

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

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SUMMARY

Formed: May 22, 1972

Disbanded: May 17, 2009

First Attack: July 23, 1983: LTTE ambush an army patrol convoy outside Jaffna; this is considered the first attack of the Sri Lankan civil war (13 dead).¹

Last Attack: May 9, 2009: Attack on civilians in Mullaitivu, Northern Province, Sri Lanka (9 dead, 19 wounded).²

OVERVIEW

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was a militant separatist group fighting for an independent homeland for Hindu Tamils in northeastern Sri Lanka. The LTTE was founded in the early 1970s by Velupillai Prabhakaran, who led the group until he was killed by Sri Lankan armed forces in May 2009. During the 1980s, the LTTE defeated a number of different Tamil militant groups and emerged as the dominant Tamil organization by the end of the decade. The LTTE successfully carried out a number of high-profile attacks, including the assassination of two heads of state. The LTTE were also notorious for their use of suicide terrorism. Suicide attacks were carried out by their elite suicide bombing unit known as the Black Tigers. Starting in 1985, the LTTE began negotiations with the Sri Lankan government. Multiple rounds of negotiations were interrupted by bouts of violence between both sides, and talks repeatedly failed. In March 2004, a large faction of the LTTE led by Colonel Karuna defected to the government side of the conflict, significantly weakening the LTTE. In 2006, after another failed round of negotiations, the Sri Lankan government declared all-out war on the LTTE, and the group was militarily defeated in May 2009.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), commonly known as the Tamil Tigers, were a separatist militant organization fighting for an independent homeland for Sri Lanka's Tamil minority in northern Sri Lanka. Velupillai Prabhakaran founded the group in 1972. The LTTE is one of several violent offshoots of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), formerly the Tamil United Front (TUF). TUF was formed in the early 1970s from groups such as the Tamil Congress and the Federal Party.³ When it officially called for the formation of an independent Tamil state in 1976, the group's name was changed to the Tamil United Liberation Front.⁴ Initially one of several Tamil militant organizations in Sri Lanka, the LTTE emerged as the dominant Tamil armed group by the late 1980s.

The LTTE is recognized for having carried out a number of high-profile assassinations, including the assassination of Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993 and the former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. The LTTE consisted of a highly developed military wing and a secondary political wing. The military wing had a naval group, an airborne unit, an intelligence wing, and even a specialized suicide terrorist unit. The group was also notorious for its use of women and children in combat.

The LTTE was largely supported by the Tamil diaspora overseas. In the 1980s, the LTTE also received supplies and training from Indian intelligence services. The LTTE was suspected of having links with a number of Islamist groups, such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines and the Taliban in Afghanistan. These links, however, were largely restricted to arms transfers and other commercial activities. The LTTE also earned a portion of their annual \$200-300 million revenue from taxation and extortion in LTTE-controlled areas in northern and eastern Sri Lanka.

The LTTE attempted to negotiate with the government on several occasions, starting in 1985. Talks consistently broke down. The group often used pauses in the fighting strategically to enhance its own position, re-arm, and eliminate its competitors.⁵ After a number of failed rounds of negotiation, the Sri Lankan government declared an all-out offensive against the LTTE in 2006. By May 2009, government forces had defeated the LTTE and killed Prabhakaran.

From the group's founding to the end of the conflict in 2009, an estimated 70,000 people were killed by LTTE and government violence.⁶ The LTTE was disbanded in 2009 after their military defeat by the Sri Lankan government and some 6,000 LTTE members were rehabilitated and re-integrated into society.⁷ The Sri Lankan government stated in 2011 that the international network of the LTTE was still searching to revive the organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

The LTTE's leadership was divided between the group's military wing and its secondary political wing. A central governing committee led by Prabhakaran oversaw all activities of the LTTE, both political and military.⁸ The military wing of the LTTE was further divided into sub-groups: the group's naval wing, known as the Sea Tigers, was led by Colonel Soosai, its airborne group, known as the Air Tigers, was led by Prabhakaran's son, a suicide bombers unit, known as the Black Tigers, an elite fighting wing, and an intelligence unit led by Pottu Amman.⁹ B.

Nadesan, Prabhakaran's political advisors, was responsible for the political activities of the group.

Velupillai Prabhakaran (1976 to 2009): Prabhakaran was LTTE's founder and chief leader. He was the head of the central governing committee of the LTTE, which controlled the LTTE's military wing and subordinate political wing. Prabhakaran was killed on May 19, 2009 in an ambush by Sri Lankan forces as he was trying to flee the area in northern Karayamullavaikkal. His death is generally considered to mark the official end of the organization's existence and the Sri Lankan civil war.¹⁰

Shanmugalingam Sivashankar, commonly known as Pottu Amman (1981 to 2009): Amman was the LTTE Intelligence Wing Chief and was second-in-command after Prabhakaran. He was also killed in the May 19, 2009 ambush along with Prabhakaran.¹¹

Thillaiyampalam Sivanesan, commonly known as Soosai (1981 to 2009): Colonel Soosai headed the LTTE's naval division, known as the "Sea Tigers." He was one of Prabhakaran's chief military strategists. He was killed alongside Prabhakaran on May 19, 2009.¹²

Balasingham Nadesan (1992 to 2009): Nadesan was Prabhakaran's chief political advisor. He was formerly head of the LTTE police force in 1992, and then named chief of the political wing in 2007. Nadesan was killed in the army ambush on May 19, 2009 along with Prabhakaran.¹³

B. NAME CHANGES

- May 22, 1972: Tamil New Tigers. Prabhakaran founds the Tamil New Tigers, the LTTE's predecessor, in 1972.
- May 5, 1976: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Prabhakaran establishes the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 1976 and disbands the Tamil New Tigers.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- Year unknown: 11,664 (Commissioner General of Rehabilitation Maj. Gen Sudantha Ranasinghe)¹⁴
- February 1, 2002: 6,000-9,000 (Presidential spokesperson Harim Peiris, stating estimated LTTE strength before the February 2002 ceasefire)¹⁵
- December 31, 2002: 16,000 (Presidential spokesperson Harim Peiris, stating estimated LTTE strength by the end of 2002 ceasefire.)¹⁶
- January 8, 2004: 18,000 (Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Office)¹⁷
- December 29, 2007: 3,000 (South Asia Terrorism Portal)¹⁸
- January 11, 2008: 4,500 (South Asian Terrorism Portal)¹⁹

D. RESOURCES

The LTTE had an annual budget of around \$200-\$300 million, most of which was obtained from the global Sri Lankan diaspora.²⁰ The main financial body of the LTTE is the Aiyanna Group,

responsible for monitoring financial flows and revenue, including donations from overseas Tamil communities and LTTE supporters. In 2009, overseas Sri Lankans sent an estimated \$2.8 million to the LTTE.²¹

The LTTE also secured a significant amount of its funding from criminal activities, including piracy, human and drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and other petty crimes. The Sri Lankan Ministry of Defense reported that the LTTE hijacked several ships in the waters just outside Sri Lanka, such as the Irish Mona (2005), the Athena (2007), Princess Kash (1998), and MV Farah III (2007).²² The LTTE also controlled the majority of smuggling of Tamil people to Western countries; for example, it generally costs between \$10,000-40,000 for a Sri Lankan Tamil to get to Canada illegally.²³ The LTTE was also known to levy an “exit tax” for individuals trying to leave Tamil-controlled areas. The Sri Lankan Ministry of Defense also reported that the LTTE was actively involved in the illicit drug trade and smuggled heroin from Burma and other Southeast Asian countries to Western Europe.²⁴ Other petty crimes committed by the LTTE include passport forgery, credit card fraud, and the theft of aid donations to Tamil-controlled areas.²⁵

Around 20% of the LTTE’s funding came from internal sources, including extortion, taxation, and payments for protection.²⁶ One of the main sources of internal revenue for the LTTE came from custom duties passing through areas controlled by the LTTE. These customs duties ranged from 10-30% of the cost of the items.²⁷ The LTTE also engaged in commercial ventures with little success.²⁸

The Office of Overseas Purchases, also known as the KP Department, functions as the main procurement body of the LTTE, and is believed to obtain arsenal from various countries as well as operate a fleet of deep-sea vessels. Captured weapons from the Sri Lankan army constitute approximately 60-70% of the LTTE’s arsenal. Additional high tech weaponry is purchased using overseas funds.²⁹

Although the LTTE was officially disbanded in 2009 after the death of its leader Prabhakaran, a US State Department report in August 2011 claims that the LTTE’s international network of financial support continues to exist, and that its overseas divisions continue to acquire weapons.³⁰

A. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

The activities of the Tamil Tigers were primarily based in the Northern and Eastern regions of Sri Lanka, where the majority of Sri Lankan Tamils reside. However, many of the group’s major attacks were carried out in the capital of Colombo, and violent attacks occurred throughout Sri Lanka.³¹

The LTTE also had a presence in neighboring India. The LTTE carried out a number of significant attacks in India, including the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in

1991.³² Tamil Nadu, the Indian state most proximate to Sri Lanka, was a crucial LTTE transit point. Its strategic location, coupled with the ability of the LTTE Sea Tigers to control regional waters, made the Tamil Nadu a hub for the passage of low-technology arms, narcotics, and contraband.

The presence of a Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in several countries – and the widespread funding sources that accompanied it – allowed the LTTE to maintain a global presence. The United Kingdom was a crucial component of overseas LTTE operations. Front organizations and pro-LTTE groups in the country, including Sri Lankan Tamil newspapers, helped coordinate LTTE fundraising activities and propaganda distribution. Pro-LTTE messages and publications authored in the United Kingdom were distributed to other European and North American countries, primarily with the intention to raise additional funds for the group.³³ Forty percent of all LTTE funding was allegedly sourced from the United Kingdom. While the group was active, there were several biannual public pro-LTTE demonstrations, and a number of UK Members of Parliament allegedly supported the group.³⁴

The LTTE also expanded its operations into several other countries. In Asia, Cambodia was a crucial source for LTTE arms procurement. An estimated 5-10% of the LTTE's total arsenal supposedly came from Cambodia. Thailand – with a community of 10,000 Tamils – had a key LTTE arms shipping base.³⁵

The LTTE also maintained a presence in South Africa. The group disseminated propaganda, engaged in fund-raising activities, hosted training camps, procured weapons, and constructed shipping routes from South Africa.³⁶ The country was home to a large and politically active Sri Lankan Tamil community. The LTTE spread its influence by highlighting commonalities between the South African Tamils and the Sri Lankan Tamils. Politically, the LTTE tried to gain the support of various important South African political leaders, including those in the African National Congress (ANC). The LTTE's growing influence led to the creation of a South African Tamil Tigers. Members of this group were trained by LTTE personnel and by military organizations from the Apartheid era.³⁷

In the Middle East, the LTTE's presence was less salient. The group did not attempt to actively mobilize the Sri Lankan Tamil community in the region to the extent that it did in countries like the United Kingdom and South Africa.³⁸

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY & GOALS

The LTTE's primary goal was to attain an independent state for Sri Lankan Tamils – known as “Tamil Eelam” – in the northern and eastern areas of Sri Lanka, where most Tamils reside.³⁹ According to a 2001 census, 9.4% of the Sri Lankan population was Tamil, while the Sinhalese majority comprised 82% of the population.⁴⁰ After Sri Lanka became independent from the British in 1948, the majority Sinhalese practiced discrimination towards the Tamils, who were favored by the British during colonial rule.⁴¹ This discrimination drove calls for an independent Tamil state.

LTTE leader Prabhakaran stressed that the creation of Tamil Eelam was “a demand of the Tamil people,” as opposed to a goal pursued by a radical minority of Tamils. Although separatist ideology has dominated the LTTE’s rhetoric, Prabhakaran stated in a 2002 press conference that the LTTE’s desire self-determination entailed autonomy and self-rule, not necessarily statehood and cessation from the rest of Sri Lanka.⁴²

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

The LTTE is one of several violent offshoots of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), formerly the Tamil United Front (TUF). TUF was formed in the early 1970s from groups such as the Tamil Congress and the Federal Party.⁴³ When it officially called for the formation of an independent Tamil state in 1976, the group’s name was changed to the Tamil United Liberation Front. Several more radical militant Tamil groups, including Prabhakaran’s LTTE, emerged from the TULF.⁴⁴

The LTTE formed its political front, The People’s Front of Liberation Tigers, in 1989, during a time in which the LTTE was in negotiations with the Sri Lankan government. Yogaratnam Yogi was the party’s General Secretary. It has, until recently, been a registered political party in Sri Lanka. However they have rarely been active in local politics. Although they were listed on a few local ballots in 2008, the government deregistered the party in 2011.⁴⁵

The LTTE demonstrated its willingness to negotiate with the Sri Lankan government on several occasions. The group often used talks and agreements strategically to enhance its own position, re-arm, and eliminate its competitors.⁴⁶ In 1985, the first set of talks with the government took place in Bhutan, and these talks were followed by an accord between India and Sri Lanka in 1987. The Indian government agreed to intervene in the Sri Lankan conflict and provide a peacekeeping force to ensure that the LTTE disarmed. However, Indian forces were unable to subdue the LTTE and withdrew in 1990, giving the LTTE time to re-group and eliminate dissenters among the Tamil population.⁴⁷

Peace talks continued throughout the 1990s and were largely unsuccessful. During this period, the LTTE adopted “hit-and-run” tactics wherein peace talks were alternated with bouts of violence and clashes between the LTTE and government forces.⁴⁸ The most significant negotiation occurred in February 2002 when Norway, serving as a mediator, helped secure a ceasefire between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. However, after six rounds of additional talks in Thailand and Japan, the LTTE announced the suspension of further talks in 2003.⁴⁹ Some experts believe this was a tactical move to garner further concessions from the Sri Lankan government. The LTTE cited the Sri Lankan government’s exclusion of the group from an international aid conference, continued military occupation of Tamil-settled areas, and marginalization in government economic policies as the primary reasons for the breakdown of the ceasefire.⁵⁰

After the failure of another round of peace talks in 2006, the Sri Lankan government launched an all-out offensive against the LTTE.⁵¹ On May 17, 2009, an LTTE representative conceded the defeat of the LTTE by government forces. Prabhakaran was killed by government forces on May 18, 2009, bringing an immediate end to the conflict and the LTTE.⁵²

C. TARGETS & TACTICS

The LTTE was organized hierarchically under the leadership of the group's founder, Prabhakaran. The LTTE maintained army, navy, and air capabilities. The group is most well-known for its use of suicide operations by a small, special armed group called the Black Tigers. The Black Tigers used traditional land and sea tactics, guerrilla warfare, and targeted bombings and assassinations against targets in the northern and eastern areas of Sri Lanka. They are one of the first organizations to utilize suicide attacks on a large scale. According to Jane's Intelligence Review, the LTTE carried out 168 suicide attacks between 1980-2000.⁵³ Some of the group's most controversial suicide attacks include the assassinations of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and former Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa.⁵⁴

The LTTE attacked targeted individuals and groups who did not support their overarching goal of attaining an independent Tamil state. This included members of the Sri Lankan military and police forces, Sri Lankan and Indian politicians, and sometimes various civilian populations. Most of LTTE's victims were Sinhalese Buddhists, who comprised the majority population of Sri Lanka. The LTTE also targeted Sri Lankan Tamil politicians who did not support the LTTE and their goals, as well as other rival Tamil militant groups in Sri Lanka. Additionally, the LTTE attacked symbols of national importance to the Sri Lankan state, such as the Sri Lankan Central Bank and the country's world-trade center.⁵⁵

The LTTE also adopted guerilla tactics that were initially very effective against the Sri Lankan government. LTTE forces would often ambush government troops and attack in "waves," meaning here that the LTTE would first swarm the enemy and then engage in suicide bombings, which would often confuse and scare Sri Lankan government forces.⁵⁶

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

May 14, 1985: Gunfire attack on Sri Lankan Buddhist holy site in Anaradhapura. (146 killed (BBC) (GTD: 86 killed, 100 wounded)).⁵⁷

May 3, 1986: Bomb planted on Sri Lankan Air flight carrying British, French, and Japanese tourists, at the Colombo airport set to fly to the Maldives. (14-16 killed, 23-39 wounded).⁵⁸

April 21, 1987: Car bomb explodes at a bus station in Colombo, killing civilians. (113-150 killed, 200 wounded).⁵⁹

June 2, 1987: Aranthalawa massacre of Buddhist monks on a bus in Eastern Sri Lanka. (33 killed).⁶⁰

July 5, 1987: A soldier drove an explosive-filled truck into a Sri Lankan Army camp in Nelliady, northern Jaffna, followed by a ground attack by a group of LTTE soldiers. (40 killed (GTD: 20 dead, 27 wounded)).⁶¹

October 10, 1988: Massacre in Mahakongaskada Village of civilians. (44-45 killed, 17 wounded).⁶²

June 11, 1990: Massacre of Police Officers in Kalmunai in eastern Sri Lanka. (144 killed (GTD); most other sources claim over 600).⁶³

August 3, 1990: Kattankudy mosque massacre; LTTE highly suspected but has not yet claimed official responsibility (112-150 killed).⁶⁴

May 21, 1991: Assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, and 14-18 others by a female suicide bomber, in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu. The LTTE did not officially claim responsibility. (15-19 killed).⁶⁵

October 16, 1992: Motorcycle-based suicide attack in Colombo killed Chief Sri Lankan Navy Commander Vice Admiral Fernando and four other Navy personnel. (5 killed).⁶⁶

May 1, 1993: Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa is killed by a suicide bomber along with 23 others during a May Day rally in Colombo. (24 killed).⁶⁷

October 24, 1994: Female suicide bomber assassinates Gamini Dissanyake, Leader of the Opposition and United National Party candidate for the Presidential Elections, during a Colombo elections rally, (59 dead).⁶⁸

October 20, 1995: Explosion in Orugodawatte crude oil company by a suicide unit of four, killing 23 soldiers and two civilians. Fourteen storage tanks were destroyed, causing \$61 million in damage. (25 killed, 32 injured).⁶⁹

October 22, 1995: Attack in Thamanagama fishing village and three other Eastern Sri Lankan villages. (50-66 killed).⁷⁰

November 24, 1995: Two female suicide bombers attack the Sri Lankan army headquarters in Colombo. (16 killed, 52 wounded).⁷¹

December 23, 1995: Army ambush in Batticaloa district that killed 32 Sri Lankan troops, and a government-reported 60 rebels. (92-93 killed, 34 wounded).⁷²

January 31, 1996: A suicide bomber detonates an explosives-loaded truck at the Central Bank in Colombo. (91 dead, 1400 injured).⁷³

July 18, 1996: LTTE took control of a Sri Lankan army camp in the northeastern town of Mullaitivu. (1200 soldiers killed (BBC and Guardian)/150+ troops and 34 rebels killed (Reuters)).⁷⁴

July 24, 1996: Explosive attack on a commuter train near Colombo. (60-61 killed, 391-600 wounded).⁷⁵

September 30, 1998: Major LTTE offensive on Sri Lankan Army at key city Kilinochchi, former LTTE base, near the Sri Lankan army's major Elephant Pass base,

killing over 600-900 (varied estimates) Sri Lankan soldiers. (900 killed (varied estimates)).⁷⁶

July 29, 1999: Neelan Thiruchelvam, a moderate Tamil MP member of TULF and involved in the government-backed peace process, was killed in a suicide attack in Colombo. (3 killed, 5 injured).⁷⁷

September 18, 1999: Attack on three villages in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province in an apparent retaliation for Sri Lankan army attacks on Tamil civilians early that week. (50 killed).⁷⁸

December 18, 1999: Assassination attempt on Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who was injured in two bombings while campaigning for a second term during election rallies in Colombo. (15-34 killed).⁷⁹

April 23, 2000: Tigers take control of key Sri Lankan Army base in Jaffna, Elephant Pass, which they had been fighting to seek control since the Army takeover of the former LTTE stronghold in the Jaffna peninsula in 1995. (79 soldiers killed, 400+ injured, and 150 LTTE members injured).⁸⁰

June 7, 2000: Senior Sri Lankan Industry Minister CV Gooneratne assassinated in Colombo by a suicide bomber. (20-21 killed).⁸¹

July 7, 2004: First suicide bombing in three years. LTTE female soldier in an apparent attempt to assassinate high-profile Hindu Affairs Minister Douglas Devananda, a voracious LTTE critic. (5 killed, 9 injured).⁸²

October 25, 2005: Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, a key player in the peace process and close aide of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, was assassinated at his home in a suicide attack in Colombo. (1 killed).⁸³

April 9, 2006: Over 100 killed during a 2 week period, the most intensified fighting since the 2002 truce. (100+ killed).⁸⁴

June 15, 2006: Evidence suggests that the LTTE was responsible for a bus bombing in Aduradhapura district. (64 killed, 84 wounded).⁸⁵

October 16, 2006: Suicide bombing attack on Sri Lankan naval convoy buses in northeast region of Dambulla, one of the deadliest since 2002 peace. (95 killed).⁸⁶

May 9, 2009: Attack on civilians in Mullaitivu, Northern Province, Sri Lanka. (9 killed, 19 wounded).⁸⁷

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/ISTED

Over 32 different states have listed the LTTE as a terrorist organization, including Malaysia, the US, India, the UK, the EU, Canada, etc.⁸⁸ The LTTE was designated a "foreign terrorist organization" by the US government under the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. The LTTE was re-designated in October 2003 and currently maintains this status.⁸⁹

The LTTE is listed as a "proscribed terrorist group" by the UK government under the Terrorism Act of 2000.⁹⁰

The EU has also listed LTTE on their list of terrorist organizations as per the Council Common Position 2009/67/CFSP.⁹¹ It was re-listed in 2011 after a review of its listed terrorist organizations.⁹²

Since 1992, the LTTE has been included in a list of terrorist organizations by the Indian government under The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.⁹³

In 2006, Canada listed the LTTE as a terrorist organization pursuant to its criminal code.⁹⁴

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Support for the LTTE was primarily based around the disenfranchised Tamil population in the north of Sri Lanka, and later the Tamils who escaped to the south.⁹⁵ In the territory it controlled, the LTTE established some civil administration, including postal services, courts, police, banks, radio, etc. These structures collect taxes and administer the rule of law.⁹⁶

The LTTE was notorious for actively recruiting women and children from among the Tamil community. It was thought that women constituted 20-30% of the LTTE's fighting cadre and that an estimated 4,000 female members were killed during the 26 years of the Sri Lankan conflict.⁹⁷ A female LTTE suicide bomber carried out the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi. The LTTE also actively used children as part of their front-line troops.⁹⁸ The LTTE's recruitment of child soldiers led to discontent among the Tamil community. According to UNICEF, the LTTE has recruited over 5,800 child soldiers since 2001. Many of these children were abducted from refugee camps and orphanages in Tamil-controlled areas.⁹⁹

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

Tamil militant groups began to emerge in 1970s, the first of which was the "Tamil Students Movement" that protested the limited admission of Tamil students to universities. By 1972, the original student movement broke up into smaller, militant groups such as the Tamil New Tigers (TNT), the LTTE's predecessor, and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO).¹⁰⁰ By the late 1980s, there were over thirty different Tamil militant groups. The most significant groups were the LTTE, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), TELO, the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS), and the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). By 1987, the LTTE was the dominant group. TELO especially was repeatedly attacked by the LTTE during the 1987 war against India, as well as members of PLOTE and EPRLF.¹⁰¹

In March 2004, Colonel Vinayagamoorthy Maralitharan, commonly known as "Karuna Amman," broke away from the LTTE and formed an underground organization and political

party with a band of his supporters. His organization's military wing is called the Tamil National Front and its political wing is known as the Tamileela Makkal Viduthalai Pulligal (TMVP), allied with the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF). By April 2004, the LTTE had essentially subdued the breakaway faction; however, Colonel Karuna escaped with a small group of supporters and regrouped in Colombo.¹⁰² In 2006, Colonel Karuna allied with the Sri Lankan government, delivering a huge blow to the LTTE.¹⁰³

The LTTE has developed relationships with various Islamist groups because of its criminal activities in the informal arms market, rather than any form of ideological affinity. By the 1990s, the LTTE had developed a close relationship with the Kurdish Support Group in France and had modeled their diaspora funding efforts after the Kurdish example. The LTTE's acquisition of 11 Greek surface to air missiles was reportedly a result of the LTTE's relationship with the PKK.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, it is believed that Otharad Cargo, an LTTE-operated cargo company based in Dubai, received military hardware from the Sharjah network, a large Taliban weapons-procurement operation.¹⁰⁵ In Karachi, Pakistan, the LTTE registered a front company that obtained weapons for both the LTTE and Pakistani militant groups. An LTTE shipping fleet was also involved in providing logistical support for the Al Qaeda-affiliated Pakistani group Harakat-al Mujahideen.¹⁰⁶

The LTTE also established a presence in Eritrea, which is known to be a major shipment point in the informal arms market. It is suspected that the LTTE has interactions with Al Qaeda affiliated groups in the Eritrean Network. A US Senate Foreign Relations Committee report in December 2006 claims that the Eritrean government directly supports the LTTE. The LTTE also maintains relationships with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Aby Sanyaf in the Philippines in activities related to fund transfers and training operations.¹⁰⁷

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Overseas funding is mainly provided by the large Sri Lankan diaspora, which has continued to grow since Sri Lanka's 1948 independence.¹⁰⁸ During the 1970s and 1980s, the LTTE's main financial support came from the Tamils who fled Sri Lanka to India, Malaysia, Europe, and North America.¹⁰⁹ The Indian state of Tamil Nadu became a crucial transit point for low-technology arms, narcotics, contraband, and more, given its geographic closeness to Sri Lanka and control of the regional waters by the LTTE Sea Tigers.

India's Intelligence service, known as the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), is believed to have provided training and weaponry to the LTTE up until the mid-1980s. RAW withdrew its support of the LTTE in the 1980s, as LTTE began to make alliances with radical separatist groups in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.¹¹⁰

Cambodia was a crucial source for LTTE arms procurement, contributing an estimated five to ten percent towards the LTTE's total arsenal. Thailand also served as an important source of manpower, as well as a strategic base for arms procurement.

MAPS

- Sri Lanka

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