

# Will the LTTE strategy succeed?

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The war for a separate Tamil country waged by the LTTE led by its able leader Velupillai Prabhakaran has been governed by a specific strategy from time to time, to meet the circumstances, this strategy has been altered.

The architect of this strategy is Anon Balasingham, the ideologue of the LTTE, who joined the Government in 1980, a proponent of psycho-social Marxism at the Jaffna Bank Polytechnic (now the South Eastern University), Balasingham's area of specialisation was Marxism.

The strategy he drew up for the LTTE is to a large extent, the Marxist line of thinking.

As early as late 1983, Balasingham proposed a four phased strategy and the LTTE made it public through a number of publications. This was partly triggered by the LTTE's own desire to demonstrate to the rest of the world that it was a liberation movement.

Phase one took place in two stages. Stage One entailed the intimidation and elimination of their own people who do not fall in line. Many prominent Tamils, from Alfred Duraipappa in Jaffna in 1975 to Kanagaratnam in Colombo in 1978

were eliminated after several warnings. Many others prominent, thereafter took the threat seriously. For most whether living in Jaffna or Colombo, it was a question of survival. No Tamil politician openly opposed them.

Stage Two of Phase One was the elimination of policemen who were engaged in anti-terrorist activity. Most of the policemen who fell victims were from the CID. They were shot while on duty and while off duty, even while relaxing with their families. The Sri Lanka Police, very soon lost its investigative arm as almost all the Tamil policemen who were engaged in anti-terrorist duties were either threatened, transferred or eliminated.

With this, the terrorists also eliminated informants and those who publicly opposed them. They also robbed banks, houses and public property to collect funds.

Among the number of policeman killed Bastianpillai, Perambalam, Balasingham, Gurusamy, Shanmugalingam and Karunanidhi stand out. Gradually not only did the police become ineffective in gathering information but no Tamil

man or woman went out of their way to provide information to the law enforcement authorities.

Phase Two also entailed two stages. Stage One of phase two was the disruption of the state machinery. The terrorists set fire to trains and buses, hijacked government vehicles and weakened the writ of the state in their area of operation.

Gradually, their area of operation grew larger and it became difficult for the police alone to combat terrorism. This led to a strengthening of the terrorists.

Stage Two of phase two, which entailed hit and run attacks on police stations, police vehicles and the army which were called to assist the police. The LTTE was not yet strong enough for direct confrontation. The behaviour of the police and the army, which was not trained to fight this type of hit and run insurgency generated resentment towards the state. Their motto was revenge and response was not specific but the Tamil public. The cycle of violence and counter-violence became large.

As a method of fighting terrorism some police officers and military officers used

"collective punishment". That is of a landmine explodes in a certain location, the residents of that location have to pay the price for it. Collective punishment had short term gains but devastating long term effects as the terrorists particularly the LTTE, exploited the resentment of the families who had been subjected to "collective punishment".

Today, the Sri Lankan security forces, particularly army have come a long way, where they make it a point to apprehend the culprit but not harm anybody else. It is often heartbreaking for a soldier to watch a boy throwing a grenade into a truck killing his brother officer and running away through a street with many bystanders and not open fire. But this is the price of fighting a ruthless insurgency. Both patience, sound strategy and clear thinking is required to win a guerrilla war.

Phase Three was directly engaging the service personnel. The LTTE achieved this capability only around 1985/1986 when they could face-to-face confront an Army camp or a police station. By this time the LTTE had not only collected a considerable quantity of

arms and ammunition from their hit and run warfare methods but also trained their cadres. The LTTE was fortunate because both the Central Government and the Tamil Nadu State Government provided sanctuary to them and went a step beyond and supplied arms, ammunition and explosives.

Phase Three also witnessed the extensive use of landmines and booby traps which prevented service personnel from moving out of their camps. The LTTE had encircled the Sri Lankan camps and

were dominating the terrain. The LTTE created the impression to the public that they were the saviours of the people. To a large extent, the Sri Lankan security forces assisted the LTTE in creating this impression by bombing, shelling and strafing the terrorists from land, sea and air but most of the casualties were civilians and not terrorists. Support for the LTTE grew.

During the IPKF episode, the LTTE briefly reverted to the hit and run warfare methods when their strength was low. The

LTTE also used typical guerrilla warfare techniques by attacking small groups of IPKF soldiers in high strength and harassing large contingents of IPKF soldiers without directly engaging them.

The LTTE is today, still at phase three where they are continuing to attack the Sri Lankan soldier causing demoralisation and desertion. Prabhakaran had emphasised to its cadres never to kill an enemy who surrenders because others will fight to the end. Prabhakaran has also told his cadres that it is

better to wound a soldier than to kill. This is because if you wound a soldier that will generate greater fear than death which makes the other soldiers more determined.

Further, it will take another four soldiers to carry one wounded soldier than a dead soldier who can be carried by one soldier.

While at phase three the LTTE has perfected the art of mobile warfare. That is the deployment of a massive force of 2000 to 3000 cadres to strike a target which is 1/4 or 1/2 that strength. There is very

little a field commander and his men can do when a guerrilla movement reaches the third phase.

In the case of the LTTE, this is more pronounced because they have effectively blocked the flow of intelligence from the areas under their control to outer areas. Further, the LTTE has built an army of fanatically dedicated fighters.

This has been exacerbated by the position adopted by the Government of Sri Lanka where they have not shown any willingness to negotiate. Whether a government is committed to a military solution or not, it has to project to the civilians that it is committed to a political settlement to prevent increasing support to terrorists.

By not willing to negotiate, the government is driving the terrorists to desperation, forcing every LTTE cadre to believe that there is no way out but to fight for Tamil Eelam.

Phase Three is the most decisive step in a insurgency. It required not only sound military planning but good political strategy. The LTTE has to move from phase three to phase four which is the

civil warfare stage. To date, the LTTE has failed in it.

There are a number of reasons why the LTTE has failed in this endeavour of consolidating the strength of the Tamil masses and placing them in conflict with the Government of Sri Lanka.

The fundamental reason was the philosophy of President Premadasa who did not discriminate against the minorities. Premadasa was astute enough to develop the Tamil areas, particularly the border areas where the Tamils and the Sinhalese interacted.

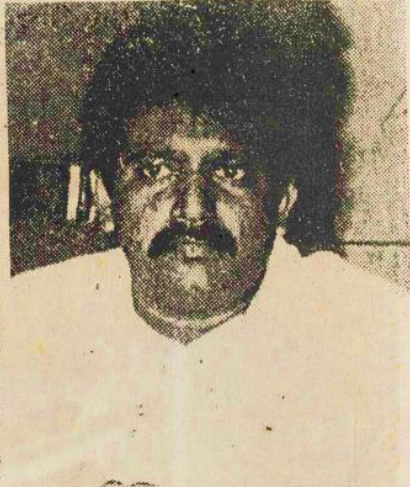
Many of the Tamils living in the LTTE controlled areas began to feel that they would have a better life in the government controlled areas and began to move into the liberated areas. The LTTE detested Premadasa's development programmes, from the garment factories in the East to the free school uniforms in Vavuniya.

In many ways Premadasa and the LTTE wooed for a common group. In fact when Premadasa was killed by an LTTE assassin, the Tamils in Colombo felt that they were not protected anymore. The Tamils also felt that they lost perhaps the only leader who

would have resolved the Northeastern crisis. President Wijetunga has perceived the crisis in a different light.

The LTTE has been able to control the Tamils in the Northern Province and to a lesser extent in the Eastern Province. The relationship between the LTTE and the public has been strained. However, many of the Tamils who had been for nearly 20 years subjected to a policy of war from the Sri Lankan security forces would still prefer the LTTE.

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ernment of Sri Lanka changes its attitude towards the northeastern Tamils.

A fine military strategy by the government over the years has become counter productive — the LTTE has grown from strength to strength. The role of the non-military in resolving the North Eastern crisis has not been even examined. Nearly two decades of an insurgency war has provided a lesson to us. One day the solution to the North Eastern crisis will lie not in the military option but the political option.