

The Rise of the Liberation Tigers: Conventional Operations in the Sri Lankan Civil War, 1990-2001

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

The Rise of the Liberation Tigers: Conventional Operations in the Sri Lankan Civil War, 1990-2001, by Nisala A. Rodrigo, 60 pages.

A key, but rare, development for nonstate armed groups is gaining the ability to fight conventionally against state forces. Many of these groups develop such capabilities through sponsorship from friendly states. Traditionally, it is assumed that such groups otherwise draw their strength by building mass support from their privileged communities.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which fought to establish a separate state for the Tamil minority of Sri Lanka until its annihilation in May 2009, developed impressive combat capabilities within a short time mostly without state sponsorship or the mass mobilization of the Tamil civilian population. The LTTE built its force structure with child fighters and crafted a secular cult of martyrdom that enabled it to raise a suicide bomber corps. In the early 1990s, the LTTE began to upgrade from a guerrilla force into an infantry force and formulated doctrine to destroy the bases of the Sri Lankan security forces. It later integrated its growing firepower to create a nascent combined-arms capability. The Tigers measured their success in terms of their ability to fight the security forces, not in territory or control over people. By the end of the decade, they reached their high watermark after defeating a Sri Lanka Army division.

The example of the LTTE challenges orthodox understanding of how nonstate armed groups generate combat power. Although the LTTE no longer exists, its example suggests that similar armed groups could emerge elsewhere, under the right conditions, to threaten the stability of other governments in the developing world.

Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Acronyms	vi
Figures.....	vii
Introduction	1
Background	4
The Landscape of the War.....	7
The Myth of Invincibility	10
The “Baby Brigade”	12
The Cult of Martyrdom	14
Prabhakaran’s Emergent Strategy and War Aims	16
From Guerrillas to Infantry: Development of Base Assault Doctrine.....	21
Operation Sky Expanse, July – August 1991	24
Military Reorganization, 1991 – 1993.....	26
Operation Frog, November 1993.....	30
Losing Jaffna, 1995 – 1996	31
Operation Unceasing Waves, July 1996.....	33
Defending Against the Government’s Wannai Offensive.....	36
LTTE Preparations	38
Army’s Poor Planning Opens Opportunities	40
Do or Die Raids, June – December 1997	44
Operation Unceasing Waves II, November 1998.....	45
The LTTE Counteroffensive	46
Operation Unceasing Waves III, November 1999 – May 2000	47
The Battle for Jaffna.....	51
Conclusion.....	55
Postscript: Death of the Tiger.....	57
Bibliography	61

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Acronyms

CASR	Charles Anthony Special Regiment (LTTE)
CFA	2002 Cease-Fire Agreement
IPKF	Indian Peace-Keeping Force
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MRL	Multiple rocket launcher
MSR	Main supply route
NCO	Non-commissioned officer
SLA	Sri Lanka Army
SLAF	Sri Lanka Air Force
SLN	Sri Lanka Navy
SRU	Special Reconnaissance Unit (LTTE)
UNP	United National Party
UTHR-J	University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna

Figures

Figure 1. Sri Lankan Tamil Areas	9
Figure 2. LTTE operations, 1990-1991.....	18
Figure 3. Operation Frog (Pooneryn).....	31
Figure 4. Operation Unceasing Waves (Mullaitivu).....	35
Figure 5. Operation Jayasikurui.....	42
Figure 6. Operation Unceasing Waves III (Phases 1-2).....	48
Figure 7. Operation Unceasing Waves III (Phases 3-5).....	50

Introduction

The eighteenth of May 2019 marked the tenth anniversary of the end of the twenty-six-year Sri Lankan civil war. The war's primary actor was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which fought to establish a separate state for the ethnic Tamil minority in the northeastern part of the island. Scholars published accounts describing how the Sri Lankan security forces finally defeated the Tigers, drawing attention to reforms that President Mahinda Rajapaksa's government implemented from late 2005 onward.¹ However, analysts have paid scant attention to the LTTE itself and how it became one of the world's most dangerous armed groups. It fought along a strip of an island with limited space against the ethnic Sinhala majority.² During the 1990s, the LTTE won conventional battles against Sri Lankan security forces that outnumbered it at least ten to one with superior firepower.³ Its example presented a puzzle because most insurgent groups have not been able to build such combat capabilities without state sponsorship or access to national resources.⁴

The LTTE's military accomplishments were impressive given the nonviolent character of the Tamil community. The Sri Lankan Tamils of the twentieth century identified their society with education, government employment, commerce, and agriculture. During colonial rule, the British had not categorized the Tamils as a martial race as they did with the Sikhs and Gurkhas in

¹ The two most well-known publications are Ahmed Hashim, *When Counterinsurgency Wins: Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) and Paul Moorcraft, *Total Destruction of the Tamil Tigers: The Rare Victory of Sri Lanka's Long War* (South Yorkshire, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2014).

² The primary division between the Sinhala and Tamil communities is their mutually-unintelligible languages. Contrary to many depictions of the conflict, religion was not a major factor.

³ This monograph defines conventional warfare as combat between forces of at least battalion size and does not explicitly consider a territorial definition, given the LTTE's emphasis on defeating the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) instead of controlling territory. See Mark Whitaker, *Learning Politics From Sivaram: The Life and Death of a Revolutionary Tamil Journalist in Sri Lanka* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 146.

⁴ India's financial and safe haven support for the LTTE ended in 1987 after the LTTE attacked Indian peacekeepers.

India.⁵ Therefore, LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran faced an uphill struggle to generate combat power from the resources of his community. At the core of his efforts was his willingness to break traditional values to ruthlessly mobilize force more than any other leader.⁶

The LTTE's military evolution built upon layers, with child fighters and resocialization based on martial values and martyrdom serving as their foundation. From its guerrilla origins, the LTTE built superb light infantry and reconnaissance capabilities based on effective small units. With these capabilities, it developed a doctrine to destroy security force facilities with infantry assaults and suicide bombers. It then integrated its increasing firepower to fight a defensive operation followed by a devastating counteroffensive. Prabhakaran proved to be adept in risk management by boldly attacking while being willing to withdraw to preserve his forces if he perceived tactical success was unattainable. Even though the LTTE was unable to land a decisive blow, its decision to eschew guerrilla warfare in favor of conventional operations brought the greatest chance for success. Conventional operations also proved to be more effective than its acts of terror against civilian leaders and the Sri Lankan economy whose net effect was to damage its efforts to gain international legitimacy.⁷

In discussing the LTTE's evolution, this monograph sought to disprove a misperception that the Tigers shifted to conventional war only from 2005 onward. One analysis described the LTTE as a "hybrid" force, but a better term would be an evolving force.⁸ Although the Tigers

⁵ D. Sivaram, "On Tamil Militarism, Part 1: Origins and Dispersion in South India and Sri Lanka," *Lanka Guardian*, May 1, 1992, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://tamilnation.co/forum/sivaram/920501lg.htm>.

⁶ P. W. Singer, *Children at War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005), 53-54.

⁷ Peter Stafford Roberts, "The Sri Lankan Insurgency: A Rebalancing of the Orthodox Position" (PhD thesis, Brunel University, April 2016), 51-52; "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," Bureau of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, accessed March 23, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>.

⁸ Lionel Beehner, Liam Collins, Steven Ferenzi, and Mike Jackson, *The Taming of the Tigers: An MWI Contemporary Battlefield Assessment of the Counterinsurgency in Sri Lanka* (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, April 2017), 5, 7, 14-19, 23, 29, 32, 39, accessed March 23, 2019, <https://mwi.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/The-Taming-of-the-Tigers.pdf>.

used guerrilla and terrorist tactics in the 1990s, they viewed conventional war as the only way to achieve a separate Tamil state.⁹ At no point did they follow Mao Zedong’s model of people’s war. The LTTE explicitly rejected the idea of mobilizing the people to build a mass army and instead sought to evolve as a purely military organization separate from civilian society.¹⁰ Its political wing was primarily concerned with recruitment and did not produce or disseminate a political program.¹¹

In simple terms, Prabhakaran’s operational art was to create vacuums by destroying his enemies, and then to fill those vacuums with the LTTE. In the 1990s, the LTTE framed its problem in terms of the security forces’ presence in the northeast that denied it a separate state. Therefore, it identified the security forces as the Sri Lankan center of gravity and measured its success in terms of its ability to fight and destroy them. Whereas the security forces required large numbers to deny areas to the LTTE, few Tigers were needed to dominate and recruit in a Tamil area. From the LTTE’s perspective, destroying the enemy would give him no choice but to cede territory. The LTTE’s relatively small organization reduced the complexity of warfighting functions such as mission command and sustainment compared to its larger opponents.

However, the LTTE’s smaller size inhibited its ability to exploit success. It won battles by concentrating its limited resources at decisive points. With a few exceptions later in the 1990s, these resources were insufficient for the LTTE to conduct “distributed operations” characterized

⁹ *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukal: cāḷs aṇraṇi ciṟappu paṭaiyaṇi* (Official History of the LTTE’s Charles Anthony Special Regiment), (2003), ii, 23.

¹⁰ Taraki, “The evolution of the Tiger,” *Island*, December 31, 1989; T. Sabaratnam, “The Split of the LTTE,” *Pirapaharan* 1, Ch. 21, December 3, 2003, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.padippakam.com/document/EelamHistory/LttePraba/LttePrabaVol1/PirapaharanCh21.pdf>; Taraki, “The LTTE is now a conventional army,” *Island*, December 2, 1990.

¹¹ Margaret Trawick, *Enemy Lines: Childhood, Warfare, and Play in Batticaloa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 167. The LTTE was more concerned with monitoring and controlling Tamil civilians. Its finance wing had the greatest interaction with them through its extortion activities which required maintaining a detailed database of the population. See Muttukrishnan Sarvananthan, “Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka: Swindlers Hold Sway,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 17 (April 23, 2005), accessed March 23, 2019, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2005/17/commentary/post-tsunami-sri-lanka-swindlers-hold-sway.html>; Taraki, “LTTE’s command structure covert,” *Island*, March 21, 1993.

by it spreading its combat power into the security forces' deep areas to retain freedom of action and deny it to the enemy.¹² Ultimately, the LTTE was unable to win the war because it had no mechanism to defeat the security forces. It lacked the means to physically destroy them, and it failed to consider alternative mechanisms such as compelling surrender.

Background

Sri Lankans divided the history of their civil war into five parts: Eelam War I (1983-1987), the Indian intervention (1987-1990), Eelam War II (1990-1994), Eelam War III (1995-2001), and Eelam War IV (2005-2009).¹³ This monograph focused on Eelam War II and III.

Eelam War I began in July 1983 when the United National Party (UNP) government of President J.R. Jayawardene backed a pogrom that massacred two thousand Tamils and displaced another three hundred thousand, after the LTTE killed thirteen Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers in an ambush in Jaffna.¹⁴ At that time, the LTTE had only thirty members armed with a single T-56

¹² James J. Schneider, "Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Foundations of Operational Art," Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies/US Army Command and General Staff College, June 16, 1992, 35. In contrast, the much larger SLA was able to conduct distributed operations from 2006 onward by improving its infantry's small-unit maneuver to fight in close areas while deploying the Commandos and Special Forces in deep areas to disrupt the LTTE's freedom of action. See Kamal Gunaratne, *Road to Nandikadal: True Story of Defeating Tamil Tigers* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Vijitha Yapa Bookshop, 2016), 598-603.

¹³ Tamil students began the militant movement in the 1970s, leading many Sinhalese to believe the war began earlier than 1983. However, only a few Tamil youth were active militants. See Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: South Asian Network on Conflict Research, 1994), 93; Thomas A. Marks, "Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," in *Democracy and Counterterrorism: Lessons from the Past*, ed. Robert J. Art and Louise Richardson (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2007), 493; T. Sabaratnam, "The Unexpected Explosion," *Pirapaharan* 1, Ch. 3, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.sangam.org/Sabaratnam/SabaratnamChap3.htm>.

¹⁴ Rajan Hoole, *Sri Lanka: The Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence, and Murder* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, 2001), accessed March 23, 2019, http://www.uthr.org/Book/CHA09.htm#_Toc523692981; Rajan Hoole, Daya Somasundaram, K. Sritharan, Rajani Thiranagama, *Broken Palmyra: the Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka - An Inside Account* (Claremont, CA: Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1992), 71, 338; T. Sabaratnam, "JR Seeks Arms," *Pirapaharan* 2, Ch. 7, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.sangam.org/articles/view2/436.html>; T. Sabaratnam, "Thirunelveli Attack," *Pirapaharan* 2, Ch. 1, April 30, 2004, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.padiappakam.com/document/EelamHistory/LttePraba/LttePrabaVol2/Chapter1.pdf>.

assault rifle, six submachine guns, and semi-automatic and bolt-action rifles.¹⁵ The Indian government saw an opportunity to destabilize the pro-US Jayawardene regime and began a policy of granting external sanctuary for Tamil militants and training them.¹⁶ The pogrom also pushed M.G. Ramachandran, chief minister of the Indian state government of Tamil Nadu, to abandon his anti-separatist stance and provide fifteen million dollars to Prabhakaran.¹⁷ With these funds, the LTTE established a global financial and shipping empire based mostly in countries with large Tamil expatriate populations, headed by Selvarasa Pathmanathan a.k.a “KP.” LTTE overseas shipments brought infantry weapons, explosives, nightvision equipment, and wireless communications systems.¹⁸

The security forces were unprepared to handle the insurgency because of their preexisting socialization and inexperience. Sri Lankan commentary normally lumped the SLA, Sri Lanka Navy (SLN), and Air Force (SLAF) with the police as “security forces” because their primary mission before the war was to aid civil authority: support the police, provide disaster relief, and

¹⁵ Sarath Munasinghe, *A Soldier's Version: An account of the on-going Conflict and the Origin of Terrorism in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Market Information Systems (Pvt) Ltd, 2000), 10; T. Sabaratnam, “Foundation for Tamil Eelam,” *Pirapaharan* 2, Ch. 26, November 25, 2004, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.padippakam.com/document/EelamHistory/LttePraba/LttePrabaVol2/Chapter26.pdf>.

¹⁶ Avatar Singh Bhasin, *India in Sri Lanka: Between Lion and the Tigers* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Vijitha Yapa Publications, October 2004), 17; Hoole et al., *Broken Palmyra*, 342-343; T. Sabaratnam, “Indira's Double Track Policy,” *Pirapaharan* 2, Ch. 10, July 19, 2004, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.sangam.org/articles/view2/?uid=460>.

¹⁷ Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka*, 418; T. Sabaratnam, “MGR's Role in the Eelam Struggle,” *Pirapaharan* 2, Ch. 27, December 3, 2004, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.padippakam.com/document/EelamHistory/LttePraba/LttePrabaVol2/Chapter27.pdf>. Ramachandran had publicly denounced Sri Lankan Tamil separatism at the 1981 International Tamil Conference in Madurai. He began backing the LTTE in 1984 simply because it was the only militant group that had no relations with his political rivals. See D. B. S. Jeyaraj, “Appapillai Amirthalingam: 75th birth anniversary tribute,” *Sunday Leader* 9, no. 7, September 1, 2002, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/archive/20020901/issues.htm>.

¹⁸ Taraki, “Counter-civilian strategies,” *Island*, July 19, 1992; Taraki, “Recapturing Jaffna: Is it feasible?” *Island*, August 29, 1993; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, “KP the LTTE Arms Procurer Chief Remains Elusive,” *Nation*, September 16, 2007, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://www.nation.lk/2007/09/16/newsfe6.htm>.

build infrastructure.¹⁹ This identity probably explained why they were fixated on taking and holding territory, not destroying the enemy. They had no combat experience except for crushing a poorly-organized left-wing insurrection in 1971.²⁰

In the 1980s, the LTTE was unable to exploit the security forces' shortcomings because it generated little combat power. By 1985, the entire Tamil insurgency had only two hundred assault rifles and a few light machine guns.²¹ The LTTE's most significant attack was overrunning the Jaffna Police Station with two hundred fighters that year, killing only four policemen.²² Earlier in 1985, two SLA platoons repulsed one hundred Tigers assaulting their post, killing sixteen fighters and losing only four soldiers.²³ Through 1987, the security forces killed about 1,800 Tamil militants, including 632 Tigers, and lost about 650 personnel.²⁴

The LTTE's military weakness that decade forced it to adopt the limited aim of gaining influence over the Tamil people through two lines of effort. The first line was provoking the security forces to retaliate against Tamil civilians, inspired by the Cuban *foco* theory of guerrilla

¹⁹ Brian Blodgett, *Sri Lanka's Military: The Search for a Mission* (San Diego, CA: Aventine Press, 2004), 25-26, 30, 34, 39-40, 44, 50, 62.

²⁰ Rohan Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Institute of Fundamental Studies, 2001), 99-100, 105.

²¹ D. Sivaram, "The cat, a bell and a few strategists," *Sunday Times*, April 20, 1997, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970420/news2.html#thecat>.

²² T. Sabaratnam, "Jaffna Police Station Attack," *Pirapaharan 2*, Ch. 30, December 24, 2004, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.sangam.org/articles/view2/?uid=709>.

²³ Malinga H. Gunaratne. *For a Sovereign State* (Ratmalana, Sri Lanka: Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha, 1988), 235-240; *Sri Lanka Army: 50 years On, 1949-1999* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka Army, 1999), 372; Kamal Gunaratne, 62-63; T. Sabaratnam, "JR's Trap for Rajiv Backtracking," *Pirapaharan 2*, Ch. 29, December 17, 2004, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.sangam.org/articles/view2/?uid=693>; Shamindra Ferdinando, "Army Loses Hero of Kokilai Battle," *Island*, July 9, 2013, accessed March 23, 2019, http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=83178.

²⁴ Rajan Hoole, "The Toll: 1983-1987," *Colombo Telegraph*, February 7, 2015, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/the-toll-1983-july-1987/>.

warfare.²⁵ Improved explosive devices (IED) were the LTTE's weapon of choice because security force personnel believed that the civilians knew where the IEDs were buried.²⁶

The LTTE focused their limited combat power on its second line of effort: annihilating other Tamil groups to gain a monopoly of legitimacy among the Tamils. By 1986, it had less than three thousand fighters but utilized speed, concentrated force at decisive points, and targeted enemy command and control to defeat the other groups having five times more fighters.²⁷ Eelam War I ended in mid-1987 with India intervening to rescue the LTTE from a SLA offensive led by Denzil Kobbekaduwa.²⁸ New Delhi deployed the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF), but its opposition to a separate Tamil state led Prabhakaran to provoke a confrontation with India.²⁹

The Landscape of the War

Both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state divided their battlefield between two theaters: the Northern and Eastern Provinces.³⁰ From 1984 onward, the LTTE organized its guerrilla forces along district lines.³¹ Most of the fighting took place in the Northern Province where more than

²⁵ Taraki, "The LTTE is now a conventional army"; Michael Roberts, "Inspirations: Hero Figures and Hitler In Young Pirapāharan's Thinking," *Colombo Telegraph*, February 10, 2012, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/inspirations-hero-figures-and-hitler-in-young-pirapaharans-thinking/>; T. Sabaratnam, "Split of the LTTE."

²⁶ Marks, 497. Aiyathurai Irasathurai a.k.a. "Appaiah" developed the LTTE's first IEDs. He was twenty years Prabhakaran's senior and had an unspecified relationship with him predating the LTTE. See Taraki, "LTTE invests in Tamilnadu nationalism," *Island*, April 1, 1990; Taraki, "After Prabha: Question of Succession," *Sunday Times*, October 20, 1996, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/961020/taraki.html>.

²⁷ Rohan Gunaratna. *Indian Intervention*, 148, 153, 155; Sivaram, "The cat, a bell and a few strategists," April 20, 1997; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "A bigger plan by the LTTE nipped in the bud," *Daily Mirror*, March 29, 2014, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/dbs-jeyaraj-column/a-bigger-plan-by-the-ltte-nipped-in-the-bud/192-45138>.

²⁸ Bhasin, 143; *Sri Lanka Army*, 399; Hoole et al., *Broken Palmyra*, 127-128, 351; Cyril Ranatunga, *Adventurous Journey: From Peace to War, Insurgency to Terrorism* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2009), 138-143.

²⁹ Bhasin, 154, 162-163, 168-169; Harkirat Singh, *Intervention in Sri Lanka: the IPKF Experience Retold* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2006), 36, 110-112; Hoole et al., *Broken Palmyra*, 222-228, 265-271.

³⁰ Taraki, "Govt. Faced with Devil's Alternative," *Island*, May 28, 1995.

³¹ *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāntukaḷ*, 28.

ninety percent of the population was ethnic Tamil. The combatants further divided the north between the Jaffna Peninsula and the Wanni jungles on the mainland. The civil war had begun in urban Jaffna which was the northeast's greatest population center and heart of Sri Lankan Tamil civilization. Given Jaffna's political importance to both sides, the most militarily strategic position for the Sri Lankan state was Palaly which had the peninsula's sole airbase and was the only feasible lodgment for operations.

The Wanni jungles encompassed Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, and Vavuniya Districts and were the primary battlefield from 1990 onward. For the LTTE, sparsely-populated Mullaitivu became vital because it connected the north and east and had the most jungle cover.³² Unlike the SLA, the LTTE viewed territory separately in terms of means and ends. It wanted control of valuable territory such as Jaffna and Trincomalee in its desired end-state, but it saw otherwise-worthless Mullaitivu as a vital means to achieve that end. Elephant Pass was an isthmus connecting the Jaffna Peninsula to the mainland and was the only overland route between the two sub-theaters. Pooneryn was also strategic because it was the section of the mainland closest to Jaffna city, although the ocean separated them.

The Eastern Province proved to be a poor battlefield for the LTTE because it lacked depth, and Tamil areas were interspersed among other communities.³³ Tamils formed only 42 percent of the Eastern Province population, compared with 34 percent Muslims and 24 percent Sinhalese. However, it served as a vital source of manpower.³⁴ The eastern Tamils' greater sense of vulnerability arguably produced a stronger sense of nationalism. More than half of the 4,500

³² Taraki, "The struggle for the Wanni," *Island*, January 7, 1990.

³³ Taraki, "Creeping advantage: can the government hold on to it?" *Sunday Times*, November 22, 1997, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/971123/taraki.html>.

³⁴ Hoole et al., *Broken Palmyra*, 96, 136; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "The Vanishing Young and the Silent Agony of Sunset Shore (Paduvankarai)," Information Bulletin No. 26, September 20, 2001, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul26.htm>; Taraki, "The LTTE's 'Jaffna First' policy"; Trawick, 211.

eastern Tigers who fell in combat in the 1990s had died in the north.³⁵ The eastern Tigers were less inclined to desert than their northern comrades because they were farther from their homes.³⁶ These factors contributed to the prominence of Batticaloa-Ampara district commander Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan a.k.a. “Karuna.”

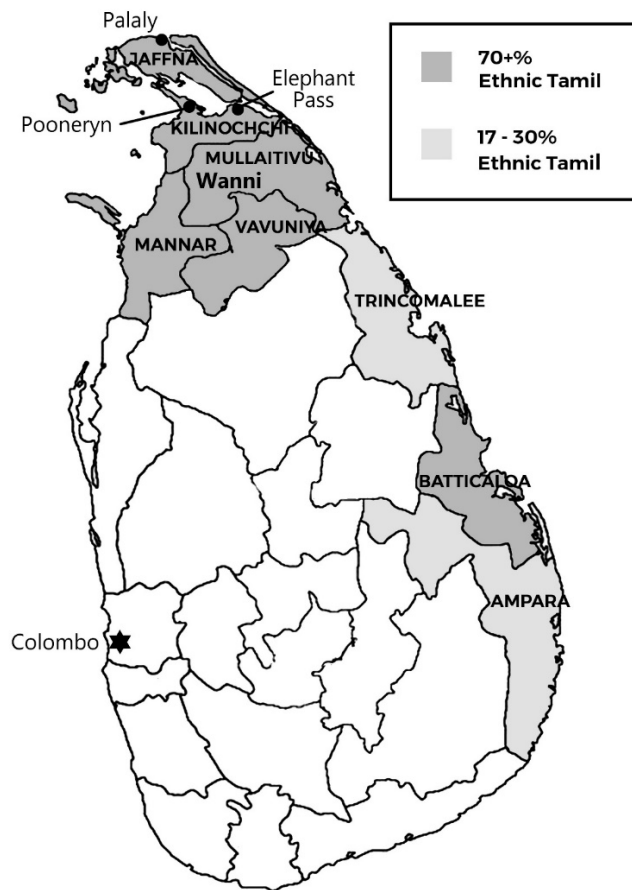


Figure 1. Sri Lankan Tamil Areas. Created by Sasrika Senaratne.

³⁵ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, “The Conflicts Within,” *Frontline* 21, no. 7, March 27-April 9, 2004, accessed March 23, 2019, <https://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2107/stories/20040409005201300.htm>; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, “The Worm Turns and Elections Where the People Will Not Count,” Information Bulletin No. 35, March 8, 2004, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://uthr.org/bulletins/bul35.htm#karunas>.

³⁶ UTHR-J, “The Vanishing Young and the Silent Agony of Sunset Shore (Paduvankarai).”

The Myth of Invincibility

The outcome of the Indian intervention was that the LTTE gained an aura of invincibility, stemming from New Delhi's unwillingness to crush the organization.³⁷ Sri Lankans came to view Prabhakaran as a military genius for outlasting the IPKF deployment of seventy-five thousand soldiers in the northeast.³⁸ The Tigers gained a mastery of the northeastern jungles after the IPKF pushed them out of Jaffna.³⁹ They learned how to resist IPKF assaults that were supported by artillery, armor, and airpower.⁴⁰ By the time that the IPKF departed Sri Lanka in March 1990, the Tigers emerged stronger than they had been before the intervention.⁴¹ The LTTE killed 1,155 Indian soldiers and claimed to have lost 711 fighters over twenty-nine months.⁴²

The most irreplaceable LTTE commander to emerge from fighting the IPKF was Kandiah Balasekaran a.k.a. "Balraj," a talented high school graduate from Mullaitivu. In March 1989, he led three hundred Tigers to attack a reinforced IPKF company conducting a search-and-destroy operation, killing ten Gurkha troops and their battalion commander. Two weeks later, Balraj held off two IPKF battalions supported by paracommandos and withstood nine hundred rounds of 105mm artillery. In 1990, Prabhakaran appointed him to command the Wannai district force at the

³⁷ Taraki, "Tiger manpower: the breeding grounds," *Island*, July 26, 1992. Rajiv Gandhi wanted to keep the LTTE intact to use as leverage against Colombo, naively believing the IPKF could force Prabhakaran to accept New Delhi's terms without threatening the LTTE's existence. See B.G. Deshmukh, *A Cabinet Secretary Looks Back* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2004), 332; S.C. Sardeshpande, *Assignment Jaffna* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1992), 51; R. R. Palsokar, *Ours Not to Reason Why: With the IPKF in Sri Lanka* (Kolkata, India: Power Publishers, 2011), 125; Bhasin, 196-197.

³⁸ Palsokar, 241.

³⁹ Taraki, "The EPRLF's Kumana foray," *Island*, April 29, 1990; Taraki, "The push for the East," *Island*, June 17, 1990.

⁴⁰ Taraki, "LTTE's command structure covert"; Peter Stafford Roberts, 171.

⁴¹ Marks, 508, 516-517.

⁴² D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "The Enduring Mystique of 'Maaveerar Naal': What Makes the 'Great Heroes Day' Tick?" November 28, 2012, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/12790>; Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention*, 315; Gautam Das and M. K. Gupta-Ray, *Sri Lanka Misadventure: India's Military Peace Keeping Campaign, 1987-1990* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2008), 261.

age of twenty-four. Balraj would emerge as the principal commander who would raise, train, and lead the LTTE to victory in the 1990s.⁴³

The Tigers exploited animosity between Colombo and New Delhi to gain weapons that enabled them to fight at a new level. In 1989, newly-elected President Ranasinghe Premadasa provided up to two thousand assault rifles, hundreds of light machine guns, and cement for building bunkers to the Tigers in order to pressure Gandhi to withdraw the IPKF.⁴⁴ During this time, the Tigers defeated an India-backed Tamil proxy force and seized its arsenal. Whereas the LTTE earlier had only two or three .50 caliber heavy machine guns and relied on gelignite to build improved explosive devices, it acquired dozens of such machine guns, 84mm recoilless rifles that could be used to destroy bunkers, and a large quantity of TNT in the Eastern Province alone.⁴⁵

The LTTE took control of most of the northeast within a week after the IPKF left, with no opposition from Colombo, and Prabhakaran declared victory over India. Tensions escalated between Colombo and the LTTE, and on 11 June 1990, Karuna's forces attacked nearly every police station in the Eastern Province and massacred six hundred policemen.⁴⁶ Eelam War II had begun.

⁴³ Sardeshpande, 88; Palsokar, 205-212; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "'Brigadier' Balraj: Fifth Death Anniversary of Legendary LTTE Commander Who Led From the Front," May 23, 2013, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/21513>.

⁴⁴ Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention*, 293-294, 300, 303-304; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "August: A Bloody Stalemate," Report No. 3, September 10, 1990, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/Reports/Report5/preface5.htm>. Premadasa wanted the IPKF to leave because he understood New Delhi did not intend to defeat the LTTE, and the IPKF's presence had sparked a Sinhala uprising against his government. He probably believed arming the LTTE would also widen the gap between India and the Tigers, being aware that India had intervened in 1987 to prevent the LTTE's defeat.

⁴⁵ Taraki, "The struggle for the Wannii."

⁴⁶ Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention*, 391-392, 438-441.

The “Baby Brigade”⁴⁷

Child fighters were the foundation of the LTTE’s military power in the 1990s. The Tigers recruited children to fill their manpower gap and because Tamil adults, like their Sinhala counterparts, generally did not adapt well to high-intensity warfare. After eliminating the other Tamil groups in late 1986, the LTTE began encouraging teenage recruitment to face the SLA.⁴⁸ This pressure accelerated during the Indian intervention when about three thousand mostly adult Tigers resigned or deserted.⁴⁹ The LTTE found that children fit its inclination against intellectual recruits who would pose a threat to the leadership.⁵⁰

The LTTE was willing to inflict long-term damage to Tamil society and alienate international sympathy by recruiting children because they enabled the organization to withstand and recover from the onslaught of the security forces.⁵¹ P. W. Singer observed that armed groups that recruit children were able to endure conditions that would break others because they were able to rapidly replace battlefield losses. Singer also noted that child fighters could be more dangerous than adults because they were less capable of understanding the consequences of their actions and did not have a sense of their own mortality. As a result, they often were willing to follow the most dangerous orders without question. Children could use modern infantry weapons

⁴⁷ Nirupama Subramaniam, “The LTTE’s ‘baby brigade,’” *Frontline* 18, no. 24, November 24-December 7, 2001, accessed March 23, 2019, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/static/html/fl1824/18240700.htm>.

⁴⁸ Hoole et al., *Broken Palmyra*, 76-78, 96; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, “March end 1989,” Report No. 2, March 1989, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/Reports/Report2/Chapter3.htm>.

⁴⁹ M.R. Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas* (New Delhi: Konark, 1995), 282; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, “The Politics of Destruction & the Human Tragedy,” Report No. 6, February 4, 1991, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/Reports/Report6/chapter2.htm>.

⁵⁰ University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, “Living Through Jaffna’s Sultry Sunset,” Special Report No. 10, April 9, 1998, accessed March 23, 2019, http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport10.htm#_Toc514776165.

⁵¹ Taraki, “Tiger manpower: the breeding grounds.”

built with lightweight yet durable plastics that became widely available after the end of the Cold War.⁵²

The primary factor behind Tamil children's vulnerability to LTTE recruitment was the destruction of their families and societies and fear of the security forces.⁵³ Sri Lankan security forces killed seven thousand Tamil civilians during Eelam War I, and the IPKF killed another seven thousand civilians.⁵⁴ The outbreak of Eelam War II resulted in the deaths of thousands of more Tamils.⁵⁵ By 2001, forty percent of a sample of children between the ages of nine and eleven in northeastern Sri Lanka reported that their homes had been attacked or they had personally been shot at, beaten, or arrested.⁵⁶ The high level of poverty in LTTE-controlled areas helped the Tigers to indirectly recruit children through giving rations to vulnerable families that contributed labor.⁵⁷

The LTTE made it difficult for child recruits to leave by cutting their hair short, in a society where rural children often had long hair, to identify them as fighters and beating those who expressed a desire to leave in front of other child fighters. Desertion was virtually impossible after the LTTE deployed children far from their homes.⁵⁸ After concluding that urban recruits

⁵² Singer, 45-47, 80-83, 87, 97-98.

⁵³ Trawick, 129; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "Human Rights and the Issues of War and Peace," Briefing No. 1, August 1992, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/Briefings/Briefing1.htm>.

⁵⁴ Hoole, "The Toll: 1983-1987"; Das, 44. About 1,000 Sinhala civilians perished through 1987.

⁵⁵ UTHR-J, "Human Rights and the Issues of War and Peace."

⁵⁶ Renuka Senanayake, "Sri Lanka: Peace Garden for Children in War Zone," *Inter Press Service*, April 19, 2001, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2001/04/sri-lanka-peace-garden-for-children-in-war-zone/>.

⁵⁷ Taraki, "Tiger manpower: the breeding grounds"; Taraki, "The entrance of the 'Monsoon' Tiger," *Island*, November 4, 1990; D. Sivaram, "The question of recruitment to the LTTE: The cat, a bell and a few strategists," *Sunday Times*, April 27, 1997, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://sundaytimes.lk/970427/news4.html#cat>; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "The Scent of Danger," Information Bulletin No. 22, January 30, 2000, accessed March 23, 2019, http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul22.htm#_Toc515621638.

⁵⁸ University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "Children in the North-East War: 1985-1995," Briefing No. 2, June 20, 1995, accessed September 13, 2018, <http://www.uthr.org/Briefings/Briefing2.htm>; Taraki, "Tiger manpower: the breeding grounds."

performed poorly, the LTTE established training camps in dangerous jungles to harden its child fighters. It then deployed them to northern battlefields to expose them to artillery and airstrikes.⁵⁹

The Cult of Martyrdom

The LTTE's reliance on child fighters enabled it to establish a subculture upholding martial values and martyrdom that was distinct from mainstream Tamil society. The University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna (UTHR-J) observed that most Tamils were not suicidal and were as materialistic as any other community.⁶⁰ The Tamils welcomed the end of hostilities when the IPKF arrived in mid-1987, to Prabhakaran's annoyance.⁶¹ Prabhakaran was unique among Tamil militant leaders in that he sought to resocialize—or revert, in his view—the Tamils into a warrior people. In his narrative of military power, the Tamils became disconnected from their martial past during the colonial era, enabling subsequent governments the Sinhala majority elected to oppress them.⁶² He adopted the tiger emblem from an eleventh century CE south Indian dynasty that had conquered Sri Lanka as part of his effort to reconnect the Tamils with this imagined past.⁶³ The LTTE separated its organization, especially its military wing, from the civilian population to serve as a vanguard for the Tamils' transformation.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Taraki, "The entrance of the 'Monsoon' Tiger."

⁶⁰ Hoole et al., *Broken Palmyra*, 106-107.

⁶¹ In August 1987, a Tamil audience in Jaffna applauded in response to Prabhakaran's false declaration that the LTTE would disarm. See Hoole et al., *Broken Palmyra*, 144-145; D. Sivaram, "The Folly of Eelam Punditry," *Northeastern Herald*, May 5, 2003, accessed April 2, 2019, <http://tamilnation.co/conflictresolution/tamileelam/norway/030505pundits.htm>.

⁶² Ragavan, "Prabhakaran's Timekeeping," *Himal Southasian*, June 2009, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://old.himalmag.com/component/content/article/522-prabhakarans-timekeeping.html>; T. Sabaratnam, "Going in for a revolver," *Pirapaharan* 1, Ch. 2, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.sangam.org/Sabaratnam/SabaratnamChap2.htm>; Taraki, "LTTE's culture: A socio-historical background," *Island*, December 1, 1991.

⁶³ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Prabhakaran: Powerful symbol of Tamil armed struggle," May 29, 2009, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/650>; Ahilan Kadirgamar, "Interview with Ragavan on Tamil Militancy (Early Years)," *Kafila*, February 16, 2009, accessed March 23, 2019, <https://kafila.online/2009/02/16/interview-with-ragavan-on-tamil-militancy-part-i/>.

⁶⁴ Taraki, "LTTE Forges New State," *Island*, March 5, 1995.

Self-sacrifice was at the heart of the Tigers' social construction, and they created a secular religion based on veneration for fallen fighters. The icon of their faith was cyanide capsules they wore to prevent capture by the security forces.⁶⁵ The Tigers believed that they would gain a sense of immortality by being remembered for their deaths in battle or suicide attacks. Given how Hindu and Christian Tamils viewed killing as sin, some Tigers believed that killing was part of the sacrifice they made in combat and might have explained why they did not talk about the afterlife.⁶⁶ In 1989, the Tigers celebrated the first "Great Heroes Day" (*māvīrar nāl*) with photographs of martyrs placed on pedestals. As the Tigers took control over Jaffna the following year, they built special cemeteries to involve the families of the deceased, emulating the ancient Tamil practice of venerating stones that represented fallen warriors.⁶⁷

In 1990, the LTTE leveraged its martyrdom cult to create a suicide attack corps, the Black Tigers. By 2000, they conducted 168 of 271 known suicide attacks in the world, mostly against military targets. Given the LTTE's initial shortcomings in firepower, Black Tiger suicide bombers served an important role as precision-guided weapons who could open breaches in the SLA's defenses and destroy its artillery. Only LTTE veterans were eligible to become Black Tigers. They had to submit a letter indicating their desire to join, and after selection they trained for two and a half months at a special camp supervised by the head of the LTTE's intelligence wing. The Black Tigers used plasticine explosives with about eight hundred embedded metal pellets placed in the pockets of the suicide-bomb jackets.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ However, Sivaram observed that some senior Tigers did not consume cyanide after Sri Lankan and Indian forces captured them. See Taraki, "LTTE's command structure covert."

⁶⁶ Trawick, 79, 86, 131; Øivind Fuglerud, *Life on the Outside: The Tamil Diaspora and Long-Distance Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 170.

⁶⁷ T. Sabaratnam, "The Death of the First Hero," *Pirapaharan* 1, Ch. 31, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.sangam.org/Sabaratnam/PirapaharanChap31.htm>; Taraki, "LTTE's culture: A socio-historical background."

⁶⁸ C. Christine Fair, *Urban Battle Fields of South Asia: Lessons Learned from Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2014), 40; Stephen Hopgood, "Tamil Tigers, 1987-2002," in *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, ed. Diego Gambetta (New York: Oxford University Press,

Prabhakaran's Emergent Strategy and War Aims

The LTTE's post-IPKF war aim was to achieve *de facto* sovereignty, after which it would negotiate to achieve its purpose of a separate state. Its model was Eritrea which first won *de facto* sovereignty in 1991 after defeating the Ethiopian Army and capturing Asmara, and then gained its independence after two years of internationally-facilitated peace talks leading to an UN-supervised referendum. As a mechanism for *de facto* sovereignty, the Tigers would have accepted an internationally-recognized confederal structure for Sri Lanka where they would obtain the rights to self-determination and to a monopoly of force in the northeast.⁶⁹ Under no circumstances would they accept an outcome where they would have to give up their arms.

The Tigers' sought to achieve *de facto* sovereignty by eliminating the SLA's bases in northeastern Sri Lanka, understanding the security forces could not function without such bases. The five thousand Tigers who emerged from fighting the IPKF faced nearly sixty thousand SLA personnel having about thirty infantry battalions.⁷⁰ The Tigers controlled most of the Jaffna Peninsula and dominated the rural hinterlands in the northeast. They were able to move forces between the peninsula and the mainland across the lagoon through Pooneryn. The security forces controlled the other population centers and the sole overland route into the peninsula at Elephant Pass.

2005), 46, 55; Kamal Gunaratne, 542; "Confessions of a suicide killer," *Sunday Times*, February 27, 2000, accessed September 13, 2018, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/000227/sitrep.html>.

⁶⁹ Taraki, "Tiger objective: *De Facto* sovereignty," *Island*, September 5, 1993; Taraki, "The LTTE's new concept- confederation," *Island*, July 28, 1991; Taraki, "Confederation: Mr. Thamil Selvan Should Know Better," *Island*, January 29, 1995. In November 2003, the LTTE articulated its concept of a confederal mechanism through its Interim Self Governing Authority Proposal, which it modeled on the 2002 Machakos Protocol that later resulted in South Sudanese independence. See "Tigers release proposal for Interim Self Governing Authority," *Tamilnet*, November 1, 2003, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?artid=10311&catid=13>; Taraki, "ISGA entails concepts and structures of final solution," *Tamilnation*, August 4, 2004, accessed April 3, 2019, <http://tamilnation.co/forum/sivaram/040804.htm>.

⁷⁰ "Sri Lanka desperate for more troops," *Tamilnet*, July 19, 1997, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=35>; "War is at a stalemate: Kalkat," August 8, 1997, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=47>; *Sri Lanka Army*, 396-397, 411, 493, 906-907; Marks, 496. Each battalion had an assigned strength of 730 soldiers. They included "volunteer" battalions that were understrength reservist units having older weapons.

The LTTE's strategic offensive in 1990 reflected its improved capabilities but also the lack of a clear operational approach. It killed 581 SLA soldiers from June through December 1990, nearly the same number from 1983 through 1987.⁷¹ In the Wanni, Balraj overran the SLA's isolated camps along the A9 highway to cut overland access to Elephant Pass.⁷² However, in the Eastern Province Kobbekaduwa broke Karuna's sieges and retook the population centers.⁷³

Balraj's most noteworthy success was against the SLA camp at Mankulam defended by 313 soldiers. On the evening of 22 November, the Tigers opened their assault with mortar and machine gun fire. At midnight, four groups infiltrated the SLA's bunker lines and attacked from the rear while Balraj's main force attacked from the front. The Tigers overran most of the camp perimeter by the following morning and repulsed the garrison's counterattacks, after which the SLA finally ordered the garrison to escape.⁷⁴ The Tigers killed only twelve soldiers, but the SLA's cohesion broke down during its retreat, and it lost one hundred soldiers by the time SLAF helicopters rescued the survivors. Sixty-two Tigers perished in their assault.⁷⁵

⁷¹ *Sri Lanka Army*, 677-689, 695-707.

⁷² D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "'Brigadier' Balraj"; *Sri Lanka Army*, 450, 478; Munasinghe, 105-106, 110; L. M. H. Mendis, *Assignment Peace in the Motherland, Second Edition* (Colombo, 2013), 151; Kamal Gunaratne, 170-171.

⁷³ *Sri Lanka Army*, 448; Taraki, "LTTE between positional and guerrilla warfare," *Island*, July 29, 1990; Taraki, "Why the LTTE is gunning for the Muslims," *Island*, August 19, 1990.

⁷⁴ Malaravan, *War Journey: Diary of a Tamil Tiger*, trans. N. Malathy (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2013), 63-78; Kamal Gunaratne, 223-226; Munasinghe, 108; Taraki, "Pooneryn: Prabha's strategic thinking," *Island*, November 14, 1993; Rohan Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis & National Security* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: South Asian Network on Conflict Research, 1998), 299.

⁷⁵ Malaravan, 83; Kamal Gunaratne, 228-245; Munasinghe, 184; Rohan Gunaratna, *Ethnic Crisis*, 300; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "Vanni: A People Crushed Between Cycles of Violence," Information Bulletin No. 12, October 22, 1996, accessed March 23, 2019, http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul12.htm#_Toc515551031.

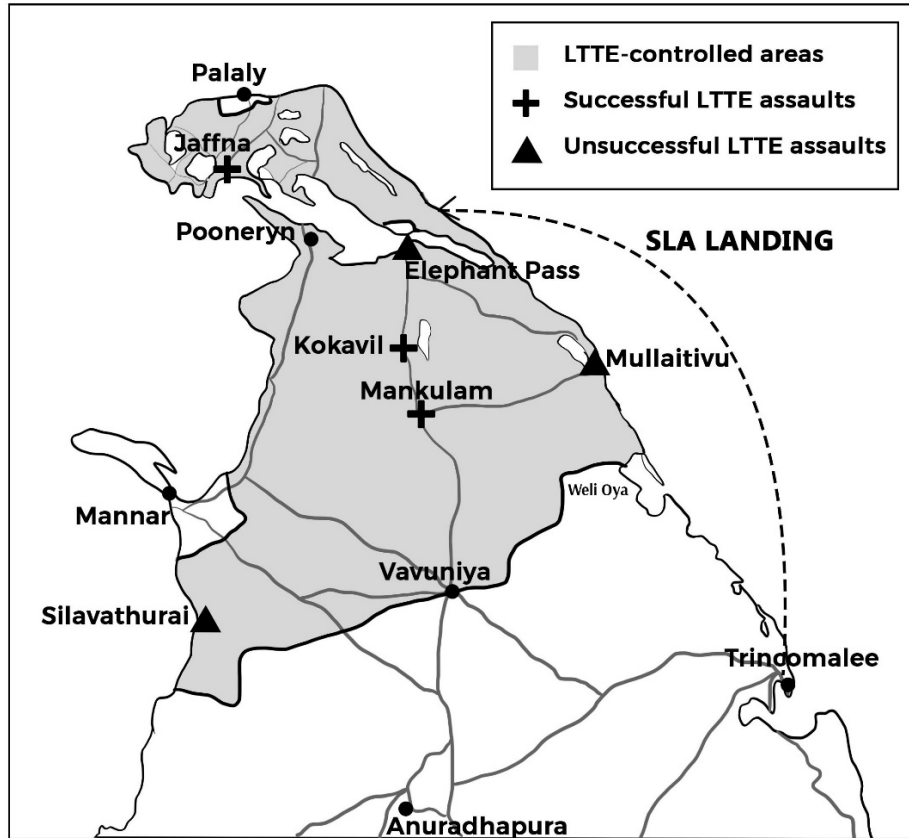


Figure 2. LTTE operations, 1990-1991. Created by Sasrika Senaratne.

The LTTE's experiences in 1990 demonstrated the folly of seeking to achieve multiple objectives simultaneously and its inability to eliminate the security forces in a war of attrition. Therefore, it adopted Antoine Henri Jomini's operational approach of concentrating combat power against decisive points and not scattering strength to defend territory. At the theater-strategic level, the Tigers concentrated forces to defeat the SLA in the Northern Province, focusing on one base at a time. At the tactical level, they interdicted the SLA's lines of communication to block resupply and reinforcements.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Taraki, "The LTTE is now a conventional army"; Taraki, "'Jaffna first policy' dominate Tiger thinking," *Island*, October 31, 1993; Taraki, "Govt. Faced with Devil's Alternative"; Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War*, translated by G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craighill (Philadelphia: Lippincott and Co., 1862), 70-73, 85-88.

After the LTTE's victory at Mankulam, it declared it had become a conventional force.⁷⁷ In publications, it divided its concept of conventional war between offensive and defensive operations.⁷⁸ Its offensive operations targeted the security forces' bases, even those lacking strategic importance, because they were conspicuous symbols of the Sri Lankan state.⁷⁹ Its defensive operations were offensive in nature and aimed at SLA units that were advancing. The Tigers sought to inflict heavy casualties to demoralize their enemy and discourage enemy recruitment while adhering to Carl von Clausewitz's "negative object" of preserving their own forces.⁸⁰ They preferred to fight battles that were more visible than a low-intensity guerrilla campaign. Success in such battles sustained and bolstered their myth of invincibility.⁸¹ Among other efforts to disseminate information, the LTTE in November 1990 established the Voice of Tigers radio broadcast to publicize its achievements.⁸² It also produced videos of its battles.⁸³

The LTTE adopted a "pause and pounce" approach where it spent much time planning and preparing for relatively quick, high-tempo assaults. Its military wing accordingly adopted as

⁷⁷ Taraki, "The LTTE is now a conventional army."

⁷⁸ *Neruppārru niccalir pattāṅṅukaḷ*. The LTTE used the term "*naṭavaṭikkaḷ*" for its operations and "*etiṛccamar*" for its efforts against SLA operations. It also used "*tākkiya*" for offensive actions and "*pātukāppu*" for defense, but those terms had more of a tactical than operational meaning. Other noteworthy Tamil words that the LTTE appropriated for military terminology were "*muriyaṭippu*" (breakthrough) and "*ūdaruppu*" (interdiction).

⁷⁹ In 1994, Sivaram criticized the LTTE's base assault strategy, arguing that the Palaly airbase was the only strategic target worth attacking and that assaulting other bases simply depleted the LTTE's manpower without achieving strategic objectives. He highlighted the LTTE's territorial losses in the Eastern Province and the Wanni as evidence of the cost of relying on base assaults. See "Govt's Counter-Insurgency Programme and LTTE's Military Response," *Tamil Times* 13, no. 5 (May 15, 1994): 9-11, accessed March 24, 2019, http://www.noolaham.org/wiki/index.php/Tamil_Times_1994.05.

⁸⁰ Taraki, "Now it's the army's responsibility," *Island*, October 10, 1993; Taraki, "Eelam War Three- The Battle for the Seas," *Island*, April 23, 1995; Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, transl. and ed. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 357-358.

⁸¹ Taraki, "Jaffna first policy' dominate Tiger thinking."

⁸² V.S. Sambandan, "Voice of Tigers begins FM broadcast," *Hindu*, January 17, 2003, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/2003/01/17/stories/2003011705281501.htm>.

⁸³ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Ace Cinematographer of LTTE Dies in Action," *Transcurrents*, February 23, 2008, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160510152406/http://transcurrents.com/tamiliana/archives/552>.

its motto, “Training, Strategy, Courage.”⁸⁴ The long pauses between operations often conveyed a false sense of LTTE weakness.⁸⁵ The Tigers established a Special Reconnaissance Unit (SRU)(*cirappu vēvu pirivu*), led by Mitthiran Selvaratnam a.k.a. “Sasikumar Master,” that enabled them to plan such operations.⁸⁶ He sent lightly-armed fighters to note the weak points in the security forces’ defenses and monitor the movement of patrols. More specialized reconnaissance fighters then infiltrated through these weak points during moonlit nights using nightvision equipment to map the security forces’ dispositions. The best of these fighters spoke Sinhala fluently and could pass as SLA soldiers.⁸⁷

The LTTE’s approach carried risks. Its north-first strategy risked alienating eastern Tamils over time.⁸⁸ The Tigers also had a policy of massacring nearly all enemy personnel who surrendered because taking custody of them during combat would decrease their tempo.⁸⁹ It refused to accept surrender probably to discourage enemy recruitment and encourage desertion. Eventually, this policy forced the security forces to fight to the death.

⁸⁴ *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāntukaḷ*, 26. Another translation for “strategy” could be “cunning.”

⁸⁵ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, “The Battle for Jaffna,” *Frontline* 17, no. 11, May 27-June 9, 2000, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1711/17110120.htm>.

⁸⁶ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, “‘Pottu Amman’ and the Intelligence Division of the LTTE,” September 11, 2009, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/1073>; J. Prasanth, “‘*tamiḷila viṭutalaippulikaḷiṅ irāṇuva paṭaitturai varaipaṭa taḷapati’ pirikēṭiyar cacikumar*,” *Pathivu*, May 15, 2018, accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.pathivu.com/2018/05/blog-post_944.html.

⁸⁷ Munasinghe, 182; Raj Vijayasiri, “A Critical Analysis of Sri Lankan Counterinsurgency Campaign” (Master’s thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1999), 53; Iqbal Athas, “At Elephant Pass: Lanka’s most difficult battlefield,” *Sunday Times*, June 20, 1999, accessed September 13, 2018, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990620/sitrep.html>; Taraki, “Tigers’ Special Ops in The North,” *Island*, December 11, 1994; Kamal Gunaratne, 539-540.

⁸⁸ Taraki, “‘Jaffna first policy’ dominate Tiger thinking.”

⁸⁹ Taraki, “Release of prisoners- pipeline for peace talks?” *Island*, June 27, 1993. The LTTE made some exceptions to this rule and held a few security force personnel for propaganda purposes. For an account of one such prisoner, see Ajith Boyagoda and Sunila Galappatti, *A Long Watch: War, Captivity, and Return in Sri Lanka* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016).

From Guerrillas to Infantry: Development of Base Assault Doctrine

The LTTE's development of an effective light infantry force was its most important achievement in the early 1990s. The Tigers used mostly the same weapons as they did in previous years, yet they significantly increased their combat effectiveness. In the 1980s, the LTTE's field groups attacked their opponents wherever possible with little coordination between them. They now began developing means to control and coordinate operations against the SLA in contested areas to launch larger assaults and prevent the SLA from massing forces against LTTE-controlled areas.⁹⁰

Stephen Biddle's exploration of force employment provided a useful analytic framework to help explain how the LTTE outfought the SLA. He argued that "modern" forces employed small-unit maneuver, cover and concealment, and dispersion to mitigate the effects of enemy firepower.⁹¹ No data exists to measure the LTTE's use of such techniques, but SLA officers acknowledged the Tigers' superior jungle combat, nightfighting, and cover and concealment skills enabled independent maneuver down to their four-man teams.⁹² The LTTE's small-unit expertise that produced its robust reconnaissance and infantry capabilities evolved from its guerrilla origins. This development occurred as the SLA acquired its first artillery in early 1991: twelve 130mm guns.⁹³

⁹⁰ Taraki, "The LTTE's military mind," *Island*, February 24, 1991.

⁹¹ Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 35-36. The LTTE fell short of Biddle's "modern system" in that it was unable to suppress the security forces' use of firepower.

⁹² *Sri Lanka Army*, 502-503; Vijayasiri, 55; Kamal Gunaratne, 408.

⁹³ Blodgett, 116-117. The SLAF provided inadequate combat support until 1996 because of its poor doctrine and procurement decisions. In December 1991, the SLAF purchased four Chinese F-7BS interceptor aircraft that were designed for air-to-air combat, not supporting ground forces, and could carry only two to four 250kg bombs. Their targeting system was so inaccurate that their pilots and engineers called it "Mark 1 eyeball bombing." See Nirosha Mendis, *The Aerial Tribute: The Role of Air Power in Defeating Terrorism in Sri Lanka*, (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka Air Force, 2014), 68-75, 90; Iqbal Athas, "Probe-team blasts Air Chief," *Sunday Times*, October 26, 1997, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/971026/spec.html>.

In contrast, the security forces understood combat power simply in terms of the quantity of manpower and advanced weapons. In 1990, the founder of the SLA's elite Commando Regiment wrote that the security forces needed one hundred thousand soldiers and armor, artillery, and attack helicopters to fight the LTTE.⁹⁴ The security forces acquired these capabilities by 1996, but they produced no decisive battlefield outcome aside from killing more Tigers. The SLA was unable to build small-unit expertise, outside of its Commando and Special Forces Regiments, largely because it neglected its non-commissioned officers (NCO) who led its subunits. It did not establish a NCO school until late 1995.⁹⁵ As in other developing countries, this neglect stemmed from the NCOs' lower social status, and thus they had no incentive to show initiative. The SLA's inadequate infantry skills forced it to operate in large formations, denying opportunities to catch the Tigers off guard.⁹⁶

Balraj's success at Mankulam prompted Prabhakaran to task him with raising a dedicated infantry assault force to fight the SLA in the north. On 10 April 1991, Balraj assembled in Jaffna twelve hundred riflemen and three hundred machine gunners from the various district forces to form the Charles Anthony Special Regiment (CASR).⁹⁷ The CASR was a formation organized into companies, platoons, and squads which could be assembled into task forces tailored for various operations. Unlike the district forces, they could deploy anywhere and were not tied to

⁹⁴ UTHR-J, Report No. 5 (Appendix II).

⁹⁵ *Sri Lanka Army*, 532-533. In contrast, the LTTE's military wing had a single rank structure based on merit. All fighters began as "brave Tigers" (*vīra vēṅkai*) who could be promoted to "second lieutenant," which was the LTTE's equivalent of a senior enlisted rank. LTTE literature suggested that lieutenant colonel was the highest rank most fighters could attain. Only a few veterans who joined in the 1980s achieved the highest rank of colonel. See *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*.

⁹⁶ Vijayasiri, 55; SinhaRaja Tammita-Delgoda, *Sri Lanka: The Last Phase in Eelam War IV from Chundikulam to Pudumattalan* (New Delhi: Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2009), 6. The battalion was the smallest SLA unit capable of independent maneuver throughout the decade.

⁹⁷ *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 24. Prabhakaran named the Charles Anthony Special Regiment (CASR) after a pre-war associate who spearheaded the LTTE's attacks until his death in 1983.

specific territories.⁹⁸ Fourteen CASR commanders perished in combat in the 1990s, indicating how they led from the front.⁹⁹

The CASR's first challenge was defending against Kobbekaduwa, the greatest SLA commander in the history of the war whom the SLA assigned to command the northern theater. Kobbekaduwa had blunted the LTTE's 1990-1991 offensive and in April 1991 began a counteroffensive from Vavuniya.¹⁰⁰ Unlike the rest of the SLA, he was uninterested in tying down manpower to occupy territory and control the population. Instead, he sought to grind down the LTTE through attrition. He threatened strategic but sparsely-populated areas in the Wanni in order to draw out and kill Tigers with minimal risk to civilians.¹⁰¹

As Kobbekaduwa expected, the Tigers counterattacked fearing that his operations would cut their access to eastern and northwestern Sri Lanka.¹⁰² In May, the CASR moved a task force to the Wanni from Jaffna through Pooneryn. The Tigers claimed to have fixed the SLA in its forward lines with machine guns while riflemen attacked its flanks. The LTTE lost forty-four fighters from May through June, and the SLA withdrew back to Vavuniya.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 103; Taraki, "The war is far from over – What's behind LTTE's recent recruitment drive?" *Tamilnation*, November 18, 1998, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://tamilnation.co/forum/sivaram/981118.htm>. LTTE literature did not specify such subunits and instead referred to them collectively as "teams" (*aṇi*). The literature used the term "*paṭaiṇṇivū*" to describe the task forces formed by the teams and appeared to equate it with battalion. Sivaram understandably, though incorrectly, described the LTTE's formations as "battalions" probably because they were composed of companies (he correctly argued against the Sri Lankan media labeling them as "brigades"). LTTE literature also used the term *paṭaiyaṇi* to refer to specific regiments as well as tactical formations of task forces. The regiments themselves were administrative, not tactical, formations roughly following the British model (the SLA, like the Indian and Pakistan Armies, also followed the British model). The difference is that their largest components were companies, not battalions. See *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 78, 97.

⁹⁹ "Book on LTTE's first conventional formation launched," *Tamilnet*, October 1, 2003, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=10014>.

¹⁰⁰ *Sri Lanka Army*, 451-452, 463; Munasinghe, 111, 113; L. M. H. Mendis, 160-163, 182-197.

¹⁰¹ Taraki, "Kobbekaduwa- an exceptional Third World General," *Island*, August 16, 1992; Taraki, "Recapturing Jaffna: Is it feasible?"

¹⁰² *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 33; *Sri Lanka Army*, 463; Munasinghe, 113-114; L. M. H. Mendis, 203-214.

¹⁰³ *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 33-38.

Operation Sky Expanse, July – August 1991

The Tigers' next and most ambitious target was the SLA's six hundred-man garrison at Elephant Pass, which gave them the opportunity to wipe out an entire SLA battalion and seize its weapons.¹⁰⁴ They planned their first operation, codenamed Sky Expanse, that required coordination between three separate forces. The main effort was the CASR attacking from the south. The Jaffna district force attacked from the north, and the Trincomalee district force was the operational reserve.¹⁰⁵ They besieged the garrison with lines of trenches and bunkers in order to prevent the security forces from bringing reinforcements and the garrison from escaping. They also acquired 14.5mm guns to prevent SLAF resupply helicopters from landing.¹⁰⁶

As the SLA observed, the elements of the LTTE's assault did not coordinate well.¹⁰⁷ After a barrage with indigenous mortars on the night of 10 July 1991, Balraj launched the main assault spearheaded by three armored bulldozers and tractors providing cover for his fighters. By the third day, though, he lost many of these vehicles, and the narrowing path forward was not conducive for a mass assault or infiltration.¹⁰⁸ Instead of supporting Balraj, the Jaffna force unsuccessfully attempted to force the garrison to surrender its heavy weapons. Kobbekaduwa then conducted an amphibious landing to relieve Elephant Pass, with help from the SLN and SLAF. The LTTE's reserve failed to halt the SLA's advance from the lodgment.¹⁰⁹ The Tigers were forced to withdraw as the SLA's eight thousand-man relief force linked with the Elephant Pass garrison on 4 August. The LTTE acknowledged that 602 fighters fell, while the SLA lost

¹⁰⁴ Taraki, "The LTTE's new concept- confederation"; Kamal Gunaratne, 287.

¹⁰⁵ *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 39, 201; *Sri Lanka Army*, 464-465; Taraki, "Grads of Tigers Defence College."

¹⁰⁶ Taraki, "Can the LTTE get anti-aircraft guns?" *Island*, September 16, 1990; Taraki, "Elephant Pass: treacherous terrain," *Island*, July 21, 1991; Kamal Gunaratne, 288.

¹⁰⁷ Kamal Gunaratne, 289-290.

¹⁰⁸ *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 40-41; *Sri Lanka Army*, 464-465.

¹⁰⁹ Taraki, "Pooneryn: Prabha's strategic thinking"; Taraki, "Grads of Tigers Defence College"; *Sri Lanka Army*, 466-467; Munasinghe, 115-117; L. M. H. Mendis, 221-246.

only 202 soldiers.¹¹⁰ Within only thirty-one days of Sky Expanse, almost as many Tigers perished as between 1983 and 1987.¹¹¹

The LTTE's defeat at Elephant Pass marked the end of its strategic offensive and enabled Kobbekaduwa to gain the initiative for the next year. He created a dilemma for the LTTE by tying down its forces in Mullaitivu while conducting shaping operations elsewhere to prepare to retake Jaffna. After he conducted a search-and-destroy operation in Mullaitivu in late 1991, he captured Pooneryn without a fight. As a result, the LTTE's ability to move forces between Jaffna and the Wanni became limited to transiting through the Jaffna Lagoon. The SLN built a base at Nagathevanthurai near Pooneryn to interdict such movement.¹¹²

After Sky Expanse, Prabhakaran established the Sea Tiger branch in order to stop the SLN from bringing reinforcements by sea. The Sea Tigers evolved from a group of fighters who trained in combat swimming and using small boats and underwater explosives in the 1980s.¹¹³ In late 1989, Thillaiyambalam Sivanesan a.k.a. "Soosai" built a base complex near VVT having a reinforced harbor, boat-building facility, and an ordnance department, and he became the Special Commander of the Sea Tigers. In 1991, they had three hundred fighters, built a base at Kilaly, and began fighting intense engagements with the SLN in the Jaffna Lagoon on fiberglass boats mounted with .50 caliber machine guns.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 41-42; Kamal Gunaratne, 294.

¹¹¹ Jeyaraj, "The Enduring Mystique of 'Maaveerar Naal.'"

¹¹² *Sri Lanka Army*, 468; Taraki, "Strategies for a peninsula war," *Island*, October 27, 1991; Taraki. "Geographical dimension of Operation Jaya Sikurui," *Sunday Times*, May 25, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970525/taraki.html>; Rohan Gunaratna, *Ethnic Conflict*, 367-368 n169; *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 43-44, 201; Munasinghe, 120.

¹¹³ Vaithilingam Sornalingam a.k.a. "Shankar" headed this group and was responsible for transporting supplies from Tamil Nadu to Jaffna. He also had set up the communications network linking Prabhakaran in Tamil Nadu to his district commanders in Sri Lanka. Arguably, Shankar was Prabhakaran's most important lieutenant that decade. See D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Death of a Tiger," *Frontline* 18, no. 21, October 13-26, 2001, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1821/18210570.htm>.

¹¹⁴ Taraki, "LTTE's sea-borne operations," *Island*, March 29, 1992; Taraki, "Tigers roam the seas," *Island*, June 28, 1992; Taraki, "Eelam War Three- The Battle for the Seas"; Niresh Eliathamby, "Ferocious Naval Battle Rocks Jaffna Lagoon," *Island*, August 29, 1993; University Teachers for Human

Military Reorganization, 1991 – 1993

The LTTE recognized that its district forces had fought at Elephant Pass as disparate guerrilla bands with no common combat method, leading Prabhakaran to establish a school for the LTTE's military wing on 19 September 1991.¹¹⁵ This school included an "Officers Training College" (*atikārikaḷ payiṛcik kallūri*) where LTTE commanders learned the tactics and techniques that Balraj sharpened. The purpose was to share a common doctrinal understanding of how to conduct infantry assaults. To support this school, the LTTE created a publications unit to translate military literature to the Tamil language.¹¹⁶ The critical lesson was Jomini's concept of maintaining a concentration of force at the decisive point until the target was overwhelmed.¹¹⁷

At the same time, the Premadasa government developed its own emergent strategy with the limited military aim of retaking and holding the Eastern Province. Premadasa based his strategy on the assumption that the security forces could not crush the LTTE and a military solution was economically unsustainable.¹¹⁸ The multiethnic eastern theater was indispensable with its long coastline and harbor at Trincomalee. Premadasa also probably calculated that the

Rights-Jaffna, "Rays of Hope Amidst Deepening Gloom," Report No. 10, January 15, 1993, accessed March 24, 2019, http://www.uthr.org/Reports/Report10/chapter0.htm#_Toc515972954.

¹¹⁵ "*Tamiḷiḷa viṭutalaippulikaḷ iyakkam ārampamum muṭivum*," *Eelamview*, April 30, 2012, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://www.eelamview.com/2012/04/30/liberation-struggle-begin-and-end-leader-prabhakaran/>; This pro-LTTE website also mentioned a "Military Science College" (*irāṇuva viññāna kallūri*), although it is unclear whether the two schools were separate or the same.

¹¹⁶ Taraki, "Grads of Tigers Defence College"; "*Tamiḷiḷa viṭutalaippulikaḷiṅ kaṭarpulikaḷiṅ makaḷir paṭaiyaṇi*," *Cutāntirap paṛavaikaḷ*, January 1994, 6, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://noolaham.net/project/263/26238/26238.pdf>. It is noteworthy that the SLA waited until 1998 to establish its own staff college. See *Sri Lanka Army*, 536-539.

¹¹⁷ Taraki, "Pooneryn: Prabha's strategic thinking."

¹¹⁸ Taraki, "Riviresa II and opening up of the 8th front." *Sunday Times*, April 21, 1996, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/960421/taraki.html>.

LTTE was weak there compared with the Tamil-dominated northern theater.¹¹⁹ Therefore, he sought to deny the east to convince the LTTE that a separate Tamil state was unachievable.¹²⁰

Despite Premadasa's emphasis on the eastern theater, Kobbekaduwa continued attrition operations in early 1992 that pushed the Tigers to create their second formation, the Imran-Pandiyan Regiment, to defend vital parts of Mullaitivu District.¹²¹ Tying down the LTTE in Mullaitivu allowed him to expand the perimeter of the Palaly airbase from where he would retake Jaffna.¹²² The Tigers responded by raiding SLA positions around Jaffna to capture weapons, test its defenses, and maximize the SLA's losses while minimizing their own.¹²³

In August 1992, Sasikumar Master's SRU killed Kobbekaduwa and his staff with an IED attack, resulting in the SLA abandoning his plan to retake Jaffna and adopting a defensive cordon to separate the Jaffna Peninsula from the mainland.¹²⁴ The SLA was confident it could repulse future assaults against its bases, based on the experience of Sky Expanse that resulted in much greater LTTE losses than Kobbekaduwa's attrition efforts. The SLA believed no level of tactical

¹¹⁹ Taraki, "'Jaffna first policy' dominate Tiger thinking"; Taraki, "Pacifying the East?" *Island*, November 21, 1993; Taraki, "Govt. Faced With Devil's Alternative"; Whitaker, 144; Munasinghe 112, 121, 229.

¹²⁰ Rajan Hoole, "The Chickens Come Home," *Colombo Telegraph*, June 6, 2015, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/the-chickens-come-home/>.

¹²¹ Joanne Richards, *An Institutional History of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)*, (Geneva: Centre on Conflict, Development, and Peacebuilding, November 2014), 28, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://repository.graduateinstitute.ch/record/292651/files/CCDP-Working-Paper-10-LTTE-1.pdf>; *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 45. Richards incorrectly dated the Imran-Pandiyan Regiment's creation to 2 October 1992. Unlike the CASR, it was a composite force that later included a dedicated Black Tiger team, the Sembayan Reconnaissance, Mayuran Sniper, Shankar Deep Assault, Victor Antitank, and Radha Antiaircraft Units, and captured armored vehicles. See Amuthan, "'Enkaṭa uyiraik koṭuttāvatu aṇṇaiyaik kāppārraṇum' pīrikēṭiyar ātavaṇ," *Pathivu*, April 4, 2017, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170408145012/http://www.pathivu.com/?p=113546>.

¹²² *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 45-46, 201; Kamal Gunaratne, 297; L. M. H. Mendis, 264-274.

¹²³ *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 47-50, 201-202, 210; Taraki, "Can the LTTE hold?" *Island*, July 12, 1992.

¹²⁴ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "'Pottu Amman' and the Intelligence Division of the LTTE"; *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 49; Shamindra Ferdinando, "Top army men divided over war tactics," *Island*, April 4, 1993.

proficiency or willpower would enable the LTTE's infantry to succeed without supporting firepower.¹²⁵

In 1992, Prabhakaran appointed Balraj as the Deputy Commander of the LTTE's military wing.¹²⁶ Balraj reorganized the military wing into standardized squads, platoons, and companies along the model of the CASR. He subordinated these reorganized ground forces and Sea Tigers under a new chain of command. The LTTE saw no need to create permanent tactical formations larger than companies in order to consolidate its combat power.¹²⁷ Instead, it task organized forces under the control of headquarters units (*kaṭṭalai talaiyakam*) for particular operations.¹²⁸

Sasikumar Master expanded the SRU into the military wing's Planning Department.¹²⁹ Using information the SRU gained on the layout of the security forces' bases, the Planning Department constructed real-size models to facilitate operational planning.¹³⁰ The Planning Department also added three more sections to collect and analyze intelligence on the SLA, SLN, and SLAF.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Taraki, "Economy will determine war," *Island*, January 5, 1992. Notably, Sivaram at the time agreed with the SLA's position.

¹²⁶ Taraki, "LTTE's command structure covert."

¹²⁷ Taraki, "The war is far from over – What's behind LTTE's recent recruitment drive?"

¹²⁸ *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṅkaḷ*.

¹²⁹ Taraki, "LTTE develops asymmetric deterrence to stall foreign intervention," *Tamilnation*, May 22, 2004, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://tamilnation.co/forum/sivaram/040522.htm>; Taraki, "What is the larger picture in Pirapakaran's mind," *Daily Mirror*, March 9, 2005, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://tamilnation.co/forum/sivaram/050309.htm>.

¹³⁰ Munasinghe, 182.

¹³¹ Jeyaraj, "Pottu Amman' and the Intelligence Division of the LTTE." Pro-LTTE sources described Sasikumar Master as the military wing's planner (*paṭaitṭurai varaipaṭa taḷapati*). However, Jeyaraj described Sasikumar Master as heading the LTTE's "Military Intelligence Service" under intelligence wing chief Shanmuganathan Sivashankar a.k.a. "Pottu Amman." Although the Planning Department's reconnaissance and analytic capabilities gave it an intelligence function, no other information was found to confirm that Sasikumar Master served under Pottu Amman. The intelligence wing supported the military wing by bribing government personnel to reveal plans while protecting the LTTE's plans from being divulged. See Prasanth, "“*tamiḷiḷa viṭtalaippulikaḷiṅ irāṇuva paṭaitṭurai varaipaṭa taḷapati*’ *pirikēṭiyar cacikumar*.”"

For sustainment, the LTTE had a separate supply wing to provide ammunition, fuel, and other combat-related requirements directly to the subunit components of the task forces assembled for operations. The CASR and other formations each received budgets only for basic needs such as food and housing.¹³² The effect of this two-tier system was that only the task forces, not the military wing's regiments providing the task forces' component subunits, could independently engage in combat.

The LTTE's reorganization and planning for major operations in the northern theater resulted in only eighteen days of combat in 1993, although they comprised the largest battles fought to date. The security forces' progress in the Eastern Province pushed Prabhakaran to redeploy eastern fighters to the north.¹³³ In May, 1,500 eastern Tigers formed another infantry formation, the Jeyanthan Regiment.¹³⁴

A Black Tiger suicide bomber assassinated Premadasa in May, and the new Sri Lankan president adopted a more aggressive posture in the north.¹³⁵ In September 1993, six SLA battalions advanced from Elephant Pass to destroy the Sea Tiger camp at Kilaly and regain control of Jaffna Lagoon. After a few days, the LTTE hit them with mortar fire and a flank attack

¹³² Taraki, "The war is far from over – What's behind LTTE's recent recruitment drive?" Until 1995, the bedrock of the LTTE's logistical system was rural adult males armed with bolt-action rifles serving as civilian auxiliaries. They were distinct from regular Tigers because they did not wear cyanide capsules or take the LTTE oath. See Taraki, "Tiger manpower: the breeding grounds"; Taraki, "Blinded in the Wannu quagmire," *Sunday Times*, June 29, 1997, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970629/taraki.html>; "tamiḷiḷa tēciya tuṇaiṇṇai," *EelamView*, May 6, 2013, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.eelamview.com/2013/05/06/tamileelam-civilian/>; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna (UTHR-J), "A Sovereign Will to Self-Destruct-The Continuing Saga of Dislocation & Disintegration," Report No. 12, November 15, 1993, accessed March 23, 2019, http://www.uthr.org/Reports/Report12/chapter1.htm#_Toc516067943.

¹³³ Taraki, "The Batticaloa Mobile Presidential Service- a non-event," *Island*, August 1, 1993; "Govt's Counter-Insurgency Programme and LTTE's Military Response."

¹³⁴ Taraki, "The war is far from over – What's behind LTTE's recent recruitment drive?"; "Pirapaharan extols Jeyanthan Brigade on 12th anniversary," *Tamilnet*, May 5, 2005, accessed March 24, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=14818>.

¹³⁵ Taraki, "Now it's the army's responsibility."

that destroyed two T-55 tanks and killed 112 soldiers. The Sea Tigers' attack craft escaped, and the SLA was unable to hold Kilaly and had to withdraw.¹³⁶

Operation Frog, November 1993

The LTTE targeted the joint SLA-SLN base complex at Pooneryn-Nagathevanthurai to break the cordon around Jaffna and regain access between the peninsula and mainland.¹³⁷ The security forces had nearly 2,300 soldiers and three hundred sailors, a battery of 120mm mortars, and two T-55 tanks. The base spread over twenty-seven sq. km with a twenty-nine-km perimeter, enabling the Tigers to infiltrate at night to gather intelligence and allowing plenty of room for maneuver during the battle, unlike the constricted space of Elephant Pass. The LTTE assigned 1,500 fighters to form two infantry task forces, along with an amphibious force of one hundred Sea Tigers, and they trained with a life-sized replica of the base. They timed the attack for the monsoon season to minimize the SLAF's ability to provide air support.¹³⁸

The Tigers launched Operation Frog at midnight on 11 November under the cover of fog and rain, with three objectives. First, a Sea Black Tiger suicide-bomb boat blasted the SLN's position at Nagathevanthurai, followed by the Sea Tigers landing and capturing the camp and its patrol boats. Second, the LTTE's first infantry task force secured Kalmunai Point to prevent reinforcements from arriving from Mandaitivu. The second task force attacked Pooneryn itself, overrunning a battalion headquarters and seizing both T-55s and two 120mm mortars.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ UTHR-J, "A Sovereign Will To Self-Destruct-The Continuing Saga of Dislocation & Disintegration"; Taraki, "Major upset for LTTE," *Island*, October 3, 1993; Taraki, "Now it's the army's responsibility"; Taraki, "'Jaffna first policy' dominate Tiger thinking"; Munasinghe, 128-132; L. M. H. Mendis, 305-314.

¹³⁷ Taraki, "Major upset for LTTE."

¹³⁸ Taraki, "Pooneryn: Prabha's strategic thinking"; Kamal Gunaratne, 327-328, 332; Rohan Gunaratna, *Ethnic Crisis*, 302.

¹³⁹ Taraki, "Pooneryn: Prabha's strategic thinking"; Kamal Gunaratne, 328-330; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Theepan of the LTTE: Heroic saga of a Northern warrior," April 4, 2012, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/5381>; Rohan Gunaratna, *Ethnic Crisis*, 302. The SLAF destroyed one of the two T-55s as it was withdrawing. The other survived under the LTTE's control until the end of the war. See "Recovered LTTE's T-55 MBT Back on Wheels," *Sri Lanka Army: Defenders of the Nation*, accessed March 29, 2019, <https://www.army.lk/news/recovered-lttes-t-55-mbt-back-wheels-1>.

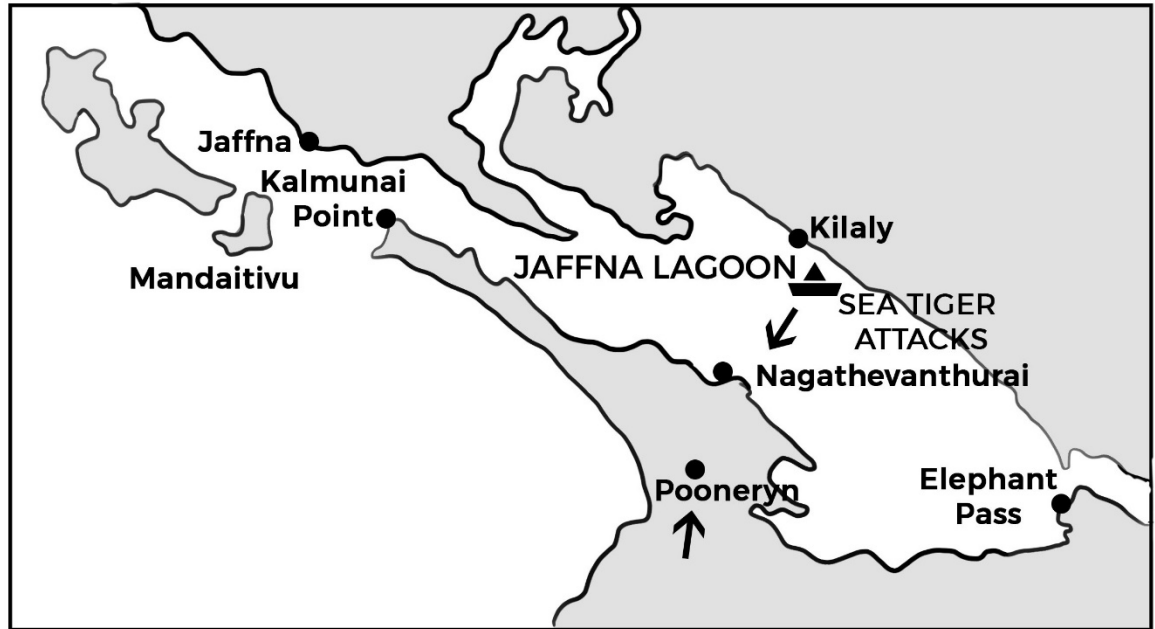


Figure 3. Operation Frog (Pooneryn). Created by Sasrika Senaratne.

Frog was a mixed success because the security forces landed reinforcements two days later to retake the base.¹⁴⁰ The Tigers withdrew after looting and destroying the complex, losing 460 fighters to 650 security force personnel killed in action.¹⁴¹ The Tigers' victory shattered the UNP's east-centric strategy and helped paved the way for its electoral defeats in the following year.

Losing Jaffna, 1995 – 1996

Whereas the failure of Sky Expanse pushed the LTTE to develop doctrine and standardize forces, the SLA responded to its defeat at Pooneryn by establishing permanent brigades and then divisions.¹⁴² The Tigers conducted no significant operations in 1994, aside

¹⁴⁰ *Sri Lanka Army*, 498.

¹⁴¹ S. Murari, *The Prabhakaran Saga: The Rise and Fall of an Eelam Warrior* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2012), 143; Iqbal Athas, "Inside story of female Tigers," *Sunday Times*, June 16, 2002, accessed September 13, 2018, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/020616/columns/sitrepl.html>.

¹⁴² *Sri Lanka Army*, 500-501, 902. Each SLA division had nine thousand soldiers. See Taraki, "Tailing the Tiger trap," *Sunday Times*, November 2, 1997, accessed September 13, 2018, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/971102/taraki.html>; "Victory Less Assured," *Tamilnet*, November 13, 1997, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=7344>.

from their special reconnaissance activities, giving time for the SLA to build these formations.¹⁴³ By the end of the year, the LTTE agreed to a ceasefire with newly-elected President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The LTTE used the ceasefire and peace talks to prepare for Eelam War III. Prabhakaran directed Karuna to return to Batticaloa with eastern veterans who had fought in the north and to recruit.¹⁴⁴ During the ceasefire, the LTTE recruited five thousand youth from the east and the Wanni.¹⁴⁵ At that time, Sasikumar Master anticipated the LTTE would achieve a separate state by 2000.¹⁴⁶ The LTTE was apprehensive that a lengthy ceasefire would dampen the Tamils' willingness to fight and thus ended it in April 1995 with a Sea Tiger attack against the SLN in Trincomalee harbor.¹⁴⁷ The Tigers predicted Kumaratunga would move on Jaffna and shot down two transport aircraft near Palaly, and in June they raided an island off Jaffna's western coast.¹⁴⁸

Kumaratunga resolved to retake Jaffna and eliminate the LTTE's *de facto* state.¹⁴⁹ In July, the SLA resumed shaping operations to break out of Palaly. The LTTE realized its stronghold in Jaffna was untenable after the population provided information to the security forces to accurately hit the LTTE's positions with artillery and airstrikes. Therefore, it began moving many fighters and arms to the Wanni.¹⁵⁰ While the security forces were concentrating

¹⁴³ "Govt's Counter-Insurgency Programme and LTTE's Military Response"; Taraki, "Tigers' Special Ops in The North."

¹⁴⁴ Taraki, "LTTE's Strategy in the East." *Island*, June 4, 1995.

¹⁴⁵ Taraki, "Destroying the Tiger in Jaffna: What Chances?" *Island*, June 25, 1995.

¹⁴⁶ Boyagoda and Galappatti, 88.

¹⁴⁷ Taraki, "Ceasefire—LTTE's concern," *Island*, December 25, 1994; Taraki, "Eelam War Three-The Battle for the Seas."

¹⁴⁸ Taraki, "Crisis Averted- PA and LTTE Recognize Mutual Problems," *Island*, April 2, 1995; Taraki, "Govt. Faced With Devil's Alternative"; Taraki, "LTTE Demonstrates Its Sea Power Again," *Island*, July 2, 1995.

¹⁴⁹ D. Sivaram, "Political and Military Objective of the Govt's Jaffna Offensive," *Tamil Times* 14, no. 12 (December 15, 1995): 16-17, accessed September 3, 2018, http://www.noolaham.org/wiki/index.php/Tamil_Times_1995.12.

¹⁵⁰ University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "The Exodus from Jaffna," Special Report No. 6, December 6, 1995, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport6.htm>; Taraki,

forces in Jaffna, the LTTE prepared to destroy the SLA 6 Brigade's base complex at Weli Oya between the Northern and Eastern Provinces to facilitate moving fighters between them.¹⁵¹ They attacked on 28 July, but 6 Brigade commander Janaka Perera set a trap that killed 350 of their three thousand fighters, with only two deaths for the security forces. The SLN also blocked the Sea Tigers from landing reinforcements.¹⁵²

On 17 October, the SLA launched Operation Riviresa ("Sunray"), its largest operation to date involving twenty thousand soldiers, from Palaly to retake the Jaffna Peninsula. The SLA created the 51, 52, and 53 Divisions, with Perera in command of the elite 53 Division, and acquired twenty-four 122mm howitzers for this operation. These formations captured Jaffna city by 2 December and the rest of the peninsula in early 1996.¹⁵³

Operation Unceasing Waves, July 1996

The Tigers indicated that losing Jaffna had not dampened their willingness to fight by continuing to recruit and announcing they would capture the SLA's heavy weapons. Not only did they withdraw from Jaffna mostly intact, but they also took most of the civilian population to preserve their recruitment and revenue base.¹⁵⁴ In 1996, the Tigers established the all-female

"'Surprise' in Prabha's strategy," June 8, 1997, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970608/taraki.html>.

¹⁵¹ Taraki, "LTTE's Strategy in the East."

¹⁵² *Sri Lanka Army*, 523-524; "'Traitor' Amidst the Debacle," *Tamil Times* 14, no. 8 (August 15, 1995): 19, 33, accessed March 24, 2019, http://www.noolaham.org/wiki/index.php/Tamil_Times_1995.08; Rohan Gunaratna, *Ethnic Crisis*, 305-306. Unlike other SLA commanders, Perera conducted patrolling and established listening and observation posts beyond the base's perimeter that detected the Tigers staging, allowing him to turn the tables on them.

¹⁵³ *Sri Lanka Army*, 527-531, 780-795; Kamal Gunaratne, 352-363, 376; L. M. H. Mendis, 360-375, 385-392; Iqbal Athas, "Yet another Op-Riviresa in Valikamam," *Sunday Times*, March 31, 1996, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/960331/sitrep.html>; Iqbal Athas, "Rumblings of talks again," *Sunday Times*, April 5, 1998, accessed September 13, 2018, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/980405/sitrep.html>.

¹⁵⁴ UTHR-J, "The Exodus from Jaffna"; Taraki, "Game Plan for a Grand Slam," *Sunday Times*, March 3, 1996, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/960303/oped/taraki.html>.

Malathy and Sothiya Regiments.¹⁵⁵ By late May, they clearly were staging for an assault against the 25 Brigade at Mullaitivu.¹⁵⁶

The SLA believed Mullaitivu was impregnable because it was surrounded by landmines and open terrain. However, it had a long perimeter of 8.5 km and a 1.5 km width, giving little depth to its defense. The distance between the first and second defense lines was too short, allowing attackers to hit both at the same time. Unlike Pooneryn, there were no areas within or outside Mullaitivu for the soldiers to regroup and defend themselves.¹⁵⁷ The SLA also placed two new 122mm howitzers whose minimum range was too far to be effective for close quarter combat.¹⁵⁸

On 18 July 1996 at 0100 hours, Balraj initiated Operation Unceasing Waves. Sixty Black Tiger suicide-bombers first created breaches in the forward defenses, and a task force broke through the base's northern front. A second force with Sea Tigers landed on the beach and overran the artillery positions and brigade headquarters. The third group attacked from the west, captured the sentry posts, linked with the other forces, divided the camp down the middle, and captured both battalion headquarters.¹⁵⁹ Instead of departing after looting the base as in Frog, the Tigers entrenched themselves and repulsed a heli-dropped Special Forces battalion.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Taraki, "The war is far from over – What's behind LTTE's recent recruitment drive?"; "Heroes' day commemorations begin," *Tamilnet*, November 25, 2005, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=16413>; "2-am lep. mālati paṭaiyaṇi," *EelamView*, April 20, 2014, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.eelamview.com/2014/04/20/2nd-lt-malathy-brigade/>. By the following year, the LTTE had three thousand female fighters. See "Tamil youth sign up," *Tamilnet*, June 15, 1997, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?artid=8&catid=13>.

¹⁵⁶ "Jaffna: signs of sunrise," *Sunday Times*, May 26, 1996, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/960526/def.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Kamal Gunaratne, 373-375, 378-379; D. Sivaram, "Mullaitivu: A Shattering Blow War Strategy," *Tamil Times* 15, no. 8 (August 15, 1996): 11-12, accessed September 3, 2018, http://www.noolaham.org/wiki/index.php/Tamil_Times_1996.08.

¹⁵⁸ Kamal Gunaratne, 376-377, 380.

¹⁵⁹ *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 57-59; Kamal Gunaratne, 381; Vijayasiri, 44-45; UTHR-J, "Vanni: A People Crushed Between Cycles of Violence."

¹⁶⁰ *Sri Lanka Army*, 526-527.

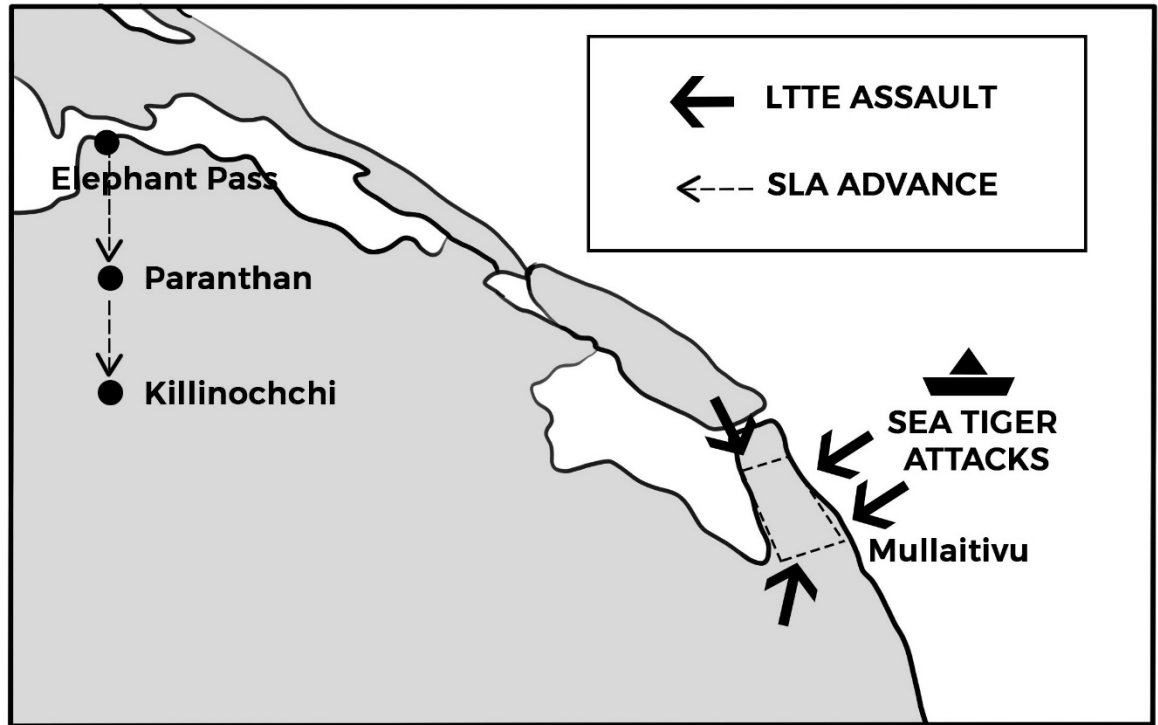


Figure 4. Operation Unceasing Waves (Mullaitivu). Created by Sasrika Senaratne.

The LTTE killed 1,463 security force personnel, including 207 soldiers who had surrendered, and only sixty-six SLA survivors managed to fight their way out. The Tigers lost only 332 fighters and seized about seventy million dollars' worth of equipment, including the two 122mm howitzers with nine hundred shells and two 120mm mortars.¹⁶¹ As a face-saving measure, the 53 Division advanced from Elephant Pass to capture Paranthan and Killinochchi, the largest remaining population centers under LTTE control, by the end of September.¹⁶²

The SLA blundered in closing its base at Pooneryn in order to free soldiers to defend Killinochchi, Paranthan, and Elephant Pass with the newly-created 54 Division. The LTTE took

¹⁶¹ "LTTE's Mullaitivu Arms Bonanza," *Tamil Times* 15, no. 9 (September 15, 1996): 6, accessed March 29, 2019, http://www.noolaham.org/wiki/index.php/Tamil_Times_1996.09; "Operation Unceasing Waves: the Mullaitivu Battle," *Viduthalai Puligal*, July 18, 1996, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://tamilnation.co/tamileelam/armedstruggle/warfront/960718mullaitivu.htm>; Iqbal Athas, "Censorship out: then events unfurled," *Sunday Times*, October 13, 1996, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/961013/sitrep.html>; Taraki, "Tigers think: Why talk, when we are riding high," *Sunday Times*, April 6, 1997, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970406/taraki.html>.

¹⁶² *Neruppārru niccalir pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 60-63; *Sri Lanka Army*, 541-542; Munasinghe, 159.

control of Pooneryn without a fight and immediately constructed a Sea Tiger base that allowed it to infiltrate fighters into Jaffna.¹⁶³ The fact that Prabhakaran, during the 1995 peace talks, demanded the SLA withdraw from Pooneryn should have demonstrated its strategic value to the Kumaratunga government.¹⁶⁴ As the following sections demonstrate, closing Pooneryn deprived the security forces of options while opening a critical opportunity for the LTTE in its counteroffensive in 2000.

Defending Against the Government's Wannu Offensive

The security forces' capture of Jaffna shifted the operational environment against the LTTE. Instead of scattered SLA bases that the LTTE could eliminate piecemeal, it now faced two SLA blocs in Jaffna and Kilinochchi to the north and in Vavuniya, Weli Oya, and Mannar in the south. Despite its success at Mullaitivu, the LTTE had ceded the initiative to a new government that framed its problem as the LTTE's combat capability.

More than any previous leader, Kumaratunga had the most comprehensive vision of defeating the LTTE. Instead of negotiating, she sought to isolate it by formulating a political solution with moderate Tamils. She combined this political line of effort with an aggressive military policy to degrade the LTTE's growing capabilities in the northern theater.¹⁶⁵

Kumaratunga also improved the security forces' human rights standards to minimize alienating the Tamils and to gain greater international support.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ *Sri Lanka Army*, 541; Iqbal Athas, "Operation Dirithara: off target but not a total failure," *Sunday Times*, October 27, 1996, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/961027/sitrep.html>; Munasinghe, 230.

¹⁶⁴ Taraki, "Eelam War Three- The Battle for the Seas."

¹⁶⁵ Taraki, "UNP ponders direct talks with LTTE?" *Sunday Times*, May 11, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970511/taraki.html>.

¹⁶⁶ University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "The Choice between Anarchy and International Law with Monitoring," Special Report No. 23, November 7, 2006, accessed March 30, 2019, http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport23.htm#_Toc174529766.

However, winning Tamil hearts and minds would have little impact on the LTTE which drew its military power from child fighters and overseas funding, not the Tamil people.¹⁶⁷ Constitutional reform and devolution held little meaning for child fighters whom the LTTE indoctrinated to fight for a separate state and to view Tamil moderates as traitors.¹⁶⁸ Despite Kumaratunga's efforts, the international community was mostly unwilling to curb LTTE fundraising.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, Kumaratunga had to achieve military success in order to implement any political solution, but her military policy would be difficult to economically sustain.¹⁷⁰

Kumaratunga's military aim was to establish a main supply route (MSR) through the Wannu to reintegrate Jaffna socially and economically with the rest of the island. The MSR was necessary because of the logistical burden of resupplying by air and sea the thirty thousand security forces personnel and five hundred thousand Tamil civilians in Jaffna.¹⁷¹ SLN and SLAF transports were vulnerable to the Sea Tigers and the LTTE's anti-aircraft weapons.¹⁷² After establishing the MSR, the SLA would be able to redeploy soldiers from Jaffna to conduct operations in depth in the Wannu to break the LTTE's military power. The logic of Kumaratunga's offensive, codenamed Operation Jayasikurui ("Victory Assured"), was that the concentration of her superior resources would eventually overwhelm the LTTE's capabilities.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Taraki, "Counter-civilian strategies."

¹⁶⁸ Singer, 99-100.

¹⁶⁹ Peter Stafford Roberts, 75.

¹⁷⁰ Taraki, "Riviresa II and opening up of the 8th front"; Taraki, "Creeping advantage: can the government hold on to it?" The UNP criticized Kumaratunga's policy as unsustainable, but fortunately for her it offered no alternative except peace talks which at that time both the LTTE and the Sinhala electorate rejected. See Taraki, "Tigers think: Why talk, when we are riding high."

¹⁷¹ Nirupama Subramaniam, *Sri Lanka: Voices from a War Zone* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005), 58; Kamal Gunaratne, 401.

¹⁷² Iqbal Athas, "Jaffna's normalcy under strain," *Sunday Times*, June 13, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990613/sitrep.html>; D. Sivaram, "Capture of Jaffna- What Next?" *Tamil Times* 15, no. 1 (January 15, 1996): 26, accessed September 3, 2018, http://www.noolaham.org/wiki/index.php/Tamil_Times_1996.01.

¹⁷³ Taraki, "Creeping advantage: can the government hold on to it?"; Whitaker, 148.

She fast-tracked military procurement to support Jayasikurui, purchasing Israeli Kfir fighter-bombers, Mi-24 attack helicopters, and Israeli Superscout unmanned aerial systems.¹⁷⁴

LTTE Preparations

The LTTE began preparing to defend against a Wannu offensive before Operation Unceasing Waves. It initiated reconnaissance, planning, and training, established a localized sustainment system for counterstrikes, and started moving fighters from the east.¹⁷⁵ The LTTE's most significant military development in the late 1990s was integrating its increasing firepower with its infantry units to conduct combined-arms operations. Its artillery had a decisive effect against the SLA which had no experience dealing with it. Standoff artillery also enabled the Tigers to engage the SLA continuously without having to pause for long periods between operations. In 1996, the LTTE raised the Kittu Artillery Regiment to organize the guns it captured and train fighters in their use.¹⁷⁶ By the end of 1997, it increased its firepower to five 122mm howitzers and dozens of 120mm and 81mm mortars.¹⁷⁷

The Tigers used their reconnaissance skills to effectively direct artillery fire.¹⁷⁸ In February 1997, fire from their 122mm howitzers forced the SLA to move its operational

¹⁷⁴ Iqbal Athas, "Rethinking military strategy for millennium," *Sunday Times*, April 18, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990418/sitrep.html>; Nirosha Mendis, 90-92, 98-99, 138; <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/980426/sitrep.html>. In 1997, the Kfirs conducted 232 sorties and the Mi-24s conducted 127 sorties. The SLAF also installed an aerial camera and communications monitoring and jamming equipment from Israel to convert a Beechcraft 200T aircraft into a COMINT platform. See Rienzi Pereira, *Wings of Sri Lanka: Fifty Years of Service to the Nation, 1951 – 2001* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka Air Force, 2001), 120; Nirosha Mendis, 148-150.

¹⁷⁵ Taraki, "The bloody lessons of Thandikulam," *Sunday Times*, June 15, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970615/taraki.html>; Iqbal Athas, "East: a prize catch, thinks LTTE," *Sunday Times*, September 15, 1996, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/960915/sitrep.html>.

¹⁷⁶ Taraki, "The war is far from over – What's behind LTTE's recent recruitment drive?"; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "The Taking of Elephant Pass," *Frontline* 17, no. 10, May 13-26, 2000, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1710/17100100.htm>.

¹⁷⁷ "Victory Less Assured," *Tamilnet*; "A long year on the road," *Tamilnet*, May 13, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?artid=7384&catid=79>.

¹⁷⁸ Kamal Gunaratne, 432; Taraki, "Battle on A9: a battered theory of war," *Sunday Times*, October 12, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/971012/taraki.html>.

headquarters from Vavuniya further back to Anuradhapura.¹⁷⁹ In March 1998, LTTE artillery hit the 55 Division's tactical headquarters, wounding the commander and killing a staff officer.¹⁸⁰

The LTTE fortified its heavier guns while constantly moving its mortars to protect them from SLA counter-battery fire.¹⁸¹ By late July 1997, 81mm mortars became the LTTE's primary source of firepower, inflicting sixty-five percent of the SLA's casualties.¹⁸² The Tigers made particular use of a consignment of 32,400 81mm mortar bombs they had intercepted earlier that May from the government.¹⁸³ The Tigers also further developed their existing air defense and antitank units. The Radha Antiaircraft Unit shot down at least four Mi-24s with MANPADS and antiaircraft guns from 1997 through 2000.¹⁸⁴ The Victor Anti-Armor Unit helped destroy eighteen T-55s in 1996 and 1997.¹⁸⁵

Altogether, the LTTE had under a million people in areas under its control to sustain a force of seven to ten thousand fighters, with an attrition rate of more than two thousand fighters

¹⁷⁹ Iqbal Athas, "Jaya Sikurui: crucial week ahead," *Sunday Times*, May 25, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970525/sitrep.html>.

¹⁸⁰ Iqbal Athas, "Mankulam: so close and yet so far," *Sunday Times*, March 22, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/980322/sitrep.html>.

¹⁸¹ Taraki, "The deepening theatre of operation - the Kilinochchi factor," *Sunday Times*, February 8, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/980208/taraki.html>.

¹⁸² Iqbal Athas, "Mortars cause highest 'Jaya Sikurui' casualties," *Sunday Times*, October 5, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/971005/sitrep.html>; Iqbal Athas, "Mankulam: so close and yet so far"; Iqbal Athas, "Censored headlines and new deadlines," *Sunday Times*, June 28, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/980628/sitrep.html>.

¹⁸³ The SLA had ordered the mortar bombs from Zimbabwe, which in turn sourced them from Croatia via an Israeli arms dealer. En route to Zimbabwe, the LTTE hijacked the ship. See Iqbal Athas, "Mortar ship — scoop and the spook," *Sunday Times*, September 12, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990912/sitrep.html>.

¹⁸⁴ "Elephant Pass troops stand firm," *Sunday Times*, December 19, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/991219/sitrep.html>; "LTTE's Stealth Boat tries to outsmart Sri Lanka Navy's Fast Attack Craft," *Sunday Times*, December 31, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/001231/sitrep.html>.

¹⁸⁵ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "An impressive performance by the LTTE Victor Unit," *Transcurrents*, October 15, 2006, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://web.archive.org/web/20150612202045/http://transcurrents.com:80/tamiliana/archives/205>; "Heavy going for SLA armour," *Tamilnet*, September 30, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=7332>.

per year.¹⁸⁶ As the SLA redeployed soldiers from the east to the north, Karuna took the eastern areas they vacated and gained 2,300 sq. km of territory without a fight.¹⁸⁷ The environment was ripe for recruitment because the area had suffered widespread impoverishment after the UNP's earlier counterinsurgency efforts had displaced civilians and imposed economic restrictions.¹⁸⁸ By May 1997, Karuna moved at least one thousand eastern Tigers to bolster the Jeyanthan Regiment in the Wanni.¹⁸⁹ Prabhakaran appointed Karuna as overall commander of the forces opposing Jayasikurui, demonstrating the importance of the easterners.¹⁹⁰

In late 1996, the LTTE raised the Leopard (*ciruttai*) Regiment with children drawn from special orphanages which inculcated absolute devotion towards Prabhakaran. The LTTE assigned the Leopards to either land or sea forces for various operations. In December 1997, the Leopards demonstrated their prowess by encircling and killing 172 soldiers, mostly elite Commandos.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ D. Sivaram, "The question of recruitment to the LTTE: The cat, a bell and a few strategists," *Sunday Times*, April 13, 1997, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970413/news5.html#Cat>; UTHR-J, "The Scent of Danger." UTHR-J estimated only 300,000 people lived in LTTE areas, pointing to how many Jaffna residents fled because of the war. However, Sivaram favored the government's higher estimate arguing that reliance on subsistence farming forced rural households to have more children. His argument was more plausible given how rural Tamils did not have as many resources to escape as Jaffna Tamils did.

¹⁸⁷ Taraki, "Clockwork scenarios and the reality," *Sunday Times*, October 19, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/971019/taraki.html>.

¹⁸⁸ Taraki, "Give up east, at what cost?" *Sunday Times*, April 7, 1996, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/960407/taraki.html>; Sivaram, "The question of recruitment to the LTTE: The cat, a bell and a few strategists," April 27, 1997; Taraki, "Govt. clings on despite stiff opposition," September 8, 1996, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/960908/taraki.html>.

¹⁸⁹ Taraki, "'Surprise' in Prabha's strategy"; Taraki, "Sojourn to Vanni tells all," *Sunday Times*, May 4, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970504/taraki.html>; "Pirapaharan extols Jeyanthan Brigade on 12th anniversary." Over the course of the campaign, 859 fighters from the Jeyanthan Regiment fell in combat in the Wanni.

¹⁹⁰ D. Sivaram, "The East: LTTE's Achilles Heel or Military Asset?" *Northeastern Herald*, August 24, 2002, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://tamilnation.co/forum/sivaram/020824.htm>.

¹⁹¹ Taraki, "The war is far from over – What's behind LTTE's recent recruitment drive?"; Rohan Gunaratna, "LTTE Child Combatants," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/530278/posts>; Iqbal Athas, "Security in city revamped," *Sunday Times*, December 14, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/971214/sitre.html>; *Neruppārru niccalir pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 76.

Army's Poor Planning Opens Opportunities

The SLA's flawed operational plan for the Wannu offensive offered what might have been described as "a particularly rich creative medium" for the LTTE to carve up the security forces.¹⁹² The Tigers predicted the SLA's approach of seizing territory would have the effect of dispersing the security forces across the Wannu and rendering them vulnerable to the LTTE attacking in depth. A month before the offensive began, the Tigers were so confident of victory that they demanded the Kumaratunga government cede all its battlefield gains, including Jaffna, as a precondition to return to talks.¹⁹³

The SLA planned for the 55 Division to advance north from Vavuniya up the A9 highway, along which the population centers of the Wannu lay, to Kilinochchi and Elephant Pass to establish the MSR to Jaffna. The 53 Division separately moved west from Weli Oya to trisect the Wannu and degrade the LTTE's mobility.¹⁹⁴ By threatening such key terrain, the SLA hoped to draw out and kill many Tigers.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Schneider, 56-57.

¹⁹³ Taraki, "Tigers think: Why talk, when we are riding high."

¹⁹⁴ Kamal Gunaratne, 395-396; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "An operation drags on," *Frontline* 14, no. 25, December 13-26, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1425/14251260.htm>; Taraki, "Geographical dimension of Operation Jaya Sikurui."

¹⁹⁵ Taraki, "Battle on A9: a battered theory of war." A better course of action would have been to establish the MSR from the western Mannar coast north to Pooneryn that would have required fewer forces to secure. The sea would have covered the SLA's western flank from overland attacks, and the SLN could have brought reinforcements quickly. The SLA successfully took this route from 2007 through 2008, and from there closed in on the Tiger heartland in 2009. See D. Sivaram, "The Post Operation Riviresa 2 Phase," *Tamil Times* 15, no. 5 (May 15, 1996): 12-13, accessed September 3, 2018, http://www.noolaham.org/wiki/index.php/Tamil_Times_1996.05.

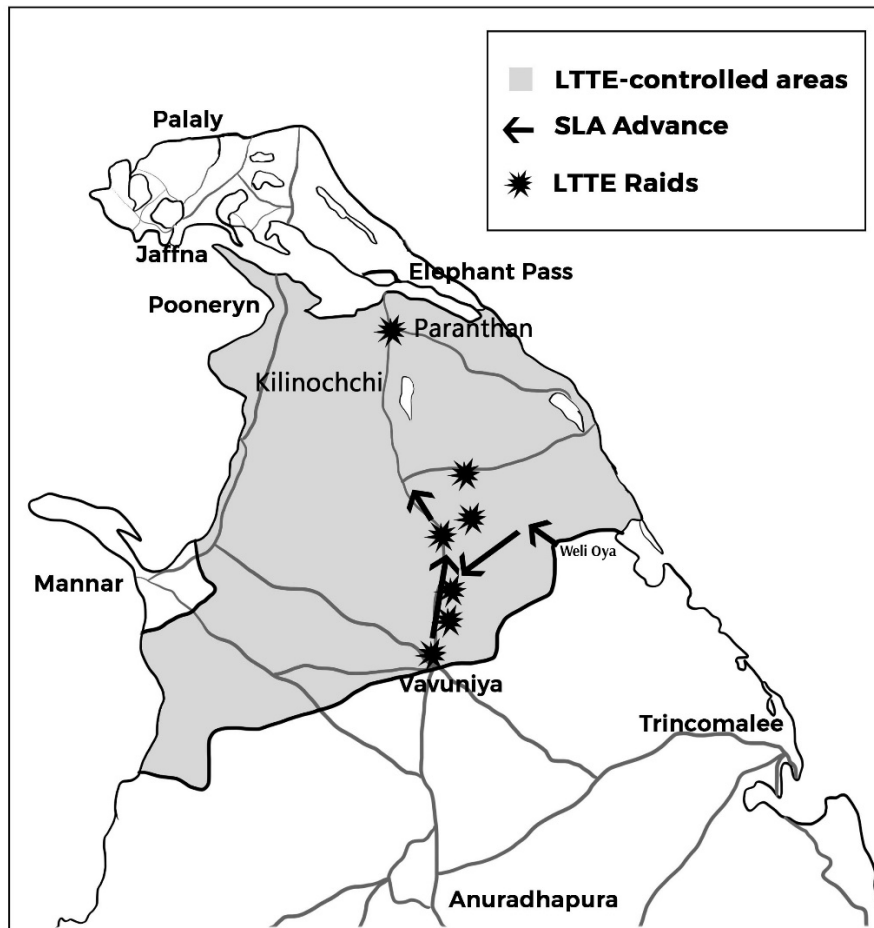


Figure 5. Operation Jayasikurui. Created by Sasrika Senaratne.

The first flaw in the SLA's idea was that it never clarified which objective took precedence: establishing the MSR or killing Tigers. Both objectives were important but imposed contradictory demands. The security forces had to establish the MSR quickly to reduce the cost of supplying Jaffna. However, speeding an inherently long attrition campaign and imposing deadlines to achieve terrain objectives risked forcing the security forces to attack under suboptimal conditions the LTTE could exploit.¹⁹⁶

The second flaw was the SLA did not have enough soldiers to secure the A9 highway, as was evident as early as January 1996.¹⁹⁷ The SLA had to redeploy many troops from the Eastern

¹⁹⁶ Kamal Gunaratne, 407, 409, 432-433.

¹⁹⁷ Sivaram, "Capture of Jaffna- What Next?"

Province to capture Jaffna.¹⁹⁸ Its losses after Unceasing Waves caused recruitment to plummet and desertion to skyrocket.¹⁹⁹ By mid-1998, the SLA acknowledged having nineteen thousand deserters out of an assigned strength of 125,000 personnel.²⁰⁰ High casualties were the primary cause of desertion, but the lack of accountable leadership from the very top down also played a major role.²⁰¹

In January 1997, Balraj demonstrated the fragility of the SLA's defenses by raiding Paranthan. The Tigers pinned the defending SLA brigade down on its western defenses while launching the main attack from the east that broke through. One task force captured the SLA's artillery positions and turned the guns to shell Elephant Pass, while another task force overran the brigade headquarters and seized two 120mm mortars. The 54 Division eventually retook Paranthan, but the Tigers destroyed nine 130mm guns before withdrawing.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ *Sri Lanka Army*, 522; Taraki, "Riviresa II and opening up of the 8th front."

¹⁹⁹ Marks, 511. In November 1997, only four thousand deserters responded to a four-week amnesty to return to their regiments. By the end of December, the Corps of Military Police collected another thirteen thousand deserters and sent them back to the front. Returning the deserters did not improve combat effectiveness because their new units distrusted them. See Subramaniam, 70; Kamal Gunaratne, 403.

²⁰⁰ Iqbal Athas, "Stock taking and stalemate in battle," *Sunday Times*, May 3, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/980503/sitrep.html>; "A long year on the road"; *Sri Lanka Army*, 906-907.

²⁰¹ For example, the Kumaratunga government played terrible attention to medical care. As late as 1999, the SLA did not have field ambulances at the battlefield to transport the wounded. Kumaratunga's uncle, Deputy Defense Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte, refused to build hospitals near the Colombo airport where the wounded arrived. See Munasinghe, 219; "Don't they deserve more?" *Sunday Times*, October 11, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/981011/spec.html>; "Why do they leave," *Sunday Times*, October 18, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/981018/spec.html>; Iqbal Athas, "Lots of promises, but precious little," *Sunday Times*, July 11, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990711/sitrep.html>.

²⁰² *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 64-66; Munasinghe, 162-163; Iqbal Athas, "The Paranthan comeback," *Sunday Times*, January 12, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970112/sitrep.html>; "Battle for Paranthan," *Tamil Times* 14, no. 1 (January 15, 1997): 5-6, accessed March 30, 2019, http://www.noolaham.org/wiki/index.php/Tamil_Times_1997.01.

Do or Die Raids, June – December 1997

In defending against Jayasikurui, which began on 13 May 1997, the LTTE demonstrated the ability to engage divisions on multiple fronts.²⁰³ It avoided using its entire strength in continuous fighting and instead waited for opportunities to counterattack, employing the minimal number of fighters necessary at the front to inflict the most damage. Kamal Gunaratne observed that only ten Tigers were enough to stop an entire battalion: two directing artillery and mortar fire and the others fixing the SLA with machine gun fire.²⁰⁴ When the Tigers became visible by attacking, they were too close to fight with artillery or airstrikes without inflicting friendly casualties.²⁰⁵

The SLA was conscious of the LTTE's new firepower and fortified its positions as it advanced, but its soldiers would bunch together and were vulnerable to mortar barrages.²⁰⁶ Their continued inability to fight at night and operate in small units further increased their losses to LTTE artillery.²⁰⁷ The security forces were unable to strike the LTTE's artillery positions, munitions dumps, underground hospitals, and base camps because the LTTE concealed them in thick jungles far from civilian habitation.²⁰⁸

From June through December 1997, Karuna exploited the SLA's ponderous tempo by conducting six "Do or Die" raids that demonstrated the SLA would be unable to secure a MSR through the middle of the Wannu.²⁰⁹ The raids involved task forces of up to six hundred fighters

²⁰³ Taraki, "Creeping advantage: can the government hold on to it?"

²⁰⁴ Kamal Gunaratne, 406-408, 410.

²⁰⁵ Taraki, "Battle on A9: a battered theory of war."

²⁰⁶ Athas, "Jaya Sikurui: crucial week ahead"; Kamal Gunaratne, 407.

²⁰⁷ Kamal Gunaratne, 431, 433.

²⁰⁸ Taraki, "'Surprise' in Prabha's strategy"; Taraki, "Blinded in the Wannu quagmire." Instead of using Commandos and Special Forces for reconnaissance to locate these targets, the SLA squandered them in spearheading conventional assaults that resulted in heavy casualties. See "Sri Lanka army launches another recruitment drive," *Tamilnet*, June 7, 1997, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=1>; Kamal Gunaratne, 401, 409; Marks, 510-511.

²⁰⁹ Iqbal Athas, "Bombarding queries in days of tranquility," *Sunday Times*, September 7, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970907/sitrep.html>; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Strategic

each and killed a total of more than six hundred security force personnel. The Tigers overran the 55 Division's tactical headquarters on the first raid, and on their fifth raid they captured the 53 Division commander's command vehicle.²¹⁰ The raids slowed the SLA to the extent that it took the 55 Division six months to advance eleven km north.²¹¹

Operation Unceasing Waves II, November 1998

In 1998, the LTTE shifted its attention to Kilinochchi, halting its raids and relying on firepower to stymie the SLA's advance from the south and to conserve manpower.²¹² Unlike previous bases that the LTTE destroyed, the SLA camp at Kilinochchi the 543 Brigade defended was not isolated and could receive reinforcements and supplies from Elephant Pass and Jaffna. On 1 February, the Tigers attacked Kilinochchi after the SLA withdrew tanks and soldiers to Colombo for the fiftieth anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence, capturing six sq. km of the camp's southern part. Further reconnaissance revealed the camp's northern defenses were weak, and in June they captured them, cutting Kilinochchi from Elephant Pass.²¹³

On 26 September, the Tigers began Unceasing Waves II with an artillery barrage against Kilinochchi, and they captured the first line of defenses. Balraj led a separate force that blocked reinforcements from Paranthan. The Tigers eventually broke through the second defense line and

changes in Wannai," *Frontline* 16, no. 8, April 10-23, 1999, accessed April 2, 2019, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/static/html/fl1608/16080570.htm>.

²¹⁰ Iqbal Athas, "Thandikulam's thundering Tuesday," *Sunday Times*, June 15, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970615/sitrep.html>; Iqbal Athas, "Do or Die - the reasons why," *Sunday Times*, June 22, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/970622/sitrep.html>; Iqbal Athas, "Worst-ever commando debacle," *Sunday Times*, December 7, 1997, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/971207/sitrep.html>.

²¹¹ Kamal Gunaratne, 416-417; Iqbal Athas, "Operation Jaya Sikurui one year: how justifiable?" *Sunday Times*, May 10, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/980510/sitrep.html>.

²¹² Taraki, "Changing strategies and Kilinochchi gamble," *Sunday Times*, February 22, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/980222/taraki.html>.

²¹³ *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukal*, 70-72; Iqbal Athas, "Credibility crisis hits forces' gains," *Sunday Times*, February 8, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/980208/sitrep.html>; Taraki, "The deepening theatre of operation: The Kilinochchi factor"; Taraki, "The Operation Checkmate in Kilinochchi – LTTE style," *Sunday Times*, February 15, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/980215/taraki.html>; Taraki, "Changing strategies and Kilinochchi gamble"; Jeyaraj, "Thepan of the LTTE: Heroic saga of a Northern warrior"; Kamal Gunaratne, 424-426.

captured the brigade and battalion headquarters, and the remnants of the 543 Brigade withdrew to Paranthan with 926 soldiers killed.²¹⁴ The LTTE lost about seven hundred fighters.²¹⁵

The loss of Kilinochchi ended the advance up the A9 highway.²¹⁶ Kumaratunga's great offensive resulted in 3,500 soldiers killed and 9,700 wounded, most of whom were unable to return to combat.²¹⁷ The LTTE suffered similar deaths but was able to launch a devastating counteroffensive in late 1999 that rolled back all the security forces' gains of the previous two years.²¹⁸

The LTTE Counteroffensive

In 1999, the SLA had no coherent strategy in part because of a fractured command structure that pushed the SLA in different directions. Although the SLA was no longer advancing along a predictable single axis, it was now spreading its soldiers thin to gain territory, leaving it with no reserve.²¹⁹ The SLA's need for manpower eventually pushed it to shut down its training

²¹⁴ *Neruppārru niccalir pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 73-78; Munasinghe, 171; Iqbal Athas, "Kilinochchi calamity: worst debacle in 17 years war," *Sunday Times*, October 4, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/981004/sitrep.html>.

²¹⁵ University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "The Tragedy of Vanni Civilians & Total Militarisation," Information Bulletin No. 20, May 19, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul20.htm>.

²¹⁶ Iqbal Athas, "Op. Jaya Sikurui: longest ever military campaign called off," *Sunday Times*, December 6, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/981206/sitrep.html>.

²¹⁷ Iqbal Athas, "New stand-off weapons in the hands of LTTE?" *Sunday Times*, September 26, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990926/sitrep.html>; "War drums amidst peace hopes," *Sunday Times*, November 26, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/001126/sitrep.html>.

²¹⁸ Sivaram, "The question of recruitment to the LTTE: The cat, a bell and a few strategists," April 27, 1997; Iqbal Athas, "Prabha's peace gambit," *Sunday Times*, November 29, 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/981129/sitrep.html>; "EPS fall: reassessing LTTE's manoeuvre warfare prowess," *Tamilnet*, April 23, 2003, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=8839>.

²¹⁹ Iqbal Athas, "'Operation battle cry' amidst cry for peace," *Sunday Times*, March 7, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990307/sitrep.html>; Iqbal Athas, "City faces suicide bombers," *Sunday Times*, August 1, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990801/sitrep.html>; *Sri Lanka Army*, 544-545, 559-560; "Foray after foray towards Periyamadu," *Sunday Times*, October 31, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/991031/sitrep.html>; L. M. H. Mendis, 513; Kamal Gunaratne, 428.

centers and send both instructors and recruits to the front lines.²²⁰ The Kumaratunga government also deployed SLN, SLAF, and police personnel untrained in land warfare to hold retaken areas.²²¹

The Tigers again conserved their manpower and deliberately allowed the SLA to overextend itself.²²² They boosted their stand-off firepower with weapons shipments, including 107mm multiple rocket launchers (MRL) and AT-4 Fagot antitank guided missile systems, that further enabled them to avoid close quarter combat.²²³ They also raised a civilian Border Force (*ellaippatai*) that played a major sustainment role by moving supplies, recovering captured weapons, and evacuating wounded fighters.²²⁴

Operation Unceasing Waves III, November 1999 – May 2000

Operation Unceasing Waves III was a multi-phase campaign timed to hit the SLA at its culminating point and aimed at decisive points. On 1 November 1999, the LTTE struck with the first phase, exploiting a vulnerable area guarded by a SLN ground force. At some point in subsequent fighting, the SLA shut down all communications after the Tigers captured a vehicle containing its communications ciphers. As the Tigers advanced, each isolated SLA element they encountered panicked and fled. By 7 November, they pushed the SLA back to where Jayasikurui

²²⁰ Kamal Gunaratne, 424.

²²¹ Munasinghe, 167; Subramaniam, 60; Kamal Gunaratne, 401, 405-406; Taraki, “Eelam War: Growing more complex,” *Sunday Times*, March 21, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990321/taraki.html>.

²²² Kamal Gunaratne, 428.

²²³ Iqbal Athas, “Now, an artillery war,” *Sunday Times*, March 21, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990321/sitrep.html>; Athas, “Rethinking military strategy for millennium”; “Missile identified as AT 4 Fagot,” *Sunday Times*, October 17, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/991017/sitrep.html#10LABEL6>; Taraki, “Eelam War: Growing more complex”; Athas, “New stand-off weapons in the hands of LTTE?”

²²⁴ University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, “The Sun God’s Children and the Big Lie,” Information Bulletin No. 23, July 11, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul23.htm#_Toc515621879; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, “Peace Prospects, Again,” *Frontline* 18, no. 11, May 26-June 8, 2001, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1811/18110480.htm>; “Expanding Tiger Civil Service,” *Sunday Times*, June 9, 2002, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/020609/columns/sitrep2.html>. Civilians older than 45 years joined the Village Force (*kirāmappaṭai*), which performed tasks like repairing roads.

had begun two and a half years earlier. The second phase of Unceasing Waves III beginning on 17 November cost the SLA its gains to the west.²²⁵

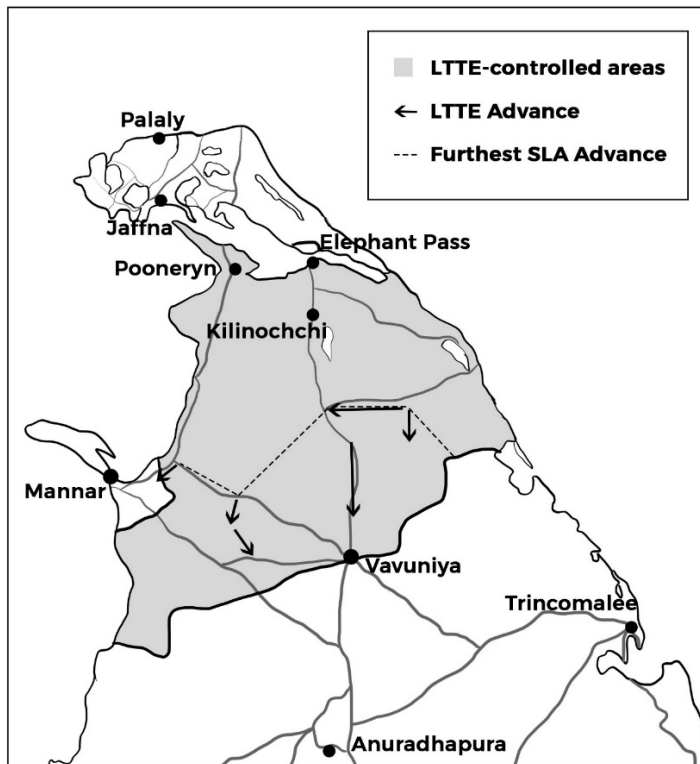


Figure 6. Operation Unceasing Waves III (Phases 1-2). Created by Sasrika Senaratne.

The third and fourth phases of Unceasing Waves III directed against Elephant Pass collectively were the most complex operation of the entire war. The SLA had expanded the base's depth by deploying the 544 and 544 Brigades to defend a forward area at Paranthan and placing a dozen artillery guns in the rear at Pallai. It had a MSR leading northwest along the A9 road and an alternative supply route to a SLA-SLN base at Kattaikadu-Vettilaikeneni east of Elephant Pass to give direct access to the sea.²²⁶

²²⁵ "Years of gains lost in days," *Sunday Times*, November 7, 1999, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/991107/sitre.html>; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "LTTE Offensive," *Frontline* 16, no. 25, November 27-December 10, 1999, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1625/16250040.htm>; *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 81-83.

²²⁶ *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 85; "EPS fall: reassessing LTTE's manoeuvre warfare prowess."

On 10 December, the LTTE overran the Kattaikadu-Vettilaikeneni base while landing fighters from Pooneryn onto the peninsula southeast of the city of Jaffna. From that lodgment, the Leopards raided radar stations. The Tigers also moved artillery to the southern coast of Jaffna Lagoon to attack targets in the peninsula.²²⁷ On 16 December, they overran Paranthan and seized the entire area south of Elephant Pass by the 27th.²²⁸ The key feature of combat from late December onward was the SLA's inability to counterattack, allowing the Tigers to reinforce their new lodgments.²²⁹ The SLA redeployed the 53 Division to defend the coast north of Elephant Pass and ensure the A9 road remained open.²³⁰ However, LTTE artillery prevented the 53 Division from approaching and relieving Elephant Pass.²³¹

The Tigers spent the next three months preparing for the fourth phase of Unceasing Waves III against the main base at Elephant Pass. Instead of directly assaulting it, they isolated and targeted it with artillery. At midnight on 26 March, three four-man Leopard teams raided Pallai, destroying several 152mm and 130mm guns. On the same day, the Sea Tigers fought past the SLN to land twelve hundred fighters commanded by Balraj at Kudaruppu, bypassing the 53 Division. They seized part of the A9 road to force the 54 Division to shift its MSR further south,

²²⁷ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Tactical Shift," *Frontline* 16, no. 27, December 25, 1999-January 5, 2000, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1627/16270230.htm>; "Tiger manoeuvres trouble gateway garrison," *Tamilnet*, December 16, 1999, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=7406>; "Creeping advantage in Jaffna," *Tamilnet*, February 10, 2000, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=7408>.

²²⁸ *Neruppārru niccalir pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 83-85.

²²⁹ "Feeding Mars in Jaffna," *Tamilnet*, June 6, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=7410>; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "The Ordeal of Civilians in Thenmaratchy," Information Bulletin No. 24, September 7, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul24.htm#_Toc515622135; Rajan Hoole, "The Fall of Elephant Pass: The System Cannot Hold," *Colombo Telegraph*, August 1, 2015, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/the-fall-of-elephant-pass-the-system-cannot-hold/>.

²³⁰ "Army prepares for new thrust against Tigers," *Sunday Times*, January 23, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/000123/sitrep.html>; "EPS fall: reassessing LTTE's manoeuvre warfare prowess."

²³¹ "Rise of LTTE and fall of Elephant Pass," *Sunday Times*, April 30, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/000430/sitrep.html>.

where the sandy soil did not support wheeled vehicles, and the Tigers were able to hit it with artillery.²³²

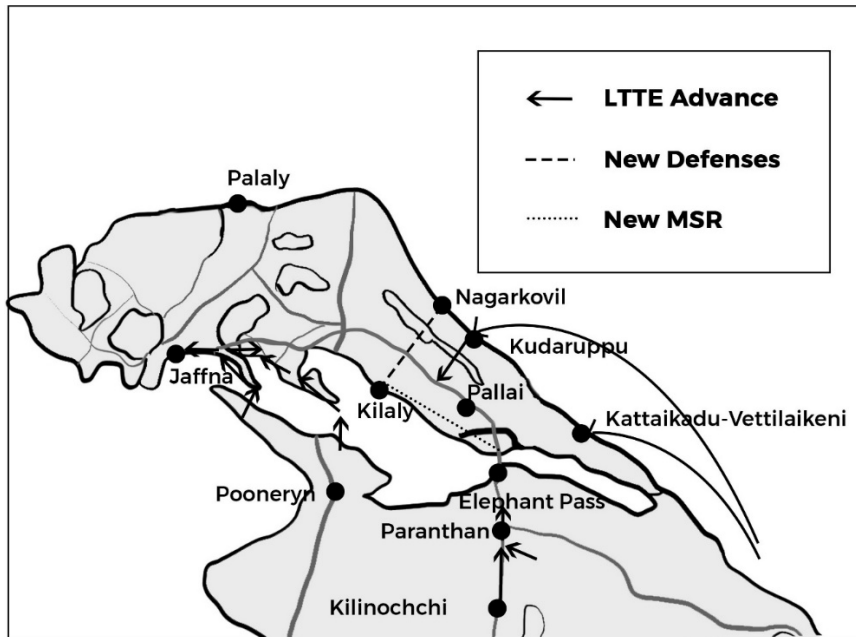


Figure 7. Operation Unceasing Waves III (Phases 3-5). Created by Sasrika Senaratne.

Balraj’s landing was the most audacious maneuver conducted in the history of the civil war. It reflected both the thirty-four-year-old commander’s insight in identifying the most critical factor necessary for victory—blocking the SLA divisions further west in Jaffna from reinforcing and resupplying the Elephant Pass garrison—as well as his personal courage in being physically present at that decisive point. Balraj’s force repulsed the 53 Division’s attacks against his blocking position that included T-55 tanks and Mi-24 attack helicopters.²³³ In mid-April, the Tigers preempted the SLA’s attempts to counterattack with their own spoiling attacks.²³⁴ On the

²³² D. B. S. Jeyaraj, “Another LTTE offensive,” *Frontline* 17, no. 8, April 15-28, 2000, accessed September 3, 2018, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1708/17080520.htm>; “The Battle for Elephant Pass,” *Sunday Times*, April 2, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/000402/sitrep.html>; “Balraj escapes Army trap,” *Sunday Times*, April 9, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/000409/sitrep.html>; *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 85-87; “EPS fall: reassessing LTTE’s manoeuvre warfare prowess.”

²³³ *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 87-92; “Balraj escapes Army trap.”

²³⁴ “Rise of LTTE and fall of Elephant Pass.”

21st, the Tigers captured the 54 Division's sole remaining source of water, and the SLA ordered a withdrawal to Jaffna the next day. The 53 Division escaped, but the 54 Division disintegrated as LTTE artillery pummeled the fleeing soldiers.²³⁵

The LTTE's success at Elephant Pass was its greatest triumph in the civil war. It finally gained control of all entrances into the Jaffna Peninsula and captured three 152mm howitzers, two 122mm howitzers, and twelve 120mm mortars among many other weapons.²³⁶ Most significantly, the LTTE observed that the SLA's will to fight dissipated.²³⁷

The Battle for Jaffna

As impressive as the LTTE's victory was, it did not open a route to the strategic prizes: Jaffna city and Palaly airbase. By 5 May, the 53 and 55 Divisions established new defenses that were easier to defend with shorter supply lines.²³⁸ The security forces in the peninsula had nowhere to run, and the heavy presence of Tamil civilians there restricted the Tigers from using the maximum level of firepower. On 8 May, the Tigers thus called for a ceasefire to allow the security forces to withdraw.²³⁹ They pressed their point by launching the fifth and final phase of Unceasing Waves III, the long-awaited invasion of Jaffna, and beginning the climactic stage of the entire civil war. The Tigers advanced from their lodgments near Jaffna city and attacked it while seizing key road junctions east of the city from where they could shell the Palaly airbase with captured 130mm guns.²⁴⁰

²³⁵ Jeyaraj, "The Taking of Elephant Pass"; "Rise of LTTE and fall of Elephant Pass."

²³⁶ "Feeding Mars in Jaffna"; "Tigers list captured weapons," *Tamilnet*, April 24, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=4970>.

²³⁷ *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 93.

²³⁸ "The Ordeal of Civilians in Thenmaratchy"; Taraki, "Lanka's climbing war budget gets diminishing returns," *Tamilnation*, October 19, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://tamilnation.co/forum/sivaram/001019.htm>.

²³⁹ "LTTE offers cease-fire for safe withdrawal," *Tamilnet*, May 8, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=5014>.

²⁴⁰ Jeyaraj, "The Battle for Jaffna"; *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 93-95; "The pre-poll mood in the battlefield," *Sunday Times*, August 27, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/000827/sitrep.html>.

In desperation, Kumaratunga appointed Janaka Perera and Sarath Fonseka, the SLA's two most accomplished commanders, to oversee the defense of Jaffna.²⁴¹ In mid-May, though, they requested an evacuation, undoubtedly judging that the four remaining SLA divisions were in no condition to defend Jaffna.²⁴² Many of their soldiers were re-inducted deserters, as the government had felt they would be unable to desert in Jaffna.²⁴³ Perera and Fonseka probably knew that they would have been unable to remove their heavy weapons from the peninsula as part of an evacuation.²⁴⁴ The fact that the SLA's top commanders were willing to allow these weapons and the facilities at Palaly to fall into the LTTE's hands illustrated how dire the SLA's position in Jaffna was. However, the Kumaratunga government refused to evacuate because it would lead to losses in parliamentary elections later that year.²⁴⁵

On 19 May, the Tigers responded by publicly appealing for the SLA to surrender and offering to hand the soldiers over to the International Committee of the Red Cross.²⁴⁶ The possibility of their soldiers surrendering on such a large scale must have been the outcome that Perera and Fonseka most dreaded. It would have ruined the credibility of the SLA as a fighting organization while cementing the LTTE's myth of invincibility. However, the LTTE's earlier massacres of personnel who surrendered precluded this option. The presence of Perera and

²⁴¹ Fonseka later served as SLA Commander during the final victory against the LTTE. See Nirmal Dharmaratne, "Tribute to a Legendary Comrade-in-Arms," *Island*, August 31, 2018, accessed March 30, 2019, http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=190504; Kamal Gunaratne, 511.

²⁴² Michael Roberts, "Where Ratwatte and CBK Stood Strong: Coping with the Elephant Pass Debacle in April-May 2000," *Thuppahi's Blog*, July 24, 2016, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2016/07/24/where-ratwatte-and-cbk-stood-strong-coping-with-the-elephant-pass-debacle-in-april-may-2000/>.

²⁴³ Munasinghe, 196.

²⁴⁴ "Feeding Mars in Jaffna."

²⁴⁵ Michael Roberts, "Where Ratwatte and CBK Stood Strong: Coping with the Elephant Pass Debacle in April-May 2000"; Jeyaraj, "The Battle for Jaffna."

²⁴⁶ "Tigers urge SLA surrender," *Tamilnet*, May 19, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=5048>.

Fonseka reassured them and stiffened their resolve.²⁴⁷ On the same day as the LTTE's announcement, Perera declared on television that the SLA would not withdraw and would push the Tigers out of Jaffna.²⁴⁸

In mid-2000, Kumaratunga spent eight hundred million US dollars for more fighter-bombers, attack helicopters, and artillery in a panic purchase to avoid defeat.²⁴⁹ In late May, the SLA acquired 122mm MRLs that helped lift its morale and were credited with halting the LTTE's advance.²⁵⁰ However, the Tigers adapted by employing hugging tactics of attacking within the MRLs' half-mile safety zone in front of the forward line of troops.²⁵¹ Additionally, the security forces were unable to locate the LTTE's artillery and mortars.²⁵²

The Tamil civilian population's refusal to rally to the LTTE dampened its ability to move further into Jaffna. Most of the tens of thousands of civilians in areas it brought under its control fled to SLA-held areas.²⁵³ The LTTE also experienced increasing difficulty supplying itself across the lagoon.²⁵⁴ As the LTTE's offensive stalled, the SLA fought back and recaptured territory near Jaffna city.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁷ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "A deceptive calm," *Frontline* 17, no. 12, June 10-23, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1712/17121220.htm>.

²⁴⁸ L. M. H. Mendis, 528-529.

²⁴⁹ "Military procurements and corruption," *Sunday Times*, June 25, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/000625/sitrep.html>; "Fresh peace moves amidst political war," *Sunday Times*, June 24, 2001, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/010624/sitrep.html>.

²⁵⁰ "Troops brace to face stepped up attacks," *Sunday Times*, May 28, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/000528/sitrep.html>; "An uneasy lull in the battlefield," *Sunday Times*, June 4, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/000604/sitrep.html>.

²⁵¹ Kamal Gunaratne, 674-675.

²⁵² "Tiger manoeuvres pressure SLA," *Tamilnet*, May 21, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=5052>.

²⁵³ UTHR-J, "The Ordeal of Civilians in Thenmaratchy"; Jeyaraj, "A deceptive calm."

²⁵⁴ "Polls eve politics and battlefield realities," *Sunday Times*, October 8, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/001008/sitrep.html>; *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 98-101; Jeyaraj, "Peace Prospects, Again."

²⁵⁵ Jeyaraj, "A deceptive calm."

On 26 September, the LTTE launched Unceasing Waves IV from Elephant Pass to break through the SLA's eastern defenses in order to establish an overland MSR to link with its forces to the west. However, the area was too constricted for maneuver, and the Tigers had to settle for capturing some sections of the SLA's defenses and downing a SLAF Mi-24 helicopter.²⁵⁶ Prabhakaran did not utilize his operational reserve of one thousand fighters led by Karuna on the mainland, probably because he wanted to employ them in exploiting a breakthrough that did not materialize.²⁵⁷ Also, he had to watch his rear because the SLA still had about fifteen thousand soldiers in the southern Wannī.²⁵⁸

In November, Prabhakaran met Norwegian officials to discuss peace talks, indicating that he saw nothing to gain from continued fighting.²⁵⁹ The LTTE's losses pushed him to send Karuna back to Batticaloa the following month to recruit more fighters.²⁶⁰ At the end of 2000, the Tigers announced a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew from Jaffna to bolster their defenses around Elephant Pass.²⁶¹ Prabhakaran probably had sensed his offensive was about to culminate and wanted to be ready for a counterattack.

The security forces seemed to have interpreted the LTTE's withdrawal as culmination. In April 2001, they launched Operation Agni Kheela to retake territory toward Elephant Pass prior to Norwegian-brokered peace talks. However, the SLA had to move through the same unfavorably narrow terrain that had worked against the Tigers in Unceasing Waves IV. The

²⁵⁶ "Polls eve politics and battlefield realities"; *Neruppārru niccaliṟ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 98-101; Jeyaraj, "Peace Prospects, Again."

²⁵⁷ "The Battle for Elephant Pass."

²⁵⁸ Taraki, "Lanka's climbing war budget gets diminishing returns."

²⁵⁹ "Peace moves won't stop war," *Sunday Times*, November 5, 2000, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/001105/frontm.html#1LABEL1>; Prabhakaran's willingness to end hostilities in late 2000 disproved the notion that the 9/11 attacks in the United States pushed him to sue for peace. See Taraki, "LTTE will negotiate only with Parity of Military Status," *Tamilnation*, January 27, 2004, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://tamilnation.co/forum/sivaram/040127.htm>.

²⁶⁰ UTHR-J, "The Worm Turns and Elections Where the People Will Not Count."

²⁶¹ "After the 'truce,' war drums from the LTTE," *Sunday Times*, January 21, 2001, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/010121/sitrep.html>.

Border Force auxiliaries constructed fortified and camouflaged bunkers and trenches, established mortar positions, and mined the main roads. The LTTE built a defense-in-depth, with the seven km first defense line opposing the SLA from Nagarkovil to Kilaly and the second line at Elephant Pass. The 53 and 55 Divisions broke through parts of the first line, but the LTTE counterattacked and forced them to withdraw to their original positions two days later.²⁶² The SLA's defeat proved that the LTTE was not a spent force and established a stalemate that served as the military basis for the later Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) in 2002.²⁶³

Eelam War III ended not with a decisive battle but with a targeted strike in Colombo that resulted in economic collapse. In July 2001, a team of fourteen Black Tigers infiltrated into the international airport and destroyed several aircraft, causing a panic in the tourism industry.²⁶⁴ Kumaratunga's coalition lost the parliamentary election in December. The new government, led by the same UNP that started the war in 1983, signed the CFA with the LTTE.

Conclusion

The story of the LTTE contributes to scholarship on the process of rebel mobilization by presenting an example that defies conventional understanding. The LTTE emerged as one of the most lethal nonstate armed groups without mobilizing its civilian population or receiving state patronage. It also produced one of the most prolific corps of suicide bombers with a non-religious ideology. The global trend towards peace might relegate the LTTE to the status of a historical

²⁶² Jeyaraj, "Peace Prospects, Again"; *Neruppārru niccaliṛ pattāṇṭukaḷ*, 103-109; "How 'Operation Rod of Fire' misfired," *Sunday Times*, April 29, 2001, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/010429/sitrep.html>; "A battlefield truce after war games and 'Op Agni Khiela,'" *Sunday Times*, May 6, 2001, accessed March 30, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/010506/sitrep.html>.

²⁶³ Taraki, "LTTE will negotiate only with Parity of Military Status."

²⁶⁴ "LTTE's three times lucky terror at Katunayake," *Sunday Times*, July 29, 2001, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/010729/sitrep.html>; Peter Stafford Roberts, 53-54.

anomaly, but it does not dismiss the possibility that such a dangerous opponent could arise where it is least expected.²⁶⁵

The LTTE combined organization, doctrine, and luck to militarily evolve and defeat the Sri Lankan security forces in battle, if not war. The security forces ascribed its rise to its members' discipline and fanatical commitment.²⁶⁶ However, these attributes brought only modest gains through 1991. Only after Balraj reorganized the LTTE's military wing and inculcated a common assault doctrine was the LTTE able to overcome the security forces' superior manpower and firepower. The infantry-focused doctrine served as a foundation for combined arms after the LTTE improved its own firepower in the late 1990s. The Tigers' integration of strategic reconnaissance and planning into a single department enabled them to identify decisive points and strike where the security forces were weakest.

Prabhakaran also deserved credit for preserving his forces and avoiding culmination when LTTE offensives failed, while exploiting the culmination of attacking Sri Lankan forces. Clausewitz defined culmination as the point where the strength of the attacking force dissipates to the same level of the defender, who beyond that point has the relative strength to shift to the offensive and exploit the initial attacker's weakness.²⁶⁷ Prabhakaran fit Clausewitz's description of a commander who accurately assessed his relative strength throughout combat.²⁶⁸

Although the Tigers understood Clausewitz's prescription of destroying the enemy in physical and moral terms through engagement while preserving their own forces, they neglected the possibilities of nonviolent efforts against their enemy's mind and the risk of attacking while

²⁶⁵ Dominic Dudley, "Most of the World Is Becoming More Peaceful, but the U.S. and the Middle East Are Bucking That Trend," *Forbes*, June 1, 2017, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2017/06/01/most-of-the-world-is-becoming-more-peaceful-but-the-u-s-and-the-middle-east-are-bucking-that-trend>.

²⁶⁶ Kamal Gunaratne, 11, 15.

²⁶⁷ Clausewitz, 528.

²⁶⁸ Clausewitz, 566-573.

the enemy's back was to a wall.²⁶⁹ They failed to consider that capturing and releasing soldiers would have encouraged further surrenders that could have crippled the SLA's willingness to fight. If Prabhakaran in 1990 had the foresight to adopt such a policy, surrender would have been a viable option for SLA soldiers who otherwise fought to the death. The fact that he attempted to reframe by unsuccessfully seeking the surrender of the SLA in May 2000 proved that his original moral framework and policy were wrong.

Postscript: Death of the Tiger

It is only apparent in hindsight that the LTTE had lost the civil war by the end of 2000. For all its efforts to refine its operational approach and bring its combat effectiveness to its maximum potential, the LTTE ultimately lacked the material means to destroy the SLA. At most, it could dislocate and disintegrate parts of the SLA and push them to another part of the island.²⁷⁰ The beginning of the CFA gave Prabhakaran the opportunity to reconsider the feasibility of his desired endstate, which in turn would have pushed him to reframe his problem. Instead, he viewed the CFA as a pause to allow the LTTE to rearm and retrain forces.²⁷¹ Prabhakaran hoped to bully the UNP government into giving territorial concessions that would convey an advantage when hostilities resumed.²⁷²

The humiliating terms of the Norwegian-facilitated CFA and the LTTE's subsequent ability to act with impunity masked, at the time, the LTTE's failure.²⁷³ The LTTE infiltrated its intelligence wing into government-held areas, under the guise of political work, to eliminate

²⁶⁹ Clausewitz, 95-97; Francois Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 47-49, 146.

²⁷⁰ US Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 1-21.

²⁷¹ Peter Stafford Roberts, 76.

²⁷² Kamal Gunaratne, 455.

²⁷³ University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "Rewarding Tyranny: Undermining the Democratic Potential for Peace," Special Report No. 17, October 7, 2003, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport17.htm>.

dissidents.²⁷⁴ International aid groups remained silent while it continued to recruit children in order for the aid groups to maintain access to LTTE areas.²⁷⁵ The European Union (EU) pressured Kumaratunga against acting to hold the LTTE accountable, arguing it would threaten the peace process. The LTTE's murder of the Sri Lankan foreign minister in August 2005 led to little more than the EU imposing a travel ban.²⁷⁶ The perceived strength of the LTTE's military wing and persistence of its myth of invincibility served as a shield behind which it could carry out these acts without retaliation.

However, the Tigers found that propaganda and psychological pressure were no longer effective to recruit children. Therefore, they imposed a draft of one child per family and confiscated the lands of families that did not comply, pushing the civilian population against the LTTE.²⁷⁷ LTTE survivors reported how senior leaders adopted a lavish lifestyle that demoralized their fighters and created security breaches. As Prabhakaran bestowed more authority upon the intelligence wing to act against these breaches, the organization's cohesion began to invisibly crumble.²⁷⁸ The watermark of the LTTE's fragmentation came in March 2004, when Karuna

²⁷⁴ University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "The Murder of T. Subathiran: Sri Lanka's End Game," Press Statement, June 15, 2003, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/Statements/Subathiran.htm>.

²⁷⁵ University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "The LTTE, Child Soldiers and Serial Disasters: A Challenge Without an Answer?" Information Bulletin No. 27, October 19, 2001, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul27.htm>.

²⁷⁶ The EU banned the LTTE only after the Sea Tigers opened fire on a SLN ship carrying a European CFA monitor in May 2006. See University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "The Batticaloa Fiasco & the Tragedy of Missed Opportunities," Information Bulletin No. 36, May 29, 2004, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/Bul36.htm>; "Sri Lanka: Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union condemning the actions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)," *Reliefweb*, September 27, 2005, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-declaration-presidency-behalf-european-union-condemning-actions>.

²⁷⁷ UTHR-J, "The Vanishing Young and the Silent Agony of Sunset Shore (Paduvankarai)"; University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, "The Plight of Child Conscripts, Social Degradation & Anti-Muslim Frenzy," Special Report No. 14, July 20, 2002, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport14.htm>; M.S.M. Ayub, "Why did the LTTE fail? Thamilini's answers," *Daily Mirror*, September 2, 2016, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/115155/Why-did-the-LTTE-fail-Thamilini-s-answers>.

²⁷⁸ P.K. Balachandran, "Downfall of LTTE: Betrayed by Insiders or Outmaneuvered in War?" *New Indian Express*, June 26, 2016, accessed March 31, 2019,

defected out of anger with the Wannu-based intelligence and finance wings encroaching into Batticaloa and undercutting his authority. To justify his departure, Karuna exploited eastern resentment of the LTTE's northern orientation.²⁷⁹ The Tigers thus had to fight Eelam War IV without access to the eastern manpower that had been critical in the 1990s.

The best explanation for Prabhakaran's decision to resume hostilities in 2005, despite the LTTE's relative weakness, was that he saw war as the only means to restore cohesion to his organization. His search for a confrontation led him to block the Tamils from voting in the 2005 presidential election, resulting in Rajapaksa's victory. Prabhakaran held the security forces in such contempt that he could not imagine them defeating him without outside help. Therefore, he preferred to fight Rajapaksa whom he predicted the international community would not support because Rajapaksa did not have his dovish UNP opponent's pro-Western orientation.²⁸⁰ Prabhakaran demonstrated a much weaker awareness of the operational environment, despite the LTTE's vaunted intelligence capabilities, than the average Tamil voter who feared the return of war.²⁸¹

Balraj's death in May 2008 from health problems deprived the LTTE of its premier operational commander.²⁸² His loss might explain why the LTTE in its final years abandoned its

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/Downfall-of-LTTE-Betrayed-By-Insiders-Or-Outmaneuvered-In-War/2016/06/26/article3501283.ece>.

²⁷⁹ Jeyaraj, "The Conflicts Within"; UTHR-J, "The Worm Turns and Elections Where the People Will Not Count"; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Pottu vs. Karuna: clash of the 'Amman's,'" *Sunday Leader* 10, no. 35, March 14, 2004, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/archive/20040314/issues-3.htm>; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Karuna affair: The military connection," *Tamilnation*, July 7, 2004, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.tamilnation.co/forum/sivaram/040707.htm>.

²⁸⁰ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "LTTE-enforced boycott lost Ranil the presidency in 2005," *Daily Mirror*, October 24, 2014, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/55085/lte-enforced-boycott-lost-ranil-the-presidency-in-2005>; Shanaka Jayasekara, "Strategic Miscalculation by the LTTE," *Asian Tribune*, February 6, 2009, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.asiantribune.com/?q=node/15489>.

²⁸¹ Jeyaraj, "'Pottu Amman' and the Intelligence Division of the LTTE." Jeyaraj mentioned briefly that some Tigers in the intelligence wing revolted because their leaders refused to acknowledge the new combat effectiveness of the security forces.

²⁸² Jeyaraj, "'Brigadier' Balraj: Fifth Death Anniversary of Legendary LTTE Commander Who Led From the Front."

aggressive posture of attacking the enemy in favor of hiding behind fortifications and hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilian human shields, hoping in vain for international intervention.²⁸³ Even if Balraj had lived, his fighting style would have been less effective against the SLA which by now adopted Biddle's small-unit maneuver and distributed operations into the Tiger heartland, denying a "creative medium" for the LTTE to attack.²⁸⁴

The LTTE's expanding capabilities were unable to compensate for these setbacks. After the end of the war, the security forces estimated the LTTE amassed more than one-hundred fifty 120mm mortars and five hundred 81mm mortars during the CFA period.²⁸⁵ This unprecedented level of firepower explains how the LTTE killed 6,261 personnel during the thirty-four months of Eelam War IV.²⁸⁶ Much like the security forces in the 1990s, though, the LTTE now was unable to translate its lethality to achieve objectives, more or less to halt the SLA's advance.

Prabhakaran's disconnect from reality—specifically, that his political desires did not match his military means—best explained both his success and defeat. A leader guided more by material than moral factors might have realized that Tamil demographics imposed too severe a limitation on manpower to win a war that brought more tactical victories to the LTTE, and more suffering to the Tamils, than anyone at the time could have imagined. His refusal to consider any alternative to a separate state and one-dimensional pursuit of war made a peaceful outcome an impossibility.

²⁸³ D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Wanni civilians and the humanitarian catastrophe," March 31, 2009, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/235>; D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "War in Wanni: Why the Tigers Are Down but Not Out," *Daily Mirror*, December 20, 2008, accessed March 31, 2019, http://web.archive.org/web/20081220200947/http://www.dailymirror.lk/DM_BLOG/Sections/frmNewsDetailView.aspx?ARTID=35656.

²⁸⁴ Tammita-Delgoda, *Sri Lanka: The Last Phase in Eelam War IV from Chundikulam to Pudumattalan*.

²⁸⁵ Ministry of Defence, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, *Humanitarian Operation Factual Analysis: July 2006-May 2009* (July 2011), 16, accessed April 3, 2019, <http://slmbassyausa.org/archives123/humanitarian-operation-factual-analysis-july-2006-may-2009/>.

²⁸⁶ "Sri Lankan army deaths revealed," *BBC*, May 22, 2009, accessed April 3, 2019, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8062922.stm.

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