by the former in the face of pressure from Sinhalese nationalist elements in Ceylon. The pact represented an effort by Bandaranaike to mollify the Tamils after the passage of the “Sinhala-only” bill in 1956.^a As part of this effort, Bandaranaike offered to modify an existing draft Regional Councils Bill to allow multiple regions to amalgamate across provinces.¹ Some amount of governing authority was to be devolved to regional councils, and the new revision that Bandaranaike proposed would allow both the Northern and Eastern Provinces, each of which would constitute a separate region, to combine into a larger political entity. Opponents of the bill viewed this proposition as the first step in an eventual division of the country. Another controversial provision involved the designation of the Tamil language as an official language for administrative use in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Language purists viewed this provision as diluting the Sinhala-only act.

One issue that was not addressed by the B-C Pact was the citizenship status of the Indian Tamil workers brought in by the British in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to work on agricultural plantations in the interior of the island. As noted in *Chapter 4. Socioeconomic Conditions*, by the mid-twentieth century, the population of Indian Tamils slightly outnumbered the Sri Lankan Tamil population. The Sinhalese were deeply suspicious of the Indian Tamils, so much so that shortly after independence the central government denied Indian Tamils Ceylonese citizenship through the passage of the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act of 1949. In addition to diluting the Kandyan Sinhalese vote in the interior of the island (had Indian Tamils been given the vote), Sinhalese concerns centered on fears that the Indian Tamils were potential fifth-columnists with greater loyalty to India than Ceylon.

For Bandaranaike, the effort to devolve authority to subnational political units in the 1950s was consistent with efforts earlier in his political career to enact a federal structure for the country. Thus, although he rode to power in 1956 on a wave of messianic Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism that would not countenance the devolution of central authority to the Tamil regions of the country, in the 1920s he espoused federalism for Ceylon as head of the Progressive Nationalist Party.² Also, as a minister of local government in the State Council

^a As noted in *Chapter 3. Historical Context*, another measure designed to mollify Tamil opinion was the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958, which addressed the use of the Tamil language for educational instruction, for administrative purposes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and for test-taking purposes for admittance into the civil service. However, subsequent legislation needed for the implementation of this act was not submitted for parliamentary approval until 1966.

when Ceylon was still under British rule, he was the main advocate for a provincial council system (modeled on British County Councils) that devolved authority down to the provincial level.³ Besides opposition from Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists, opposition to the regional councils also came from cabinet ministers, as the councils would inevitably involve the dilution of the powers of central government ministries, and cabinet ministers were not eager to see a reduction in their political and administrative authority that would have resulted with the enactment of the Regional Councils Bill.⁴

In August 1958, pressure by *bhikkus* and SLFP extremists within his party, as well as communal riots in May, forced Bandaranaike to abandon the B-C Pact. The UNP returned to power in March 1960, but after a vote of noconfidence a new election was held a few months later in July. Before this subsequent election, the opposition SLFP won the support of the Tamil Federal Party by indicating its willingness to implement the B-C Pact. The ruling UNP made an issue of their collaboration and charged that the two parties had made a secret deal to partition the country.⁵ Despite these exaggerated charges, the SLFP won the election; yet once in power, it reneged on its promise to implement the B-C Pact, owing to concerns over the potential reaction of Sinhalese extremists within and outside the party.

Efforts to reach an accommodation with the Tamils were revived in the mid-1960s with the S-C Pact, which called for the devolution of authority over colonization schemes and other issues to district councils. The pact noted that the proposed district councils would not be able to amalgamate and that employees of these bodies would be representatives of the central government. Additionally, Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake emphasized that the national government would have direct authority over the councils, as these regional bodies were to fall under the authority of the office of the prime minister.⁶ Nonetheless, in mid-1969, Senanayake was forced to abandon a District Councils Bill that would have implemented the pact in the face of pressure from opposition parties and Buddhist activists animated by fears that the legislation was the first step along a slippery slope that culminated in the partition of the island.

As described in *Chapter 5. Government and Politics*, in 1972 the character of the Sri Lankan state was ethno-nationalized along Sinhalese-Buddhist lines, as the new constitution enacted that year elevated the status of Buddhism and designated Sinhala as the sole official language of the country. These factors, along with revised university admission policies that made Tamil entry into higher education more difficult, led to the mobilization and radicalization of the Tamil population, especially among those Tamils residing in the Northern Province. At

this time the TUF/TULF was formed, which brought together the two main Tamil political parties, the Tamil Congress and the Tamil Federal Party, as well as the Ceylon Workers' Congress, which represented Indian plantation workers.

After the passage of the 1972 constitution in May, the TUF called for a *hartal* and a day of mourning, and on May 24 black flags were flown, schools were boycotted, and buses were stoned. Additionally, a TUF youth leader blatantly threatened Tamil members of parliament who voted for the new constitution, by stating that "the six Tamils who voted for the new constitution would not die by illness, by accident or by natural causes, but would meet their death by some other ways."⁷ In May 1972, the TUF also put together a program known as the Six-Point Plan, which consisted of a number of demands, including the equal parity of the Tamil and Sinhala languages, the extension of citizenship rights to all Indian plantation workers, the formal commitment to a secular state in which no single religion was given preference, and the establishment of a decentralized system of government.⁸ However, by this stage, separatist sentiment had gained traction among Tamil youth, especially those within the lower middle class, who had the least to lose economically and politically in a struggle for independence.⁹ They began to organize into militant groups that agitated for a separate state and placed pressure on TUF politicians to seek the same objective. For instance, the Tamil Youth League, started in 1970, later became the Tamil New Tigers, and the military wing of this organization, which was organized by Prabhakaran, became the LTTE in May 1976.

During this time, the security situation in the north rapidly deteriorated, as criminal groups engaged in thefts of cars and robberies of banks and government institutions to raise funds to carry out political killings.¹⁰ Assassination squads also emerged that targeted Sinhalese politicians and Tamil leaders sympathetic to the government. The first political murder in the north was carried out by Prabhakaran and two associates in July 1975 when they murdered Alfred Duraiappah, the progovernment Tamil mayor of Jaffna.¹¹ Links between the militants and the TUF were reportedly very close at this time, as indicated by one activist:

[TUF leader Appapillai] Amirthalingam gave support to our activities. He gave us a political cover, a political justification for all that we did. He was the mass leader although Chelvanayakam was the figurehead . . . We did whatever the TUF asked us to do.¹²

However, the government at this time was not sure whether the TULF's desire for a separate state was genuine or simply reflected pressure exerted by Tamil militants as well as the desire to consolidate its

political position among the Tamil electorate.¹³ In any case, after the 1977 elections in which he was made leader of the opposition, Amirthalingam reportedly wrote letters of reference on government stationary to raise funds for the LTTE and other Tamil insurgent groups.¹⁴

Additionally at this time, the police in the north contained fewer and fewer Tamils, and their absence aggravated ethnic tensions. Before the 1960s, given the onerousness of caste restrictions and rules of behavior in Tamil society, the Sinhalese officers that served in Jaffna were viewed as impartial arbiters of caste-based conflicts.¹⁵ However, as political violence erupted in the north during the 1970s, the government increasingly regarded Tamil officers as either unreliable or ineffective, and as a result the police eventually consisted almost entirely of Sinhalese.^{16,17} Very few of these officers spoke Tamil, and another difficulty they faced was the unwillingness of the local populace, for fear of retribution by Tamil militants, to act as informants and provide information regarding politically motivated crimes.¹⁸ These factors led to a breakdown in communication between the police and the local inhabitants, causing frustration among the police as they were unable to effectively apprehend the perpetrators of politically motivated acts of violence and robbery. The security forces were increasingly seen as an army of occupation by the inhabitants of Jaffna, and the frustration felt by these forces likely manifested in a number of police abuses that occurred at this time, from the mass arrests and torture of Tamil youths to the killing of nine people during the fourth International Conference of Tamil Research in Jaffna.¹⁹

The actions of the police in Jaffna, the government's policy on university admissions and language, and the frustrations felt by the educated unemployed among Tamil youth led to the final break with the idea of federalism and led the Tamil political class to support outright independence, as communicated in the Vaddukoddai Resolution of May 1976. In addition to calling for a separate Tamil state in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the resolution promised to offer Eelam citizenship to all Tamil-speaking citizens throughout the island and to Tamils of "Eelam origin" in the diaspora.²⁰ From the Sinhalese perspective, in addition to its blasphemous nature, an independent Tamil state on the island would be an unmitigated socioeconomic and demographic disaster, as indicated by the following statement from an observer at that time:

Eelam will create an explosive socio-economic situation in the island. One third of the island would . . . be carved out for less than 1/6 of the population. The remaining 85 percent of the population will be cramped into the North-Central, South, Western and

Central parts of the country. They would have less of the sea as an outlet. There is already acute landlessness in these areas. A good portion of the under-populated area that could be developed would be in "Eelam." This is bound to cause much social tension inside the reduced Sri Lanka and the proposed Eelam . . . how fair is the Tamil leaders' demand to reserve the colonization of the Northern and Eastern Provinces exclusively for the Tamils?²¹

Additionally, as previously noted, a more ominous concern centered on fears that the Tamils would not be content with simply independence. By 1981, nearly a third of the Sri Lankan Tamil population lived in predominantly Sinhalese areas,²² and combined with the large Indian Tamil population, these demographic realities likely helped motivate Sinhalese fears that the Sri Lankan Tamils sought to annex the island within a broader south Indian Dravidistan situated within the Indian federation.²³

Prior to the 1977 elections, the TULF appealed to Tamil voters by running on a separatist platform, calling on Tamils to vote for the party to establish an independent Tamil state by peaceful means or other measures. In contrast, the UNP, then in opposition, took a conciliatory approach by calling for an all-party conference to develop constitutional reforms that would address minority grievances, and also called for the decentralization of governmental authority to district development councils. It also vowed to take actions to address Tamil grievances regarding education, language, colonization, and employment in the public sector. In the ensuing elections, the UNP won a five-sixth majority in the legislature, while the "antisystem" TULF secured eighteen parliamentary seats against the eight seats won by the SLFP, thereby making the TULF's Amirthalingam the leader of the opposition. Support for Eelam was quite strong in the Northern Province, with 68.7 percent of the voters in that region voting for the TULF. In contrast, support for Eelam in the ethnically mixed Eastern Province was much more subdued, with the TULF garnering only 27.1 percent of the vote, but overall the Tamils in the north and east voted in support of the TULF's separatist platform.^{24,25}

Tamil militants took the results as vindication of the separatist agenda and therefore proceeded to wage a campaign to extricate the Sri Lankan state from the north and east of the country. In all likelihood, the young Tamil militants were influenced by the example of Sinhalese youth supporting the JVP insurgency in 1971, and indeed imprisoned Tamil militants reportedly met JVP insurgents in jail.²⁶ Also, violence was widespread after the election. Commencing as

violence between UNP and SLFP supporters, the violence subsequently took on a communal hue as Sinhalese mobs took out their frustrations against the Tamils. The riots were motivated in part by false rumors that Buddhist temples had been burned and Sinhalese murdered in the north, although observers also noted that inflammatory speeches made by Tamil leaders in support of Eelam also fanned the flames of violence against Tamils.²⁷ As a result of this latest iteration of communal violence, the Sinhalese were ethnically cleansed from the Jaffna peninsula, while thousands of Tamils were forced to escape from the south. Radical Tamil youth groups encouraged the removal of Sinhalese from the north and the settlement of Indian Tamils in their place to reinforce the Tamil identity of the north and east and to create a buffer zone against prospective Sinhalese settlers moving into the region.²⁸ To show solidarity with their Sri Lankan brethren, the DMK in Tamil Nadu organized a strike to protest the postelection treatment of Tamils.

With its victory in 1977, the UNP proceeded to amend the constitution and political structure of the country, adopting a presidential form of government that incorporated elements from the American, French, and British systems. With respect to national security, the president was made commander-in-chief of the armed forces as well as minister of defense.

Given the highly influential role the president would play in terms of directing government policy in meeting the challenges posed by the LTTE and JVP, the rest of this chapter concerning government countermeasures is organized by presidential administration.

JUNIUS RICHARD JAYEWARDENE ADMINISTRATION (1977–1989)

In February 1978, J. R. Jayewardene of the UNP became the president of Sri Lanka under the newly adopted constitution, and his government pursued a two-pronged strategy toward the Tamil issue that involved a conciliatory approach toward the TULF combined with a harsh crackdown on Tamil militants in the north.²⁹ With respect to the former, the UNP's election manifesto issued before the 1977 vote stated:

The United National Party accepts the position that there are numerous problems confronting the Tamil-speaking people. The lack of a solution to their problems has made the Tamil-speaking people even support a movement for the creation of a separate state. In the interests of national integration and unity so necessary

for the economic development of the whole country, the Party feels that such problems should be solved without loss of time. The Party, when it comes to power, will take all possible steps to remedy their grievances in such fields as:

1. Education
2. Colonization
3. The use of the Tamil Language
4. Employment in the public [sector] and semi-public corporations

We will summon an All-Party Conference as stated earlier and implement its decision.³⁰

Indeed, one of the administration's first acts once in power was to rescind the use of language-based ethnic quotas for university admissions, although it maintained a modified district quota system for admission to university science departments, whereby fifteen percent of all such slots were reserved for students from twelve rural and plantation districts. Additionally, the new constitution contained several provisions that addressed Tamil grievances. With respect to language, although Article 18 recognized Sinhala as the *official* language, Article 19 recognized Tamil as a *national* language that could be used, for example, for the purposes of education, receiving and transmitting communications with public officials, and conducting public administration and court proceedings in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Although the prior 1972 constitution consolidated the "Sinhala-only" policy of 1956, previously the use of the Tamil language had been permitted within the limits established by the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958. However, regulations drafted under the provisions of this act, specifically the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Regulations Act of 1966, were regarded as "subordinate legislation."³¹ So in theory subsequent legislation or even administrative decisions could override the language rights entailed in these provisions. However, the impact of the language provisions of the 1978 constitution was that this ability to override provisions was no longer possible, and that going forward the language rights enjoyed by Tamils could be modified only through constitutional amendments.

Additionally, as noted in *Chapter 5. Government and Politics*, a system of proportional representation was adopted, which dulled the extremist tendencies of the main Sinhalese parties (the UNP and SLFP) as they now had to work to build greater consensus with Tamil voters, as this group now played a more decisive role in determining electoral outcomes. The new constitution also extended to Indian Tamils the

fundamental rights contained within the 1972 constitution,^b and during the process of forming the new constitution, the government was able to withstand pressure by Sinhalese nationalists to elevate Buddhism to the status of a state religion and to restrict the presidency to a Sinhalese Buddhist.³³

The new constitution did not offer any concessions regarding federalism, and in fact it asserted that Sri Lanka was a unitary state.³⁴ However, Jayewardene's administration did initiate a new effort at devolving authority to subnational units, this time down to the district level with the establishment of District Development Councils (DDC) in 1980. The UNP had made reference to the DDCs in its election manifesto in 1977, but communal violence put these plans on hold. Yet in August 1979, a ten-member Presidential Commission including TULF representation was established to investigate the devolution of administration to DDCs. The TULF's participation augured in a period of positive cooperation between the party and the UNP government, as the party began to temper its agitation for a separate state, and TULF ministers of parliament held regular meetings with President Jayewardene and his cabinet to discuss the management of ethnic issues.³⁵ At this time, there was also a noticeable improvement in the security situation in the Jaffna peninsula, and so in the midst of this more positive atmosphere, the Development Councils Act was passed by parliament in August 1980.

The DDCs were led by a district minister and consisted of ministers of parliament from the district, elected leaders of local bodies, and government officials. Elections for the DDCs were held in June 1981, and although they had to be postponed in Jaffna because of terrorist violence, the DDCs did manage to dampen separatist agitation in the Jaffna peninsula, where in rescheduled elections the TULF took every seat on the council. Nevertheless, there were some complaints from Tamils that the DDCs did not have sufficient authority, such as with respect to initiating development projects on their own initiative. Additionally, they were not appropriately financed, and the operation of the DDCs was also hampered by bureaucratic, electoral, and financial considerations. Specifically, there was a delay in the delegation of authorities and administrative functions from cabinet to district ministers, as the former were unsure of their roles with respect to the delegated

^b In 1964, India and Ceylon reached an agreement regarding the status of Indian residents on the island. The agreement called for the repatriation of 525,000 Indian residents of Ceylon over a fifteen-year period and the absorption of 300,000 as citizens of the island nation. There was still a balance of 150,000 Indian residents that were not covered by the 1964 agreement, and in 1974, it was decided that half would be repatriated while the other half would become Sri Lankan citizens. However, even after this agreement, 50,000 to 75,000 Indian residents were left over for further consideration.³²

functions within the new administrative setup.³⁶ And the implementation of the DDCs was slowed down as attention was turned to the September 1982 presidential elections and by budget cuts in 1982–1983.³⁷

The UNP's policy of conciliation toward the TULF, however, came to an abrupt end in July 1983 when anti-Tamil riots erupted throughout the country in response to an LTTE ambush that resulted in the deaths of thirteen soldiers in Jaffna.^c The timing of the attack was not an accident. An all-party conference was scheduled to meet at the end of July to discuss remaining issues in the ethnic conflict, and at the time of the attack the TULF had organized a party convention to discuss whether to participate. Hence, the attack sent the very clear message that militant Tamil youth desired a separation from the state rather than a peaceful political resolution that entailed the Northern and Eastern Provinces remaining within a potentially federalized state. The attack achieved its objective, as afterward Jayewardene went on state television to state that the policy of conciliating the TULF and separatist forces was a mistake, and he promised firm steps to deal with the separatist threat.³⁸ In early August 1983 parliament passed the sixth amendment to the constitution outlawing political parties that advocated separatism. Every TULF minister of parliament forfeited their seat by refusing to take an oath disavowing the advocacy of separatism, and in fact the TULF leadership left for Tamil Nadu and thus abdicated leadership of the Tamil cause to Tamil militant groups.³⁹

Eelam War I commenced after the July 1983 riots, yet before the formal outbreak of hostilities the government had been taking aggressive actions against militant groups in the north. In May 1978 parliament passed a bill proscribing the LTTE and similar organizations for one year, which was extended one year later, and in July 1979 the government imposed emergency rule in Jaffna. President Jayewardene decided to launch a war on Tamil terrorism when he ordered Army Brigadier Tissa Weeratunga to “eliminate the menace of terrorism in all its forms from the island and more specially from Jaffna District” within six months.⁴⁰ In July, the government also enacted new legal instruments to deal with Tamil terrorism, specifically the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which had been modeled on legislation enacted by Britain to counter the violence perpetrated by the Irish Republican Army.⁴¹ The PTA allowed the government to hold suspects without trial for up to eighteen months, and suspects could be tried on charges on the basis of confessions that were inadmissible under existing laws. In March 1982 the PTA was made a permanent piece of legislation, and in December 1982 the government held and subsequently won a

^c See *Chapter 3. Historical Context* for more details surrounding this episode of communal violence.

referendum to extend the life of the parliament for another six years rather than hold elections in 1983. The government justified this move by arguing that the possibility of election violence, a “Naxalite”^d threat from radical elements in the SLFP, and the need to deal with Tamil terrorism necessitated an extension of the current government.^e

Although the security situation had improved somewhat in the Jaffna peninsula as the UNP government pursued a policy of conciliation toward the TULF, Tamil militants had not remained quiet during this time. In September 1978 an aircraft belonging to Air Ceylon was blown up on the runway of Ratmalana airport outside of Colombo during celebrations commemorating the new constitution. The aircraft was empty at the time, but the explosive device had been timed to go off when the aircraft was flying over Colombo.⁴⁴ And President Jayewardene’s order to eliminate terrorism came after the police inspector for Jaffna was killed at the latter’s residence.⁴⁵

By the end of 1979, the army had become a key component of the peacekeeping force in the Northern Province, and in August 1982 the Special Task Force (STF), a new police paramilitary force, opened a training camp and interrogation center in Elephant Pass, which connects the Jaffna peninsula with the rest of the island.^{46,47} The government also boosted military spending during this period. Expenditure on defense increased from forty million dollars (1.5 percent of gross national product) in 1978 to two hundred million (3.5 percent of te gross national product) by 1985.⁴⁸ Additionally, the government established the Ministry of National Security in March 1984 to coordinate counterinsurgent activities, and it instituted a surveillance zone covering most of the north and northwestern coastal region to counter the increasing flow of men and arms between Jaffna and Tamil Nadu.⁴⁹

Even before the outbreak of Eelam War I, India, and especially the Tamil Nadu state government, had become increasingly concerned over the budding ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The first contact between Sri Lankan Tamil activists and Tamil Nadu officials occurred in 1972, when members from the Tamil Manavi Peravi, a Sri Lankan Tamil youth group committed to armed struggle, met with E. V. R. Periya,

^d *Naxalite* is a generic term used to refer to militant communist movements operating in various parts of India.

^e A key factor motivating the desire to extend the life of the government involved the legality of maintaining a state of emergency for an extended period of time. A simple parliamentary majority was needed to impose a state of emergency in response to outbreaks of communal violence, but a two-thirds majority was needed to extend the state of emergency beyond three months. The UNP had secured an overwhelming majority in the last parliamentary election in 1977, yet under the new proportional representation system, it was unsure whether it would be able to secure two-thirds of the seats in parliament in 1983.^{42, 43}

who was then the leader of Tamil Nadu.⁵⁰ As indicated in *Chapter 7. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*, a number of training camps were established in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere in India to train Tamil militants, and some of these camps were in operation before the anti-Tamil riots of July 1983.⁵¹ Additionally, the Tamil Nadu government provided offices, telephones, residences, and other facilities to assist Sri Lankan Tamil insurgents in their campaign of armed struggle.⁵²

As previously noted, a variety of factors led India to take a substantial interest in the brewing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Perhaps most importantly, electoral politics and fears of separatism within India led it to become heavily involved in Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu (which translates as “Tamil Country”) was established in the mid-1950s as a concession to the powerful force of linguistic nationalism in India, and the key political actors within Tamil Nadu that championed linguistic nationalism at this time were the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and the DMK, which was a breakaway faction of the DK. After the passage of the sixteenth amendment to the Indian constitution, which banned secessionist parties and the promotion of secession, the DK had to temper its separatist impulses, and it ultimately reconciled itself to championing greater autonomy within India itself. K. M. de Silva noted that the group, barred from advocating the detachment of Tamil Nadu from India, took vicarious pleasure in encouraging and supporting the Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka.⁵³

Still, as the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka accelerated in the late 1970s, the ruling Indian National Congress led by Indira Gandhi had to pay attention to the plight of Sri Lanka’s Tamils to bolster its own support among the Tamil population in India. Stated bluntly, there were no Sinhalese votes in India, so when communal tensions broke out in Sri Lanka, the Indian government had to take measures to demonstrate that it was concerned about the welfare of Sri Lanka’s Tamils.⁵⁴ Yet the fear of Tamil separatism in India itself remained a motivating factor in the minds of some Indian officials. Commenting on why India intervened in the conflict later in 1987, J. N. Dixit, the Indian ambassador to Sri Lanka in 1987, made a frank admission:

The first reason why we went to Sri Lanka was the interest to preserve our own unity . . . what the Tamils in Sri Lanka were being compelled to follow in terms of their life . . . would have affected our polity. Let us not forget that the first voice of secessionism in the Indian Republic was raised in Tamil Nadu in the mid-sixties. This was exactly the same principle of Tamil ethnicity. . . . So, in a manner, our interests in the Tamil issue in Sri Lanka, Tamil aspirations in Sri Lanka, was based

on maintaining our own unity, our own integrity, our own identity in the manner we have been trying to build our society.⁵⁵

Such fears of separatism had been fanned by Tamil politicians in India. At a September 1984 public rally in Madras, the leader of the DMK indicated that unless the Indian government sent in troops to save the Sri Lankan Tamils, the DMK would have no other option but to revive its abandoned policy of working to promote a separate state for the Tamils of India.⁵⁶ Additionally, an incident in August 1985 was also quite telling. After Tamil representatives walked out of Indian-mediated talks with the Sri Lankan government in Thimpu, Bhutan (discussed below in this chapter), the Indian government ordered the expulsion from Tamil Nadu of LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham, TELO spokesman N. Satyendra, and S .C. Chandrahasan, the son of the late prominent Tamil politician S. J. V. Chelvanayakam. Within forty-eight hours, opposition parties in Tamil Nadu organized large street protests against the order, and the leader of the DK warned:

If the orders are not withdrawn, [Rajiv] Gandhi will face agitations like Punjab and Assam [i.e., ongoing secessionist struggles in those areas] and we will not allow any North Indian to set foot here.⁵⁷

Tamil militants were quite aware of the electoral and separatist pressures motivating the Indian government to become involved in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government's establishment of a surveillance zone in the north and northwestern coastal region in November 1984 to curtail the movement of arms and militants between Tamil Nadu and Jaffna began to impact the livelihood of residents in fishing communities, as a ban was placed on fishing in that area. Many residents decided to leave their homes and become refugees in Tamil Nadu, thereby demonstrating the porous nature of the surveillance zone. K. M. de Silva noted that the TULF leadership and Tamil militants took measures to increase this refugee flow into Tamil Nadu in order to force the Indian government to intervene militarily in Sri Lanka to carve out a separate state, as it did when it intervened in East Pakistan in 1971 (several months after nearly ten million Bangladeshis fled to the Indian state of West Bengal) to create Bangladesh.⁵⁸

Interestingly, there are indications that the "Bangladesh model" was considered by Indira Gandhi. According to Gunaratna, when President Jayewardene refused to implement a devolution package known as Annexure C (discussed later in this chapter), Gandhi told R. N. Kao, her national security advisor (who was involved in the Bangladeshi operation), to "repeat the success of the Bangladesh operation in

Sri Lanka.”⁵⁹ Gunaratna also noted that shortly before Gandhi’s death in October 1984, the Indian prime minister was under significant pressure by Tamil politicians and bureaucrats to invade Sri Lanka. Invasion plans were drawn up and mobilization had commenced, but the invasion never occurred once the prime minister was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards.⁶⁰

Additionally, as previously noted, international security concerns also led India to take an active interest in the ethnic conflict. In the early 1970s, India did not intervene in the emerging conflict as Gandhi had a close and personal relationship with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike.⁶¹ Yet India’s position changed when the center-right Jayewardene assumed power in 1977. As previously indicated, Gandhi and Jayewardene did not enjoy a good relationship, and suspicions were raised in New Delhi once the new Sri Lankan leader liberalized the economy. Suddenly, Sri Lanka was now answerable to external interests, especially the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and with reliance on Western capital, the diplomats at India’s Ministry of External Affairs believed it was only a matter of time before Sri Lanka began receiving Western military aid to combat Tamil separatists.⁶²

Additionally, as previously indicated in *Chapter 3. Historical Context*, India’s experience under colonial rule led Indian planners to conclude that the country had come under European domination because external powers—rather than India—controlled the Indian Ocean pathway to the subcontinent.^{63,64} As one Indian admiral stated, “Independent India’s wars might have been fought on the land borders of the north, but those outsiders who came here and ruled us came through the ocean.”⁶⁵ Although a champion of the nonaligned movement, India had traditionally tilted toward the Soviet Union. Hence, once Jayewardene began to align Sri Lanka along a more pro-Western orientation, Indian officials began to develop a heightened fear that a hostile power would develop influence in Colombo and perhaps obtain permission to station naval vessels at the port of Trincomalee. Indian strategists remembered how, during the Indo-Pakistani war in 1971, Pakistani aircraft carrying reinforcements to East Pakistan were permitted to refuel in Colombo on their way to Dhaka, and so they were concerned that the port of Trincomalee would be used for a similar purpose in a future conflict.⁶⁶

Hence, India grew alarmed in July 1983 when a well-placed source in the Sri Lankan Army provided information regarding American^f and Israeli military assistance to Colombo, Sri Lanka’s relationship with Pakistan and China, and the assistance the Sri Lankan Army was getting

^f Gunaratna reports, however, that the United States ultimately did not provide military assistance to Jayewardene.⁶⁷

from a private British security firm that included former Special Air Service officers.⁶⁸ Shortly thereafter, as previously indicated, in August 1983 Indira Gandhi made the decision to support the Tamil insurgency^g to pressure the Sri Lankan government to refrain from seeking a military solution to the ethnic conflict, and over concerns regarding Sri Lanka's cooperation with outside powers. After this decision, India's Research and Analysis Wing was given permission to provide training, financing and weapons to Sri Lankan Tamil insurgent groups.⁷⁰

With respect to the United States, India was concerned that an expansion of the Voice of America's relay station north of Colombo would be equipped with surveillance equipment to collect information on India,⁷¹ and it was also concerned that American warships would gain access to Trincomalee.^h India was also worried over Pakistani training of senior Sri Lankan officers, and it also suspected that Pakistan's premier intelligence agency, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, was assisting Colombo.⁷³ Taken together, from India's perspective, Jayewardene's ultimate sin may have been his desire to conduct an independent foreign policy that did not pay sufficient homage to India's place within the regional distribution of power. As noted by India's Foreign Secretary in a 1986 communication to Gunaratna, Jayewardene "failed to acknowledge India as the leading regional power" and had "acted contrary to India's geostrategic/political and security interests."⁷⁴

After the July 1983 riots, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, M. G. Ramachandran, himself an Indian Tamil born in Sri Lanka, urged Indira Gandhi to intervene in Sri Lanka to protect the Tamils, arguing that India's intervention in East Pakistan and the secession of Bangladesh formed a precedent for intervention in Sri Lanka.⁷⁵ Gandhi instead adopted a diplomatic approach, telephoning Jayewardene to pressure him to control the ensuing violence and sending Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao to Colombo to assess the situation.ⁱ Rao's trip commenced a period, lasting until the Indo-Sri Lanka Treaty four years later, during which India was to play a prominent role in mediating

^g Bandarage also reports that, after returning to power in 1980, Gandhi encouraged the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, M. G. Ramachandran, to provide covert support to Sri Lankan Tamil insurgents. As a consequence, the number of training camps in Tamil Nadu training Sri Lankan Tamil insurgents increased, as did the supply of weapons provided to the insurgents.⁶⁹

^h Interestingly, Sri Lankan officials believed that the United States desperately needed Trincomalee, yet Gunaratna reports that the US ambassador to Sri Lanka indicated that the United States was not interested in the port.⁷²

ⁱ Gandhi's principal advisors on Sri Lanka, Gopalaswami Parthasarathy and later P. Chidambaram, may not have been impartial observers of affairs on the island. Both were south Indian Tamils that were partial to Sri Lanka's Tamils, and Chidambaram had once participated in pro-Tamil demonstrations in Tamil Nadu against the Sri Lankan government.⁷⁶

negotiations between the TULF and Tamil militants on the one hand and the Sri Lankan government on the other. India, however, was hardly an honest broker—at the same time RAW was covertly aiding Sri Lankan Tamil militants as they waged their campaign against the Sri Lankan state during Eelam War I.

Toward the end of 1983, India helped bring together the Sri Lankan government and the TULF for talks, which did not produce any results. An all-party conference was later held in January 1984. After the July 1983 riots, the TULF had withdrawn its support for the DDCs, arguing that they did not meet the needs of the Tamils for greater autonomy after the riots.⁷⁷ They decided to participate in the all-party conference to negotiate for a more comprehensive devolution of power along the contours set out in the 1957 B-C Pact, by supporting the creation of provincial councils and overarching regional councils that would permit the formation of a subnational political unit encompassing the Northern and Eastern Provinces.⁷⁸ India also supported the TULF's position. However, although India provided support to Sri Lankan separatist groups, it had no interest in seeing an independent Tamil state on Sri Lanka, because its establishment would set a precedent that would encourage separatist movements within India itself. Hence, India supported the TULF's position on the belief that the former's support for a more comprehensive devolution of power would moderate the TULF's inclination toward separatism.⁷⁹

The outcome of the all-party conference was a list of proposals known as Annexure C. As called for in this document, DDCs within a province were permitted to combine into one or more regional councils, and so the DDCs within the Northern and Eastern Provinces were permitted to amalgamate within each province. Left unclear was whether the DDCs in the north and east were permitted to combine into an overarching regional council that would span the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The TULF believed that Annexure C did not go far enough in the direction of autonomy, whereas most non-Tamil opinion at the conference believed that Annexure C opened the gates to Tamil Eelam.^{80,81} The UNP government ultimately was also opposed to Annexure C, with President Jayewardene going back on his promise to Indira Gandhi that Annexure C would be implemented. In response, Gandhi placed more importance on the covert support provided by RAW to Tamil separatist groups.⁸²

The next round of discussions occurred in Thimpu, Bhutan, in July 1985 after a cease-fire agreed to in June with Indian assistance. India had also managed to convince the Sri Lankan government to meet with representatives of the various Tamil militant groups, something which, up until the end of 1984, it had refused to do.⁸³ In Thimpu,

representatives from the Sri Lankan government met with representatives from TULF and from TELO, PLOTE, LTTE, EROS, and EPRLF. The Tamil representatives indicated that the Sri Lankan government had to accept four nonnegotiable principles, which were subsequently regarded as the “Thimpu principles:”

1. Recognition of the Sri Lankan Tamils as a distinct nationality
2. Recognition of an independent Tamil homeland and the guarantee of its territorial integrity
3. Recognition of the unalienable right of self-determination of the Tamil nation
4. Recognition of the right to full citizenship and other fundamental democratic rights of all Tamils who look upon Sri Lanka as their country

The first three principles were reiterations of previous Tamil demands that were rejected by past Sri Lankan governments,⁸⁴ and so talks broke down as the Sri Lankan government again refused to accept them.

Violence picked up again after the failure of the Thimpu talks, and in February 1986, the government indicated that any agreement to end the conflict had to incorporate nine conditions, including the abandonment of the objective of an independent state, the ending of hostilities, the closure of insurgent training camps, and the surrender of arms by Tamil militants. These conditions were rejected by the Sri Lankan Tamil leadership.⁸⁵ Subsequent efforts to reach an agreement were made by President Jayewardene and two Indian ministers of state, and their discussions led to a set of proposals known as the December 19 proposals, which emerged at the end of 1986. These proposals called for removing Ampara, a Sinhalese-majority district, from the Eastern Province and merging the remaining two districts (Trincomalee and Batticaloa) with the Northern Province within a federal system.

This effort also found resistance among Tamils and Sinhalese. Tamils in the Eastern Province, who shared the province with sizeable Sinhalese and Muslim communities, were receptive to this latest effort. However, Prabhakaran was noncommittal because the proposal fell short of establishing a separate state.⁸⁶ Among the Sinhalese, various groups mobilized against the proposals. Both the SLFP and the JVP came out against this latest attempt at devolution, and a Sinhalese nationalist organization called Maubima Surakeeme Viyaparaya (MSV, the Movement to Protect the Motherland) was organized by several prominent Buddhist monks to oppose the proposals.⁸⁷ Although this latest effort failed at resolving the conflict, the proposals did form a basis for the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of 1987.⁸⁸

After the failure of these efforts, the combatants returned to the battlefield. Additionally, the LTTE began to consolidate its rule in the Jaffna peninsula. First, it took actions to decimate the other Tamil militant groups. For instance, as mentioned in *Chapter 7. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*, it killed 150 members of TELO and seventy to eighty members of the EPRLF, and it wiped out nearly the entire EPRLF politburo in Madras.⁸⁹ Additionally, as previously mentioned, it began to establish its own state institutions to supplant those of the Sri Lankan state, and in early 1987, once the LTTE announced that it would issue its own vehicle licenses and rationing measures, the Sri Lankan minister of national security placed an embargo on all fuel supplies and threatened to cut off food and electricity from the south.⁹⁰ However, the government relaxed the fuel embargo in response to Indian pressure.

The LTTE also undertook a number of horrific terrorist attacks, which led the government to seek a military solution to the conflict. On April 17, 1987, the LTTE massacred 127 Sinhalese bus passengers traveling on the Trincomalee-Habarana Road, and several days later, a car bomb exploded in Colombo's main market, killing 113 and injuring more than 200 people.⁹¹ In response, in May 1987 the government launched *Operation Liberation* to take back the Jaffna peninsula. It was able to capture Vadamarachchi, which curtailed the militants' access to Tamil Nadu, and it very nearly captured Prabhakaran as Velvettiturai, the LTTE leader's hometown, also fell to government forces.⁹²

By this point, Jaffna was on the verge of falling and it appeared that the LTTE would be defeated with the entire peninsula falling under government control. With reports of swelling civilian deaths, Ramachandran, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, rushed to New Delhi to urge Rajiv Gandhi to intervene "to save the Tamils."⁹³ India initially responded on June 3, 1987, by sending a convoy of twenty ships with relief supplies to the Jaffna peninsula. This flotilla was intercepted and turned back by the Sri Lankan navy, with the government stating that relief supplies had already been shipped to the north. With Pakistan and China also offering to send humanitarian aid, India decided to preempt them by airdropping twenty-two tons of relief supplies on the Jaffna peninsula on June 4, in violation of Sri Lanka's airspace. Jayewardene subsequently described this violation as India's seventeenth invasion of Sri Lanka over the last 2,500 years.⁹⁴

A furious round of negotiations among the key participants took place behind the scenes to negotiate the settlement that came to be known as the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord. Dixit, the Indian high commissioner (i.e., ambassador) in Sri Lanka, met with twelve Sri Lankan cabinet ministers to argue that the merger of the Northern and Eastern

Provinces (the key measure within the upcoming accord) should occur before, rather than after, a referendum ratifying it.⁹⁵ On July 28 in New Delhi, Gandhi met with representatives of the TULF, TELO, EPRLF, ENDLF, EROS, and PLOTE, and later that day, he met with Prabhakaran to discuss the accord.⁹⁶

Prabhakaran had previously indicated to an Indian official that the LTTE was not prepared to drop its demand for Tamil Eelam.⁹⁷ For Gandhi, however, Eelam was unacceptable,^j and he had a very difficult needle to thread. While he was obligated to intervene in Sri Lanka to ensure that separatist impulses in Tamil Nadu remained latent, RAW assessments from 1986 indicated that an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka would invigorate the notion of *Dravida Desam*, or “greater Tamil Nadu.”⁹⁹ Hence, at their meeting, Gandhi’s objective was to convince Prabhakaran to accept a deal that entailed the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces but fell short of Eelam. Pressed by Gandhi, Prabhakaran responded vaguely, indicating that he would support the accord provided that it was consistent with the interests of the Tamil people.¹⁰⁰ As an inducement, India awarded the LTTE \$300,000 per month, which Prabhakaran planned to use for the financial rehabilitation of LTTE cadres.¹⁰¹

President Jayewardene and Gandhi signed the accord on July 29, 1987, with Jayewardene under severe pressure both to support and to oppose the accord. India’s airdrop of supplies hinted at a military intervention,¹⁰² yet Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa strongly opposed the accord, and Jayewardene had to strong-arm the UNP into supporting the agreement by threatening to call for early parliamentary elections if the party did not support him.¹⁰³

Jayewardene was also fearful that a coup was imminent if he did not prosecute the war against the Tamil militants until the end.¹⁰⁴ Yet he felt he needed to agree to the accord because his national security advisor had indicated that the war was not winnable despite the impressive recent gains made by the armed forces.¹⁰⁵ As he stated to Gunaratna:

[Critics] are now attacking the Accord. I can defend that. What was the alternative? Nobody answers. If I did not sign the Accord . . . I would have been strung by my legs like Mussolini. Who would have been in office? The JVP here and the LTTE in the northeast.¹⁰⁶

^j At this time India, was facing several separatist movements that threatened its unity. A separatist movement had been brewing in the Indian state of Assam, and Sikh separatists were pressing for the creation of the state of Khalistan in the Indian Punjab. And by 1990, the separatist movement in Kashmir was beginning to escalate.⁹⁸

As described in *Chapter 6. Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)*, the accord itself was highly controversial because it severely restricted the ability of Sri Lanka to conduct an independent foreign policy, and it represented a severe intrusion into the domestic affairs of a small nation by a regional hegemon. The accord called for the joining of the Northern and Eastern Provinces into a single administrative unit with one elected provincial council and one chief minister, with a referendum held by the end of 1988 to allow the residents of the Eastern Province to decide whether they wanted to link up with the Northern Province. Additionally, the Tamil language, which up to that point had been a *national* language, was designated (along with English), as an *official* language, thus joining Sinhala in that category. The reversion to provincial councils and the new language provisions required a modification of the 1978 constitution in the form of the thirteenth amendment, which was approved in November 1987.¹⁰⁷

A day after the accord was signed, Indian peacekeeping troops (the IPKF) began to arrive in Jaffna, and they were warmly received by the LTTE and its sympathizers.¹⁰⁸ In the south, large street protests and antigovernment demonstrations erupted in Colombo. The accord required Tamil militant groups to surrender their arms within seventy-two hours. India promised that its territory would not be used for activities harmful to Sri Lanka's unity and security, and Sri Lanka was called on not to engage in activities that were "prejudicial" to India's interests.¹⁰⁹ Sri Lanka was required to consult with India regarding its reliance on foreign military and intelligence personnel, and it assured India that any foreign broadcasting facilities based in Sri Lanka would not be used for military or intelligence operations. Additionally, Sri Lanka promised to ensure that the port of Trincomalee would not be made available to foreign military forces in a manner that was inimical to India's interests.

Critics charged that the accord turned Sri Lanka into a satellite of India, similar to Sikkim (before it was incorporated into India) and Bhutan, whose foreign policy is controlled by India.¹¹⁰ Yet the accord provided Jayewardene with some breathing room. Aware of the festering JVP rebellion in the south (which received greater support as a result of the accord), he knew that his armed forces could not combat two insurgent groups (the JVP and the LTTE) at the same time.¹¹¹ With the introduction of Indian troops in the north, the accord allowed him to shift his forces to the south to deal with the JVP. In fact, the aircraft that were used to transport Indian troops to Sri Lanka were also used to transport Sri Lankan troops to the south.¹¹² Yet this move bought Jayewardene some time, because it avoided the possibility of a coup brought about through a failure to defeat the LTTE.

It was perhaps inevitable, though, that the LTTE and the IPKF would come to blows, as the LTTE was fighting and dying not for the minimalist goal of greater autonomy within a Sri Lankan state but for outright independence, an intolerable outcome for the Indians. Even before their 1987 intervention in Sri Lanka, the Indians had grown suspicious of the LTTE. The 1986 RAW assessment warning of the possibility of *Dravida Desam* also noted that the LTTE had become formidable and was getting difficult to control.¹¹³ Once the Indians arrived in Sri Lanka, the LTTE grew disenchanted as they alleged that India began arming rival militants and establishing bases for them in the north and east.¹¹⁴

The spark that set off their conflict occurred in early October 1987 as the Sri Lankan navy arrested seventeen LTTE cadres at sea. The Sri Lankan military wanted to bring the captured soldiers to Colombo, a move opposed by the IPKF for fear that it would cause significant public unrest in the Jaffna peninsula, which the IPKF would be forced to control. The IPKF threatened to use force against the Sri Lankan forces to prevent the forcible transfer of the captured LTTE cadres to Colombo,¹¹⁵ but the cadres preempted such a possibility by swallowing their cyanide pills, with twelve of the captured LTTE members perishing.^k

In response to the death of their cadres held by Sri Lankan troops, the LTTE executed eight Sri Lankan soldiers it held in custody and displayed their bodies at Jaffna's main bus terminal.¹¹⁸ It also proceeded to massacre 260 Sinhalese men, women, and children in border villages, and it also publicly hanged five Indian soldiers. By this time, the IPKF had decided to wage war against the LTTE,¹¹⁹ and on October 10, 1987, the IPKF commenced a counterinsurgency campaign against the LTTE that would last about thirty months. Interestingly, the Tamil Nadu government continued to support the LTTE, providing the group with fifty million rupees, and the south Indian state continued to provide training and hospital facilities to the group.¹²⁰ Ethnic solidarity also appeared to trump national identity when the Indian government was forced to withdraw the Tamil Madras Regiment of the IPKF on

^k Officials in Colombo were insistent that the captured LTTE members be sent to the capital. At one point, they told Brigadier Jayantha Jayaratne, who held the LTTE cadres in custody (and who was aware of the IPKF threat to use force to prevent the transfer of the LTTE members), that he would be relieved of his duties if he did not comply with the order to transfer the prisoners to Colombo. Colombo informed Jayaratne that "if you don't send the prisoners to Colombo within the next two hours, you hand over your charge to your second-in-command and come to Colombo under house arrest."¹¹⁶ The insistence with which the Sri Lankan government demanded the transfer of the seventeen LTTE cadres led Senaratne¹¹⁷ to speculate that the Sri Lankan government was interested in provoking a conflict between the LTTE and the IPKF.

October 11 because the unit refused to engage in the offensive against the LTTE.¹²¹

RANASINGHE PREMADASA ADMINISTRATION (1989–1993)

The period before the start of the Premadasa presidency was a highly turbulent one in Sri Lanka, as the government had to deal with the JVP in the south while the IPKF and LTTE battled in the north. As mentioned in *Chapter 6. Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)*, during the height of the JVP insurgency the UNP government reached out to the group to invite it to participate in the political process, going so far as to offer to vacate seats in parliament for the group in return for an end to the insurgency. Sensing momentum on its side, the group turned down the offer and kept up the campaign to decapitate the government.

Ultimately the JVP was destroyed by government-sponsored paramilitary groups, who stepped up an existing campaign against the group after the latter's disastrous decision in August 1989 to issue a death threat against the family members of armed forces personnel. Additionally, government efforts were supported by one hundred intelligence analysts in five different agencies. These agencies were the National Intelligence Bureau, the Counter Subversive Unit, the Colombo Detective Bureau, Military Intelligence, and Operations Combine.¹²² Police units fought against the JVP, but when they were overwhelmed they were supported by the army. However, army units suffered from low morale because they preferred to fight against the Tamil Tigers rather than a pro-Sinhalese organization, and they lacked the training to fight against an unconventional enemy.¹²³ However, special forces units within the army achieved greater success against the group because they had received training in unconventional warfare. These units largely concentrated their efforts in eliminating key JVP leaders.¹²⁴

Before the final reckoning in August 1989, the government did consider psychological and political-military actions short of unrestricted combat to counter the group. Unfortunately none of these actions was pursued as vigorously as the paramilitary campaign. In September 1988 the ministry of defense contemplated a strategy with two main components to counter the JVP.¹²⁵ One aspect of this strategy called for the identification and elimination of members of the JVP politburo and central committee, to include turning a blind eye to extrajudicial killings. However, the second component of the strategy involved a psychological operations campaign targeting moderates and sympathizers of the group. Some of the key aspects of this proposed campaign included

publicizing the awards available to informants providing information on the JVP; publicizing the atrocities committed by the group and the rationale for cumbersome actions taken by the security forces, such as instituting curfews and conducting searches; countering JVP propaganda; and encouraging the JVP to surrender by highlighting the lenient treatment and rehabilitation that defectors and cadres would receive.¹²⁶ Yet Gunaratna noted that no military or civilian office, nor any high-level official, took responsibility for implementing this psychological operation campaign.¹²⁷

This strategy also advocated tactics more in line with a counterinsurgency campaign than a kinetic counter-terrorist offensive. Specifically, it called on security forces to leave their bases to live and work with the local populace.¹²⁸ It suggested the development of community relations officers selected from the security forces, with responsibility for winning the hearts and minds of the local populace. Key among their objectives would be convincing the public that a JVP government would be disastrous for the country.

To implement this approach the government launched the Winning Hearts and Minds Program (WHAM) in March 1989.¹²⁹ The WHAM program called for troops to help provide medical facilities; distribute food, books, and clothes; assist with agricultural activities and organize the water supply; and help maintain other essential services. It also called for troops to have a continuous dialogue with local residents. The JVP was quite concerned with this program and attempted to disrupt its implementation, but they had little reason to worry because most troops stayed inside camps and left the villages to the JVP.¹³⁰

With respect to the Tamil insurgency, President Jayewardene was initially supportive of an Indian crackdown on the LTTE.¹³¹ Yet quite quickly, the Sri Lankan government changed its thinking, which resulted in a convergence of interests between the government and the LTTE in seeing the IPKF withdrawn from the island. Premadasa wanted the IPKF to leave to remove a rallying cry of the JVP,¹³² which had used the presence of the IPKF to great effect in drawing support to the group for its campaign to dislodge the government.

Additionally, Premadasa could not have been happy with the evolution of political and military affairs within the Northern and Eastern provinces under the IPKF. The NEPC was the centerpiece of the effort to devolve authority to the region. Given its war with the IPKF and its desire for an independent Eelam under its control, the LTTE boycotted the elections to this body, and India wound up administering the vote, flying in civil servants from the subcontinent to run the election.¹³³ The

EPRLF, which was created by India, wound up winning the election,¹ and the group, along with the ENDLF and TELO, came to comprise the Tamil National Army, which was also formed by the Indians and fought against the LTTE.

Given these politico-military developments, Premadasa was likely concerned that the north and east were growing increasingly under Indian control, and his government feared that that the IPKF would never leave if they managed to destroy the LTTE.¹³⁵ In a controversial move, he began to reach out to the LTTE, going so far as to transfer weapons to them to use against the IPKF.^m Premadasa also met with Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief spokesman and ideologue. The result of this rapprochement between the government and the LTTE was a cease-fire declared by the government and an offer of a peace package, including amnesty and rehabilitation, to the LTTE, and the two parties formalized the cease-fire in June 1989. The IPKF left Sri Lanka in March 1990 after increasing pressure from Sri Lankan and Indian critics of the intervention.¹³⁷ India's role as a regional peace-maker had failed.

Not surprisingly, the LTTE had no interest in laying down its arms. It took over IPKF camps and arms left by the departing army, and after Premadasa's refusal to dissolve the NEPC and repeal the sixth amendment to the constitution outlawing separatism, it broke off talks with the government, with Eelam War II commencing in June 1990.¹³⁸ The LTTE proceeded to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991, as the group feared he would reintroduce Indian troops into Sri Lanka if reelected. It also assassinated President Premadasa in May 1993, as the group was able to place a suicide bomber near the president at an election rally.

CHANDRIKA KUMARATUNGA ADMINISTRATION (1994–2005)

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga of the SLFP came to power after the August 1994 parliamentary elections. She headed the left-leaning People's Alliance (PA) coalition, and several months after being elected prime minister, she was elected president in November 1994. Peace talks with the LTTE commenced in October 1994 shortly before she was elected president, and the LTTE and the government signed a cease-fire in early January 1995. This new effort at peace also saw the

¹ Gunaratna reports that the elections were in all likelihood rigged by the IPKF, on instructions from the Indian High Commission in Colombo and RAW in New Delhi.¹³⁴

^m For more information regarding the weapons transferred to the LTTE, see Gunaratna.¹³⁶

international community take a greater role in overseeing the process. Four peace-monitoring committees were established in February 1995, two of which were from Norway and one each from the Netherlands and Canada. Norway also assisted the Sri Lankan government with setting up a national integration and planning unit within the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs and Ethnic Integration.¹³⁹

Negotiations lasted until mid-April 1995, at which time the LTTE abrogated the cease-fire by sinking two Sri Lankan navy gunboats, killing twenty-two sailors. Eelam War III commenced, yet the Kumaratunga government continued to pursue a political resolution to the conflict by releasing a sweeping devolution package in August 1995 that promised to devolve significant authority to a Tamil-run administrative unit in the north and east.¹⁴⁰ This new effort proposed to transform Sri Lanka into a “union of regions,” with each province constituting a region featuring a regional council and governor with authority over law and order, education, finance, and public service. Each region would have its own police force, educational and court systems, civil service, and administrative bodies for investment, taxation, and foreign aid. Additionally, a single North East Province would be created.ⁿ

This proposal generated substantial opposition from Sinhalese nationalists. One complaint was that under the new proposal, the government could not dissolve a regional council or assume its powers in case of war or rebellion.¹⁴² Article 2 of a legal draft on devolution issued in January 1996 noted that regional administrations were forbidden from advocating separatism, but it left unclear was how the government would respond if a regional unit desired to separate from Sri Lanka. The new proposal, however, did represent an effort to correct what some saw as deficiencies of the thirteenth amendment to the 1978 constitution.¹⁴³ This amendment was passed as part of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, yet one criticism was that it failed to give to any provincial

ⁿ Additionally, during the discussions over the Kumaratunga initiative, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress negotiated a deal with the TULF and the Ceylon Workers Congress for the creation of a regional unit for Sri Lanka’s Muslims. This deal involved the removal of the largely Sinhalese Ampara District from the Eastern Province and its inclusion within a South East Council with the Potuvil, Samanthurai, and Kalmunai areas of the Eastern Province.¹⁴¹

council complete control over any issue,^o and the central government could easily reassert authority over a particular issue. For instance, on health and education matters, central government authority could be reasserted through a ministerial directive.¹⁴⁵

The Kumaratunga government pursued this initiative while Eelam War III raged,^p yet ultimately this latest peace effort also failed. The opposition UNP opposed the effort, and the PA government did not even put to vote a draft August 2000 bill to modify the constitution to provide the legal framework for devolution.¹⁴⁶ The LTTE also rejected this effort. It was unhappy that the chief negotiator sent by the government lacked ministerial rank.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, Teresita Schaffer, a former American ambassador to Sri Lanka, also believed that the LTTE leaders participated in the 1995 talks as an exploratory exercise.¹⁴⁸ She noted that in talking to foreign audiences, they had previously indicated they would accept a settlement short of a separate state but had been vague as to what they would consider an acceptable solution. In her opinion, the LTTE's participation in the negotiations gave them a glimpse of what a resolution short of a separate state would look like, and the leadership preferred a return to war, given their desire for Eelam.¹⁴⁹

On the battlefield, in December 1995 the government managed to sweep the LTTE from the Jaffna peninsula, but the LTTE regrouped in the jungle area north of Vavuniya, from which it was able to prevent the government from resupplying Jaffna by overland, and it harassed sea traffic north of Trincomalee.¹⁵⁰ It also brought the fight to Colombo in January 1996 by setting off a truck bomb right next to the Central Bank, which destroyed the entire financial district and killed eighty-six people and wounded 1,400. In October 1997, it bombed Sri Lanka's tallest building, the thirty-nine-story World Trade Centre in Colombo, shortly after the building opened. It also achieved several notable gains against the Sri Lankan army. In November–December 1999, the LTTE inflicted heavy casualties on the army and gained more than 1,000 square miles of territory in the Vanni region in the north. In

^o More specifically, the thirteenth amendment specified three lists: List I detailed subjects devolved to provincial councils; List II, the reserved list, spelled out subjects retained by the central government; and List III, the concurrent list, specified subjects under the authority of both the central government and provincial councils, but in practice they fell under the authority of parliament. Additionally, the subjects listed in List I ultimately were under the authority of the central government as well, because the first phrase within the reserved list stated that “national policy on all subjects and functions,” including those on the provincial and concurrent lists, could be determined by the central parliament.¹⁴⁴

^p Kumaratunga pursued the peace effort even after an LTTE suicide bomber attempted to assassinate the president at a December 1999 election rally, which resulted in the loss of her right eye and injuries to several ministers.

April 2000, the group gained control over a key military base in the Elephant Pass, which connects the Jaffna peninsula with the mainland.¹⁵¹ Nearly 35,000 government troops were trapped on the Jaffna peninsula after this latest setback.

After these victories the LTTE instituted a unilateral cease-fire in December 2000, but once it ended in late April 2001 the Sri Lankan military launched an offensive to recapture the Elephant Pass, suffering heavy casualties. Additionally, the LTTE attacked the international airport outside of Colombo, destroying half the fleet of Air Lanka, the international carrier.¹⁵² As a result of these setbacks and frustration with a faltering economy, parliament passed a no-confidence vote against Kumaratunga's government, forcing a new election. The elections brought to power Ranil Wickremasinghe of the UNP, who headed the United National Front (UNF) coalition. Wickremasinghe became the prime minister, with Kumaratunga remaining as president.

Initially, Wickremasinghe was more willing than Kumaratunga to negotiate directly with the LTTE.¹⁵³ He was inclined to lift the ban that had been placed on the group after its attack on the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in January 1998, and he favored the creation of an interim administration in the north and east that featured a prominent role for the LTTE. Reportedly, during the Norwegian-led negotiations that commenced in 2002 (see below), his government was willing to give the LTTE *de facto* control over the administration of the northeast for a period of two years.¹⁵⁴ However, some observers argued that the LTTE and Prabhakaran had proceeded too far along the path of independence that they would never agree to any deal short of a separate state. For her part, Kumaratunga sought to sidestep the group and appeal directly to moderate Tamil parties through constitutional reforms that would pave the way toward greater autonomy for the north and east.¹⁵⁵

After the election, in December 2001 the LTTE extended an existing month-long cease-fire to the new government, and in February 2002 the two parties, with the assistance of Norwegian facilitators, signed the cease-fire agreement (CFA), which ushered in an indefinite cease-fire and a period of negotiations to end the conflict. Building on the success it had achieved in overseeing a peace process during the 1990s between Israelis and Palestinians, Norway proceeded to facilitate a spate of meetings between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. Six rounds of talks were held over 2002–2003, in Norway, Thailand, Japan, and Germany.

This process started off promisingly, with a March 2002 visit by Wickremasinghe to the Jaffna peninsula, the first visit to the region by a government leader since 1982. The LTTE also attempted to repair its relationship with Sri Lanka's Muslims. This community did not support

the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces (given their fear of Tamil domination within the proposed administrative unit), nor did they approve of LTTE rule in the north and east of the country. In response, in 1990 the LTTE began expelling thousands of Muslims from the Jaffna peninsula, but in 2002 the LTTE apologized to the Muslim community for this action and agreed to set up a joint committee to facilitate the return of displaced Muslims. The Muslims, in turn, reached a deal with the LTTE in which they recognized the group as the *de facto* authority in the north and east.¹⁵⁶

In April 2002, the LTTE sent out mixed signals regarding its willingness to consider a solution short of Eelam,⁹ and in May Wickremasinghe expressed doubts regarding the advisability of establishing an interim administration in the north and east. In a May 2002 speech to the European Parliament, he indicated that the unity of Sri Lanka was nonnegotiable and that the establishment of an interim administration in the north and east should be linked to a political settlement.¹⁵⁹

The first round of discussions between the LTTE and the government was held in Thailand in September 2002. Anton Balasingham, the chief negotiator for the LTTE, indicated that the group was willing to accept “autonomy and self-governance” in northeastern Sri Lanka once both parties agreed to a particular political system for the country, and the head of the government delegation noted that the LTTE’s political aspirations could be fulfilled “within one country.”¹⁶⁰ In the follow-up meeting in Oslo in December 2002, both sides agreed to develop a federal political system in which the Tamils would enjoy “internal self-determination” within the north and east.

In July 2003, Wickremasinghe put forward a proposal based on the mutual understanding reached in Oslo, which entailed the establishment of a proposed Provincial Administrative Council (PAC) that would have authority over governmental functions except for matters of police, security, land, and revenue. The PAC would also have an LTTE majority. However, this proposal was rejected by the group, and in November 2003 the LTTE put forward its own proposal for an interim administration, known as the Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA).

⁹ In an April 2002 press conference held by Prabhakaran and LTTE chief negotiator and political strategist Anton Balasingham in Kilinochchi, Balasingham indicated that Prabhakaran was the president and prime minister of Tamil Eelam. Additionally, when asked if his long-standing request to his cadres to shoot him if he gave up his demand for Eelam still stands, Prabhakaran indicated that it does. However, during the same press conference, Prabhakaran thanked Wickremasinghe for his bold actions and indicated that if Tamil demands regarding a Tamil homeland, nationality, and the right of self-determination were met, they may agree to a political solution. He stated, “Once these fundamentals are accepted or a political solution is put forward by Sri Lanka recognizing these three fundamentals and if our people are satisfied with the framework of a solution that recognizes these core issues then we will consider giving up the demand for Eelam.”^{157, 158}

The ISGA would have an LTTE majority and authority over a wide range of subjects, including security, defense, and land; and separate institutions for finance and justice would be established, which would give the authority the ability to regulate internal and external trade, as well as to borrow and receive aid.¹⁶¹ With respect to maritime issues, Clause 18 would have given the ISGA control of nearly two-thirds of the Sri Lankan coastline.

Up to this point, the peace process on the government side had been handled by Prime Minister Wickremasinghe,^r and by now President Kumaratunga had become alarmed by the evolution of the talks. She believed that the UNF government was making too many concessions to the LTTE and was concerned that the group was using the cease-fire to build up its military capabilities. Additionally, she was alarmed that the group had already set up a *de facto* independent state in the north and east.¹⁶³ By this point, the conflict had evolved beyond a merely ethnic conflict to one that encompassed competing state-building projects, where “the Wickremasinghe’s government’s limited formulation of a unitary state with some regional decentralization” clashed with the “LTTE’s maximalist notion of a confederation of largely sovereign entities in one formal state.”¹⁶⁴

Before the government considered the ISGA proposal, Kumaratunga invoked her authority as president by declaring a state of emergency in November 2003 and took control of the ministries of defense, interior, and media from the UNF government. Furthermore, in 2004 she dissolved parliament four years before the end of its term and announced new elections for April 2004. The election was won by the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA), which was formed through an alliance between Kumaratunga’s SLFP and the JVP, which by this time had rehabilitated itself as a nonviolent Marxist-nationalist party. The election resulted in the exit of Wickremasinghe from the prime minister’s role, as this position was assumed by Mahinda Rajapaksa, who took a more skeptical view of LTTE intentions.¹⁶⁵ The UPFA

^r The approach to the negotiations with the LTTE that the UNF government headed by Wickremasinghe adopted over 2002–2004 was fundamentally different from that adopted by Kumaratunga over 1996–2000. The UNF government envisioned a political solution as the culmination of a long drawn-out process of de-escalation, normalization, and rapid economic development in the north and east. This sequencing led to LTTE fears of a “peace trap,” whereby the north and east would become economically ensnared within the economy of Sri Lanka before an acceptable political settlement was reached. In contrast, the government headed by the People’s Alliance in the mid- and late 1990s favored reaching a political settlement up front, in conjunction with a military strategy designed to weaken the LTTE in order to impose a more favorable political settlement (albeit one entailing enhanced regional autonomy that may be acceptable to moderate Tamil groups).¹⁶²

rejected federalism as a solution to the Tamil issue and instead favored decentralization and devolution within a unitary state.¹⁶⁶

In November 2004, during his annual Heroes' Day address honoring LTTE members who had given their lives in the battle for Eelam, Prabhakaran threatened a return to war.¹⁶⁷ However, in December, the Indian Ocean tsunami struck Sri Lanka. Mullaitivu was badly hit, and LTTE infrastructure suffered significant damage. The LTTE organized humanitarian aid, which was regarded as exemplary, although the government would have preferred that the group not be seen providing human security in the affected areas, nor did it want to see the group directly receive foreign humanitarian assistance.¹⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the government and the LTTE agreed to establish the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) to coordinate the distribution of aid within LTTE areas. The Supreme Court, however, blocked implementation of P-TOMS by ruling it unconstitutional.

During this time, a development occurred that had far-reaching consequences for the LTTE and its struggle against the government. In March 2004 reports emerged of a split between Prabhakaran and Vinayagamoorthy Muralithiran, who was also known as Colonel Karuna and who headed the eastern wing of the LTTE based in the Batticaloa-Ampara region. Reportedly, the split was caused by Karuna's refusal to send 1,000 of his combat troops up north, given fears that this redeployment of forces would weaken the LTTE in the eastern region. Yet this split was also the result of long-simmering tensions between northern and eastern Tamils within the LTTE. Eastern Tamils complained that most of the leadership positions within the group were held by northern Tamils, while the former did most of the fighting.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, Karuna complained that very few funds collected from abroad were spent in the east, and the eastern leadership was not happy with the rapprochement with the Muslims in eastern Sri Lanka, because Tamils and Muslims were still clashing in the east, where Muslim youths were allegedly forming anti-LTTE "Osama suicide squads" to attack the group.¹⁷⁰ This split led Karuna to claim that his forces, which totaled approximately 6,000 troops,⁵ represented "South Eelam," with the LTTE representing "North Eelam."¹⁷²

After this split, Karuna and his faction went over to the government side, and they undoubtedly provided government troops with tactical and strategic intelligence.¹⁷³ Stung by the defection, the LTTE launched a swift counterattack against the group, which forced the latter to disband and disperse abroad. Many Karuna supporters wound up finding employment abroad in the construction industry in Qatar,

⁵ Chris Smith estimated that Karuna's forces totaled 2,000.¹⁷¹

and they ruled out a move to Colombo, given the LTTE's numerous and well-organized intelligence network in the capital.¹⁷⁴

Presidential elections were held in November 2005, and frustrations with the CFA lead to the defeat of Wickremasinghe by SLFP leader Mahinda Rajapaksa. Rajapaksa brought his own ideas regarding how to confront the LTTE, and it was under his administration that Sri Lanka finally succeeded in defeating the Tamil Tigers.

MAHINDA RAJAPAKSA ADMINISTRATION (2005–)

As previously noted, Rajapaksa took a more jaundiced view of the LTTE's motives, and he would countenance a political solution only as long as it validated the unitary nature of the Sri Lankan state and entailed only a minimal degree of devolution.¹⁷⁵ Interestingly, there are reports that the Rajapaksa camp bribed the LTTE to dissuade Tamil voters in the north from voting.¹⁷⁶ Tamil voters would likely have voted for Wickremasinghe, given his prominent role in the peace process, and their votes may have made a difference as Rajapaksa captured fifty-one percent of the vote against Wickremasinghe's forty-nine percent.¹⁷⁷ For the LTTE, they may have calculated that it was preferable to have a hard-line president with whom an agreement was impossible, so as to justify a return to the battlefield and thus avoid the possibility of being forced into making concessions in negotiations.¹⁷⁸ If this indeed was their thinking, then the group miscalculated, as Rajapaksa proved to be willing to pursue a military solution in which the armed forces were given wide latitude to finally destroy the LTTE regardless of the humanitarian cost.

The last negotiation between the LTTE and the government occurred in February 2006 in Geneva, after which the two sides returned to the battlefield. In April, the LTTE nearly assassinated the army chief Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka, and in June it managed to kill Major-General Parami Kulatanga, the third most senior army officer. By this time the government appears to have been relying on tactics that successfully suppressed the JVP rebellion in the late 1980s. Paramilitary groups comprising members from groups that were decimated by the LTTE were operating in the north carrying out "white van" disappearances against suspected LTTE members and sympathizers.¹⁷⁹ Some of those abducted were eventually located within the government's Terrorist Investigation Division and Criminal Investigation Division.¹⁸⁰ The government also collaborated with anti-LTTE Tamil political parties, including the Eelam People's Democratic Party and the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (Tamil People's Liberation Tigers, TMVP), which was the party created by Colonel Karuna.¹⁸¹

In July 2006 the LTTE raised the stakes by closing down a canal that ran from an “uncleared” area (i.e., one that still contained LTTE elements) into a “cleared” area in the Trincomalee District, which deprived water to more than 50,000 individuals.¹⁸² The government responded with air strikes in the Sampur District, along with the deployment of troops. It managed to liberate Sampur, which had been held by the LTTE for nine years and was used by the group to harass troop carriers and supply ships heading north.¹⁸³

Sensing momentum swing to its side, the government took a number of actions to prepare for the final destruction of the LTTE. Internationally, it reoriented its foreign policy by establishing closer ties with China, Russia, and Pakistan. The Chinese provided the government with Jian-7 fighter jets, surveillance radars, ordnance, and substantial aid in return for a naval base in Hambantota, in the Southern Province.¹⁸⁴ Additionally, both Russia and China shielded Sri Lanka from being targeted by the United Nations Security Council.¹⁸⁵ Also, after his recovery from the LTTE suicide attack, Fonseka returned to his duties with great vigor and extra motivation. He invested more in training and jungle warfare and in long-range deep penetration units to attack the LTTE.¹⁸⁶ On the home front, the government conducted an effective media campaign through state media and the newly established Media Center for National Security, via which LTTE battle deaths were inflated and military casualties underreported.¹⁸⁷ Many members of the media reporting on the war were assaulted, murdered, kidnapped, and imprisoned on false charges.¹⁸⁸

The defection of the Karuna faction essentially resulted in the loss of the east for the LTTE. The Sri Lankan military supported the remnants of Karuna’s forces with intelligence, safe houses, and weapons,¹⁸⁹ and with their aid in July 2007 the government captured the entire Eastern Province. The vice was beginning to close in on the LTTE. By this late stage, the group had graduated from being a guerrilla force to a conventional one that ran a *de facto* state that controlled territory and had access to a population. These factors mitigated against a return to the jungle to wage a guerrilla campaign.¹⁹⁰ Additionally, the population under its control tended to follow as the LTTE retreated, as they feared either the LTTE’s retribution or that of government forces.

The knockout blow occurred in May 2009, as the group and 100,000 civilians found themselves trapped in a strip of land along the eastern coast.¹⁹¹ The military repeatedly bombed the area, which had previously been declared a no-fire zone, resulting in the death and maiming of thousands of Tamils civilians. Prabhakaran was shot and killed on May 19, and with his death, a tragic chapter in Sri Lanka’s history came to a close as the LTTE admitted defeat.

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- ¹⁶⁶ Ganguly, “Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Conflict: At a Crossroads between War and Peace,” 912.
- ¹⁶⁷ Smith, “The Eelam Endgame?” 71.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁹ Ganguly, “Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Conflict: At a Crossroads between War and Peace,” 913.
- ¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 914.
- ¹⁷¹ Smith, “The Eelam Endgame?” 70.
- ¹⁷² Ganguly, “Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Conflict: At a Crossroads between War and Peace,” 914.
- ¹⁷³ Smith, “The Eelam Endgame?” 70.
- ¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.
- ¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 76, 79.
- ¹⁷⁶ Neil DeVotta, “The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka,” *Asian Survey* 49, no. 6 (2009): 1037.
- ¹⁷⁷ Smith, “The Eelam Endgame?” 76
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- ¹⁷⁹ Smith, “The Eelam Endgame?” 72–73.
- ¹⁸⁰ DeVotta, “The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka,” 1042.
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- ¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 1038.
- ¹⁸³ Chris Smith, “The Eelam Endgame?” 75.
- ¹⁸⁴ DeVotta, “The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka,” 1045.
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CONCLUSION TO PART III

This section highlights how a conflict between an insurgency and a government sometimes plays out over many years and in fact may resemble a Kabuki dance—over this extended period of time both parties will likely have accumulated a substantial amount of information on the other side, becoming well familiar with its opponent’s potential strategies and interests. For the special operator, it is important to note that counterinsurgency efforts, such as the efforts against the JVP and LTTE, will often have both military and political components of varying intensities, and the latter may involve the government making various efforts to reach an accommodation with opposition forces. Indeed, the Sri Lankan government offered to vacate seats in parliament for the JVP, and in the 1950s and 1960s it explored various schemes to devolve political authority to the Tamil regions of the country.

However, governments often have their own “red lines,” or concessions beyond which they are hesitant to offer and unlikely or unable to implement. International relations theorists, particularly those of a realist persuasion, are fond of noting how distrust is endemic among countries, and indeed that the pervasiveness of distrust is a permanent operating condition inhibiting cooperation among nations.^a The same as well may be said of the relationship between a government and an opposition movement, and this lack of trust may be instrumental in the establishment of limits on the concessions a government and is willing to offer and a society (or at least segments of it) is willing to tolerate. This was clearly evident in the Sri Lankan government’s inability to implement the B-C and S-C pacts in the 1950s and 1960s, as Sinhalese distrust of Tamil intentions fostered fears that these concessions would ultimately lead to the eventual independence of the Tamil regions of the country.

A useful conceptual tool for the special operator to potentially anticipate the types of countermeasures a government may adopt (or actions an insurgency may take) is the notion of a leader’s operational code, which was developed by Alexander George at the RAND Corporation in the 1960s.² Originally applied to understand the decision making of Bolshevik leaders, the operational code refers to a leader’s—whether government or insurgent—fundamental collection of beliefs about the nature of history and politics, and they serve as a frame through which historical and political events are interpreted. More specifically, this

^a For instance, the theory of offensive realism developed by John Mearsheimer is based on the notion that states that otherwise would prefer only to be secure have an incentive to act aggressively towards one another, in part due to the inability to never be certain about other states’ intentions.¹

belief system can be deciphered through answers to a collection of philosophical and policy-oriented questions:

1. What is the “essential” nature of political life? Is the political universe essentially one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one’s political opponents?
2. What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one’s fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic, or must one be pessimistic on this score; and in what respects the one and/or the other?
3. Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?
4. How much “control” or “mastery” can one have over historical development? What is one’s role in “moving” and “shaping” history in the desired direction?
5. What is the role of “chance” in human affairs and in historical development?
6. What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?
7. How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?
8. How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled, and accepted?
9. What is the best “timing” of action to advance one’s interest?
10. What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one’s interests?

A full analysis of a government or insurgent leader’s operational code would require an exhaustive analysis of their spoken and written statements, as well as an analysis of the actions they undertook. While such an undertaking for the leaders of the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE, and the JVP is beyond the scope of this report, the information presented in this study does allow one to take an initial stab at deciphering the operational code of the main players in the two insurgencies in Sri Lanka addressed in this report. For instance, clearly Rohana Wijeweera believed in the power of human agency (especially his) to shape historical development in a desired direction, and this belief led him to agitate for a revolution whose ultimate goal was the radical transformation of the political and economic system of Sri Lanka. Additionally, given the different stances they took toward attempting to resolve the conflict with the LTTE, one can potentially argue that Mahindra Rajapaksa and Chandrika Kumaratunga had differing views about the relative utility of force and diplomacy in reaching a solution in the long-running conflict with the Tamil Tigers.

A focus on the operational code does not mean that other “structural” factors, such as economic, political, social, and diplomatic conditions, play a less important role in affecting the actions taken by governments and insurgencies. However, the questions that embody the belief system that underpins the operational code could serve as a useful conceptual tool for Special Operators as they attempt to understand the decision-making of government officials and insurgent leaders.

ENDNOTES

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- ² Alexander L. George, *The “Operational Code”: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making*, Memorandum RM-5427-PR (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, September 1967), http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM5427.html.

CHAPTER 9.

CONCLUSION

The insurgencies waged by the JVP and LTTE ended in the military defeats of both groups, with neither group achieving its original goals. For better or worse, the military defeat of one side or the other, as opposed to a negotiated settlement, is quite common in insurgencies. A 2010 RAND study noted that a stalemate or negotiated settlement was the outcome of only nineteen of eighty-nine insurgencies under review, whereas fifty-four resulted in a victory for either the insurgents (twenty-six) or the government (twenty-eight), with the remainder yet to conclude.¹

The JVP re-emerged as a nonviolent Marxist-nationalist party, and it was one of the initial founders of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA). The UPFA won more than forty-five percent of the vote in the 2004 legislative elections, thereby winning 105 of 225 seats in parliament. Somewhat ironically, as one of the key members of the UPFA the JVP became a part of the government (although it would leave the coalition in April 2005).

Although the LTTE was militarily crushed, the grievances that animated its struggle for independence are still relevant. A November 2012 report by the International Crisis Group noted that the Rajapaksa government has not fully implemented the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution by devolving political authority down to the provincial level, and in particular to the Tamil regions of the country.² Since the defeat of the LTTE the baton of Tamil nationalism has been taken up by the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which was founded in 2001 (with LTTE encouragement), and some of its constituent parties have included TELO, EPRLF, TULF, the ACTC, and the Illankai Tamil Arasu Katchi.

The TNA has taken a moderate path with respect to ethnic issues, indicating its willingness to accept a political settlement well short of a separate state.³ Yet the tensions that motivated the thirty-year ethnic conflict remain. In the first-ever elections for the northern provincial council in September 2013, the TNA won seventy-eight percent of the vote and thirty of thirty-eight council seats, but it was obligated to run on a Tamil nationalist platform that tapped into continuing desire for a separate state.⁴ Its election manifesto reiterated the claim that the Tamils are a distinct people with the right of "self-determination" and "self-rule" within a merged North-eastern Province in a federalized Sri Lanka.⁵ Additionally, its candidate for chief minister, the retired Supreme Court Justice C. V. Wigneswaran, made campaign statements praising Prabhakaran as a hero.⁶

Sinhalese critics have taken such statements and actions by the TNA as evidence of the group's separatist nature.⁷ However, even if such actions were undertaken to gain electoral advantage, they attest to the

fact that even though the LTTE was militarily defeated, the sentiments that gave rise to its insurgency still resonate with members of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka.

ENDNOTES

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- ² International Crisis Group, “Sri Lanka: Tamil Politics and the Quest for a Political Solution,” *Asia Report*, no. 239, November 2012, 1, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/239-sri-lanka-tamil-politics-and-the-quest-for-a-political-solution.aspx>.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁴ International Crisis Group, “Sri Lanka’s Potemkin Peace: Democracy Under Fire,” *Asia Report*, no. 253, November 2013, 8, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/253-sri-lankas-potemkin-peace-democracy-under-fire.pdf>.
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- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. MAJOR SRI LANKAN ORGANIZATIONS

This appendix lists in alphabetical order the major nonterrorist organizations in Sri Lanka since independence in 1948.

ACTC	All Ceylon Tamil Congress
CIC	Ceylon Indian Congress
CPSL	Communist Party of Sri Lanka
CWC	Ceylon Workers' Congress
FP	Tamil Federal Party
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party
MEP	Mahajana Eksath Peramuna
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLPP	Sri Lanka People's Party
SMS	Sinhala Maha Sabha
TNT	Tamil New Tigers
TUF	Tamil United Front
UNP	United National Party

APPENDIX B. TAMIL TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

This appendix presents an alphabetical listing of the Tamil groups that at some time since 1948 have advocated the establishment of an independent Eelam by violent means. These groups varied in size, importance, and impact. Some no longer exist. Others have evolved into mainstream organizations and have renounced separatism and violence.

ELDF	Eelam Liberation Defense Front
ELT	Eelam Liberation Tigers
EM	Eagle Movement
ENDLF	Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front
EPRLF	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
ENLF	Eelam National Liberation Front
EROS	Tamil Revolutionary Organization of Students
GATE	Guerrilla Army of Tamil Eelam
IFTA	Ilankai Freedom Tamil Army
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NLFTE	National Liberation Front of Tamil Eelam

PLP	People's Liberation Party
RCG	Red Crescent Guerrillas
RELO	Revolutionary Eelam Liberation Organization
RFTE	Red Front of Tamil Eelamists
SRSL	Socialist Revolutionary Social Liberation
TEA	Tamil Eelam Army
TEBM	Tamil Eelam Blood Movement
TEC	Tamil Eelam Commando
TEDF	Tamil Eelam Defence Front
TEEF	Tamil Eelam Eagles Front
TELA	Tamil Eelam Liberation Army
TELC	Tamil Eelam Liberation Cobras
TELE	Tamil Eelam Liberation Extremists
TELF	Tamil Eelam Liberation Front
TELG	Tamil Eelam Liberation Guerrillas
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization
TENA	Tamil Eelam National Army
TERO	Tamil Eelam Revolutionary Organization
TERPLA	Tamil Eelam Revolutionary People's Liberation Army
TESS	Tamil Eelam Security Service
TPCU	Tamil People's Command Unit
TPDF	Tamil People's Democratic Front
TPSF	Tamil People's Security Front
TPSO	Tamil People's Security Organization
TS	Three Stars

Source: South Asia Intelligence Review, South Asia Terrorism Portal, accessed November 21, 2010, <http://www.satp.org/>.

APPENDIX C. ACRONYMS

ACTC	All Ceylon Tamil Congress
AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
ARIS	Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies
B-C Pact	Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact
CFA	Cease-fire Agreement
CID	Criminal Investigation Division
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CNC	Ceylon National Congress
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CVF	Civilian Volunteer Force
CWC	Ceylon Workers' Congress
DDC	District Development Council
DJV	Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya
DK	Dravida Kazhagam
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Association for Dravidian Progress)
ENDLF	Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front
ENLF	Eelam National Liberation Front
EPRLF	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FP	Federal Party
GCE	General Certificate Examination
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GUES	General Union of Eelam Students
IFT	International Federation of Tamils
IPKF	Indian Peacekeeping Force
ISGA	Interim Self-Governing Authority
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
ITAK	Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchchi
JSS	Jathika Sevaka Samithiya
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MSV	Maubima Surakeeme Viyaparaya
NEPC	North-East Provincial Council
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization

NSSP	Nava Sama Samaja Pakshaya
P-TOMS	Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure
PA	People’s Alliance
PAC	Provincial Administrative Council
PDS	Planning and Development Secretariat
PFLT	People’s Front of Liberation Tigers
PKK	Kurdish Workers Party
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PLOTE	People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
RDF	Rapid Deployment Force
S-C Pact	Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLTB	Sri Lanka Transport Board
SORO	Special Operations Research Office
SSU	Socialist Student Union
STF	Special Task Force
SWAPO	South West Africa People’s Organization
TEEC	Tamil Eelam Education Council
TEEDO	Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organization
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization
TEPO	Tamil Eelam People’s Organization
TMVP	Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
TNA	Tamil National Army
TNT	Tamil New Tigers
TOSIS	Tigers Organization of Security Intelligence Service
TRO	Tamils Rehabilitation Organization
TUF	Tamil United Front
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UNF	United National Front
UNP	United National Party
UPFA	United People’s Freedom Alliance
VOC	Vereenidge Oost-Indische Compagnie
WHAM	Winning Hearts and Minds Program
YVM	Yalppana Vaipava Malai
ZDI	Zimbabwe Defense Industries

APPENDIX D. TECHNICAL APPENDIX

Methodology of the Study

All ARIS Tier 1 Insurgency Case Studies are presented using the same framework. While not a strict template, it is a method used by the team to ensure a common treatment of the cases, which will aid readers in comparing one case with another.

All of the sources used in preparation of these case studies are unclassified and for the most part are secondary rather than primary sources. Where we could, we used primary sources to describe the objectives of the revolution and to give a sense of the perspective of the revolutionary or another participant or observer. This limitation to unclassified sources allows a much wider distribution of the case studies while hindering the inclusion of revealing or perhaps more accurate information. We selected sources that provide the most reliable and accurate research we could obtain, endeavoring to use sources we believe to be authoritative and unbiased.

These case studies are intended to be strictly neutral in terms of bias toward the revolution or those to whom the revolution was or is directed. We sought to balance any interpretive bias in our sources and in the presentation of information so that the case may be studied without any indication by the author of moral, ethical, or other judgment.

While we used a multi-methodological approach in our analysis, the analytical method that underpins these case studies can most accurately be described as “contextual social/political analysis.” Research in the social sciences is often done from one of two opposing perspectives. The first is a positivist perspective, which looks for universal laws to describe actions in the human domain and considers context to be background noise. The second is a postmodernist or constructivist perspective, which denies the existence of general laws and attributes of social and political structures and processes, and as a consequence focuses almost entirely on local factors. Contextual analysis is “something in between,” in which context is used to facilitate the discovery of regularities in social and political processes and thereby promote systematic knowledge.¹ In practice, contextual social/political analysis balances these two perspectives, combining a comparative understanding of the actors, events, activities, relationships, and interactions associated with the case of interest with an appreciation for the significant role context played in how and why things transpired.

“Context” includes factors, settings, or circumstances that in some way may act on or interact with actors, organizations, or other entities within the country being studied, often enabling or constraining

actions. It is a construct or interpretation of the properties of a system, organization, or situation that are necessary to provide meaning beyond what is objectively observable.²

Although we have applied this methodology throughout these case studies, the section entitled *Context and Catalysts of the Insurgency* focuses heavily on contextual aspects. Examples of elements of context often used in this type of analysis include culture, history, place (location), population (demography), and technology. Within these studies, we present the primary discussion of context as follows:

Physical Environment

Social scientists often cite features of the physical environment as a risk factor for conflict—whether it is slope elevation, mountainous terrain, or rural countryside. Rough terrain^a is a typical topographical feature correlated with rebel activity, as it provides safe havens and resources for insurgents. Insurgent groups such as the Afghan Taliban have benefited from mountainous terrain, making pursuit and surveillance by countervailing forces difficult. Likewise, the Viet Cong in Vietnam benefited from dense forest cover despite American attempts at defoliation.³ Less clear are the reasons behind the correlation that researchers have found between rough terrain and conflict. Most theories for this relationship center on insurgent viability and a state's capacity to govern. In short, rough terrain is correlated with conflict, but that does not mean it causes conflict or that rough terrain is necessary for a conflict to emerge.^b

Other geographic features, such as location and distance, have an impact on conflict patterns and processes. Generally, regions farther from the capital are at higher risk for conflict, as are those closer to international borders. Another important consideration when analyzing the impact of geography on conflict patterns and processes is the expanse of the conflict. While it is common to speak of entire countries embroiled in conflict, actual conflicts generally occur only in a small percentage of a state's territory, typically fifteen percent. Despite that

^a Most researchers use mountains (or slope elevation) and forests as a proxy for "rough terrain." Little attention has been paid to other topographical features, such as swamps, that impede government access or surveillance.

^b The relationship between terrain and conflict can be described as follows: "rebels who seek refuge in the mountains are better able to withstand a militarily superior opposition . . . that rebel groups will take advantage of such terrain, whenever available. We do not believe that terrain in and of itself is a cause of conflict, nor does the rough terrain proposition anticipate such a relationship."⁴

low figure, however, internal conflicts can sometimes encompass nearly half of the territory of the host country.⁵

Historical Context

Revolutions or insurgencies do not emerge from formless ether but, rather, take their shape from accumulated layers of historical experience. Not only are actors in insurgent movements important participants in history, but they are also its end users. That is, insurgent movements are not only shaped by historical experience, but they also actively seek to understand and manipulate the key components of those experiences—whether historical events, persons, or narratives—to accomplish their objectives. Thus, sustained, organized political violence cannot be adequately explained without analyzing the historical context in which it developed. Some of the themes analyzed in this section are the legacies, whether organizational, political, or social, of conflict over time; the formation of group and organizational identity and its attendant narrative; the development of societal and political institutions; and the changing relationships, and perceptions thereof, that balance national, local, and/or group interests.⁶

Charles Tilly, a pioneering sociologist studying political conflict, made important observations about the relationship between social movements and historical context. Several of these are described below:

- Social movements incorporate locally available cultural materials such as language, social categories, and widely shared beliefs; they therefore vary as a function of historically determined local cultural accumulations.
- Path dependency prevails in social movements as in other political processes, such that events occurring at one stage in a sequence constrain the range of events that is possible at later stages.
- Once social movements have occurred and acquired names, both the name and competing representations of social movements became available as signals, models, threats, and/or aspirations for later actors.⁷

While Tilly's observations address social movements, usually understood as nonviolent political movements, he and his collaborators argued that contentious political activity belonged on a continuum, not in separate categories.⁸ Violent and nonviolent groups belonged to the same genus but used different "repertoires of contention." Thus, the same methodologies used to explain nonviolent political activity could also be useful in explaining violent political activity. Our extensive research on nearly thirty insurgencies supports this theory. The

insurgencies, but also the individual participants themselves, often began their careers by engaging in nonviolent political activity, transitioning to violence sometimes only after many years. To connect the observations described above more explicitly with revolutionary and insurgent activities, we examine each of these general observations of social movements and apply them to the specific activities associated with an insurgency or revolution. Revolutions and insurgencies typically begin as local or regional movements, and as such they include all of the aspects of local cultural material, which, as mentioned above, contributes to the ontology of a social movement.

Insurgent activities frequently cross borders and have an influence on the societies and movements in adjacent regions. Actions taken by an insurgent organization at one point in time can eliminate or enable possible future options for furthering the insurgency. Groups associated with revolutions and insurgencies usually seek recognition for their actions, so it is important for them to have names and symbols (emblems, flags, etc.) that can be easily associated with them and their causes. These representations then become the public branding of the organization and are used by supporters and detractors alike to further the narrative or counter-narrative of a movement. Given these factors, the historical context within which any insurgency, revolution, or other internal conflict takes place is a critical element in analyzing these events.

Socioeconomic Conditions

How do socioeconomic conditions affect insurgencies? One important socioeconomic variable to consider is per-capita gross domestic product (GDP), and the high correlation of this variable with political stability is among one of the most robust findings in the analysis of conflict dynamics. In general, some of the relevant socioeconomic factors that impact political violence include poverty, relative deprivation, opportunity costs, and ethnic nationalism.

With respect to poverty, some political scientists argue that countries with lower levels of economic development are more likely to witness political violence.⁹ Poverty describes the poor material wealth of individuals or societies, but it also tells researchers that the country is likely suffering from a host of other ills. Rather than just a simple measure of wealth, a country's low GDP per capita is also a proxy measure for poor state capacity. States with poor capacity feature a central government with a limited ability to project power across their territory to enforce laws, policies, and regulations.¹⁰ Often, the governments in these states have weak institutions, poor governance, and widespread

corruption, all factors that enable insurgents to more easily recruit and operate. For instance, in Colombia, a relatively wealthy developing country, limited resources made it difficult for the government to build road infrastructure in rural areas. As a result, the security forces found it difficult to access remote areas where insurgents found sanctuary. However, poverty by itself is not enough to predict an insurgency. It is best understood as a risk factor for political conflict.¹¹

Researchers also look at additional factors that are closely related to poverty, such as the presence of a large landless population. In many countries, including Iran and Colombia, land reform was a prominent feature of the demands of resistance movements in the twentieth century.¹² Poverty can also introduce “selective incentives” to participate in insurgencies. These incentives are the advantages that accrue to participants, whether economic gain or enhanced social status and political power, gained by participating in a successful rebellion.¹³ Other research has also indicated that countries with extensive patron–client networks, large agricultural sectors, and highly uneven patterns of land ownership are also at risk for political conflict.^c

Another branch of research related to poverty looks at how a government’s efforts to modernize society and the economy can lead to increased tensions.¹⁵ More specifically, this perspective argues that the modernization process is inherently conflictual since in practice it is often uneven, as greater emphasis is usually placed on economic and social uplift of downtrodden groups without developing a political framework for adequately incorporating them in the political process. Elite members of the *ancien régime* may see their fortunes decline relative to newly empowered classes, yet the latter remain disenchanted as the former may still control the levers of political power. This dynamic was present in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Sri Lanka, as rising members of the *karavas* caste in Sinhalese society attempted to challenge the political power of the *govigama*, the highest group within the Sinhalese constellation of castes.

Another proposed socioeconomic factor theorized to contribute to conflict is relative political, social, and economic grievances. In *Why*

^c In such an environment, patron–client relations may suppress the desire of the peasantry to offer support to reformist parties that seek to reduce extreme levels of economic and land inequality. Specifically, a small oligarchic land-holding elite may use its economic power over the peasantry to compel the latter to vote for parties that oppose land redistribution (which would involve the breakup and sell-off of large estates). Joshi and Mason¹⁴ found that Maoist insurgents in Nepal who supported land reform were more successful in mobilizing peasants to support an insurgency than to support their candidates for parliament. They found that patron–client relationships prevented the peasantry from offering their political support, and that the insurgents had greater support in areas where they were able to disrupt clientelist dependency between the landed elite and the peasantry.

Men Rebel, Ted Gurr argued that political violence can be explained by relative deprivation, which occurs when individuals or groups feel deprived of resources or opportunities in comparison with others in society.¹⁶ If political allegiance is based on ethnicity and one ethnic minority group experiences deprivation relative to the ethnic majority group (as happened with the Tamils in Sri Lanka vis-à-vis the Sinhalese in the early 1970s), then the minority may give up hope for satisfying its aspirations within a unitary state and seek to detach itself from the nation.

Other related important indicators for grievance are political exclusion and economic inequality. In Colombia, for example, following the country's mid-century civil war, La Violencia, political elites established a closed political system that disenfranchised several groups, especially communist and socialist ones. This reinforced Colombia's historical inability to include all its citizens in a political process, leading to political exclusion and the economic space and motivation for insurgency by both political and criminal groups.

Social scientists also link poor economic development to reduced opportunity costs for potential rebels. People mired in poverty have few opportunities for economic gain. For these individuals, joining an insurgency is not a sacrifice of resources in other, more lucrative fields. Instead, joining an insurgency may offer economic benefits, making recruitment easier for insurgent groups.¹⁷ Lowered opportunity costs are magnified in areas with "lootable" resources such as drugs or diamonds that can be used to finance an insurgency and enrich its participants.

The analysis of the socioeconomic factors underlying political conflict also includes examining the dynamics between different ethnic groups in a state. After the Cold War, the incidence of wars motivated by identity grievances proliferated. Social scientists refer to these conflicts as ethnic wars. Ethnic wars may also be influenced by additional factors, such as relative deprivation and political exclusion, but the fulcrum of these conflicts is identity. The clash of ethnic identities and fears of cultural extinction can be the animus motivating these conflicts. Political scientist Benedict Anderson defined a nation as "an imagined political community" in which "members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."¹⁸ Anderson's seminal concept highlights how groups, whether nations or ethnicities, together construct a common identity through shared linguistic, regional, or religious attributes, among others.

These dynamics are also present in ethnic groups. In Sri Lanka, the ethnic Tamil Tigers battled the Sinhalese government for decades

to secure an independent state. The Tamils and Sinhalese communities constructed their identities based on both facts and distortions of the historical record. Thus, while separate south Indian and Sinhalese communities have resided on the island for several thousand years, during the recent conflict some participants may have “read history backwards.”¹⁹ The communities began to view past conflicts through the prism of an identity paradigm, irrespective of whether the participants of the conflicts in the distant past were motivated by ethnic grievances.

The social science research on ethnic identity and political conflict can be divided into three primary perspectives. Despite a burgeoning research program, social scientists do not agree on how ethnic identity impacts the dynamics of insurgency. Early research identified the extent of ethnic heterogeneity as a motivating factor for conflict. Ethnic heterogeneity refers to the diversity of different ethnic groups in a country. It was thought that the more ethnic groups resided in a country, the more likely it was to experience political conflict.²⁰ Another school of thought argued that other risk factors, such as low levels of economic development and weak institutions, were more important contributors to political conflict than the ethnic makeup of a country.²¹ The third and final perspective developed more nuanced arguments. These scholars argued that ethnic groups which were excluded from political power were most likely to rebel. A widely used data set, the Minorities at Risk database, tracks disenfranchised ethnic groups all over the world.²² In the same vein, other research has added to arguments based on political exclusion. This research looks at how the distribution of power in the political system among competing groups affects conflict. Ethnic groups are more likely to rebel when the center of power in the country is segmented among competing groups and when a smaller ethnic majority rules over and excludes a larger ethnic majority.²³

In addition to the long-running ethnic insurgency in Sri Lanka discussed above, numerous ARIS case studies were driven by ethnic politics. The decades-long conflict in Northern Ireland pitted Catholics and Protestants against one another. The conflict was fueled by the political exclusion of Catholics by the Protestant-dominated government. Protestants largely ruled the country even though the Catholic community comprised the majority of the population. Similarly, an ethnic Albanian insurgency erupted in Kosovo after Slobodan Milosevic gained control of the Serbian government in 1989. While in office, Milosevic dissolved the political autonomy of Kosovo, rendering it subordinate to the Serbian national government. Combined with his policies of exclusion targeted against ethnic Albanians, Kosovo declared its independence and mounted an armed insurgency against Milosevic’s government.

Government and Politics

When considering government and politics in the contextual analysis of insurgency, it is helpful to begin by focusing on the impact of ideas and institutions on the decisions and actions of stakeholders in the conflict. An analysis of the impact of ideas requires understanding the political discourses within state and society and the dynamics between the state and challengers to its authority. When looking at how institutions influence decisions and actions, researchers consider the type of government and the capacity of the state to govern. Together, these factors help explain how insurgent groups are able to mobilize and operate in a state.

Civil society groups independent of the government contribute to the political context in which insurgencies emerge. Indeed, such groups may be among the main actors within a rebellion. More specifically, we have discussed insurgency or revolution as a specific instance of a social movement. Social movements have been defined as “networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.”²⁴ Government and politics is one of the primary means through which ideas are enacted within society. Social movements (such as insurgencies) are another. The key difference between social movements and other means within society is that social movements (1) exhibit strong lines of conflict with political or social opponents, (2) involve dense interorganizational networks, and (3) are made up of individuals whose sense of collective identity exists beyond any specific campaign or engagement.²⁵

Social scientists often look at how different regime types shape patterns of political violence in a country. Regime types are broad categories, such as democratic and autocratic, used to describe the political structure of a government. Currently, social scientists favor these institutional factors over the socioeconomic factors discussed above for their efficacy in explaining political violence in a country. Simply put, “most states have potential insurgents with grievances and resources, but almost always possess far greater military power than do insurgents.” With these advantages, competent regimes are usually capable of defeating armed challenges to their authority. Weak and divided regimes, however, are less capable of defending their authority.²⁶

As a result, social scientists often look at a state’s regime type as a significant factor for explaining the emergence of political conflict. Many of the initial studies on this topic used a simple categorization of regimes as either democratic or autocratic, but researchers have also adopted a three-way categorization that includes democracy and

autocracy as categories, as well as a middle category of “anocracy,” which characterizes a government that has both democratic and autocratic elements. Although the findings have recently been challenged, anocracies are thought to be at higher risk for insurgencies than fully democratic or autocratic regimes.²⁷

Most researchers agree that developed, mature democratic states are the least vulnerable to political conflict. Secure democracies provide pressure valves for the release of societal discontent through well-trod legal-institutional channels. In the United States, for instance, citizens are able to vote leaders out of office, contribute to groups lobbying for their interests, or engage in civil resistance to voice their discontent. If radicalized resistance movements were to opt to use violent or illegal means to achieve their political objectives in the United States, they would have difficulty raising support. For the average citizen, the costs are simply too high and the expected payoff too low.

In highly repressive regimes, the situation is nearly a mirror opposite of the situation facing open democratic societies. Highly repressive regimes provide no legal channels for political opposition or dissent. In these authoritarian states, it is difficult for political dissenters to form an organized political opposition to the regime. These regimes usually have highly refined secret police and other intelligence-gathering capabilities. Before the Syrian civil war and the Arab Spring, for instance, the Assad regime kept dissent in check through its secret police, the Mukhabarat. The police had an extensive intelligence apparatus supplemented by ordinary civilians encouraged to inform on family, friends, and colleagues. As a result, most Syrians were highly suspicious of voicing dissent against the Assad regime.²⁸ In such regimes, any attempts at opposition are usually met with arbitrary arrests, interrogations, and detentions. Political opposition is usually stillborn, crushed by the overwhelming force of the state’s security apparatus. For the average citizen in these repressive regimes, such as North Korea, the costs of resistance are simply too high.

However, in today’s world, many states fall somewhere in between these two extremes. Social scientists call these states, which combine democratic and authoritarian features, hybrid regimes, or anocracies. These states might, for instance, have nominally democratic elections but might rig or otherwise corrupt election results. As a result, the ruling party or political leaders never face serious challenges to their authority.

Researchers find that political conflict is more likely to arise in these anocracies than in truly democratic or repressive states.²⁹ This finding is referred to as the “inverted U-curve” because the concentration of political conflict on the authoritarian–democratic scale falls in

the middle. These states typically allow just enough political and civil liberties that political opposition is able to form. The inherent contradictions in these states, which claim to be democratic but engage in activities that do not support these claims, also fuel societal grievances. When the political opposition mounts a challenge to the state, security forces often violently suppress it, leading some resistance movements to adopt violence as a strategy to achieve their political objectives.³⁰

In the preceding sections, we have already discussed how political exclusion fueled political conflict in Colombia. In many ways, the state resembled an anocracy. After its mid-century war, the government altered its constitution to rotate the presidency between the two major parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, in control of the government. The National Front government, as it was called, made it very difficult for the emerging middle and lower classes to be incorporated into the political process. Additionally, a small elite sector controlled both parties. In 1970, one outside contender for the Liberal presidential candidacy, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, ran for office but lost the election. Many believed that electoral fraud perpetrated by the political elite prevented Rojas's victory.

This event was the trigger for the formation of an important insurgent group in Colombia, the M-19, which took its name from the date of the alleged fraudulent election, April 19. In its propaganda, the M-19 disparaged the Colombian regime for failing to live up to its democratic ideals. The M-19 was instrumental in a 1991 constitutional reform process that eliminated some of these barriers to political participation.

Some researchers, however, consider these categorizations (democracy, anocracy, and autocracy) to be overly simplistic or ambiguous. Recent work has developed a more detailed set of parameters to determine what researchers call "the institutional character of the national political regime." These parameters explain the degree to which elections for leaders of countries (i.e., presidents, prime ministers, etc.) are open, competitive, and institutionalized (i.e., rule based), and whether opposition and other political groups can compete for political power and influence. After considerable research, experts found these attributes to be the most significant indicators or predictors of conflict.³¹

ENDNOTES

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