

# Inception of Civil War in Sri Lanka and India's Response and security Concerns

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**Abstract:** After July 23, 1983, ethnic conflict became civil war. The Government of Sri Lanka attempted to crush the Tamils and then dictate a settlement, but the militant separatists were able to increase their strength every time the government did. Their success won respect for the militants from many Tamils, even those who opposed their ruthless methods. Their insurrection was funded by financial support from overseas Tamils and by drug smuggling. The war up to the end of 1994 can be divided into four distinct phases: escalation, 1983–1987 (Eelam War I); Indian intervention, 1987–1989; the reign of Ranasinghe Premadasa, 1989–1993 (Eelam War II); and the attempt to find a negotiated solution, 1993–1994, culminating in the election of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga on a peace platform.

**Keywords-** Sinhalese, National Security, LTTE, Human Rights, IPKF, Jaffna

## Background

Violence spiraled upward after the pogrom of 1983, interrupted by periods of raised hopes for a settlement between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and the Tamil minority. Both sides believed that the escalation of violence favored it and extremists on both sides were unwilling to accept conditions that would bring about a negotiated settlement. In early 1983 it was believed that the extremists among the separatists were a small minority, a few hundred young men, although more were being trained in India. Soon they established bases in South India, gained international support, and developed the capacity to attack Sinhalese areas. The armed forces of Sri Lanka had been small and primarily ceremonial, but quickly grew into a larger and better equipped, but poorly trained, military. Observers in late 1983 hoped that the unprecedented violence would shock Lankan leaders into negotiating a solution to ethnic conflict. India, which took in more than 135,000 Tamil refugees, offered to mediate. Indira Gandhi's efforts were undermined by the suspicion, later confirmed, that she had allowed her military intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), to create training camps in south India for Tamil militants and to arm them. The Government of Sri Lanka rejected a proposal, known as "Annexure C," in part because it was written by her envoy Gopalaswamy Parthasarathy in consultation with Lankan politicians. It proposed a "union of regions" within a unitary constitutional framework, the devolution of substantial legislative and executive power to these regions, and measures that would ensure adequate Tamil representation in the central government. As the extremists began to use their bases in India more effectively, relations between the two countries worsened, particularly after the appointment of Lalith Athulathmudali as Minister of National Security. Athulathmudali equated all separatists with terrorists and used extreme measures for their suppression, resulting in high civilian casualties, which he blamed on the Tamil people for allowing the extremists to thrive. He created a 5000-strong commando force (later increased to 6,000) known as the Special Task Force (STF). Athulathmudali's interdiction of supplies and guerillas from Tamilnadu resulted in the seizure of Indian fishing vessels and tense relations between the countries.

## EMERGENCE OF THE LTTE

The Tamil extremists took advantage of the confusion in late 1983 to build up their strength. The undermanned police were unable to prevent politically motivated crime, and dispossessed Tamils joined the movement. Political prisoners freed from the Batticaloa prison joined the rebels in Tamilnadu. By March 1984, there were an estimated 2,000 armed extremists in camps in Tamilnadu, with more awaiting weapons. Eventually, the LTTE under the leadership of Vellupillai Prabhakaran prevailed over five other major militant groups: the People's Liberation Organization of Tamileelam (PLOTE), led by Uma Maheswaran; the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), led by Padmanabha; the Tamileelam Liberation Organization (TELO), led by Kuttimani and Thevan; the Eelam Revolutionary Organizers (EROS); and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP). They differed in tactics, areas of influence, ideological orientation, and goals. EROS and EPRLF were openly Marxist and favored an island-wide Marxist revolution over a separate Tamil state. Personal rivalries divided their leaders, who were unable to overcome their differences at a meeting in Madras on November 10, 1983. Instead, the most ruthless and best organized group seized power through a series of bloody confrontations in Sri Lanka, Madras, and London. The success of the LTTE can be credited to its single-minded devotion to the creation of an authoritarian government for the state of Eelam. In Jaffna they killed nonmilitant authorities such as human-rights activists, academics, and social workers, and they took control of most civilian organizations. Internationally they opened offices around the world, engaged in business and financial operations, and systematically levied funds from overseas Tamils. They indoctrinated their recruits to kill and die for the cause, including suicide bombers, and operated efficient propaganda and intelligence networks. They kept pace with the technological developments of the 1980s and 1990s and have been called a textbook case of the globalization of terrorism. As it became stronger, the LTTE systematically destroyed its opposition. In April–

May 1986, it killed 200 members of TELO, and later that year it attacked the EPRLF organization in the Jaffna Peninsula. On July 13, 1989 LTTE members assassinated Amirthalingam, and in June 1990, they murdered many senior EPRLF leaders while holding a meeting in Madras. The other groups had depended on India to supply them with weapons, and they had no alternative sources when India shut off the supply. They were unable to resist, and some of them turned to kidnapping, extortion, and burglary to raise money, which undermined their legitimacy in the eyes of the Tamil people.

### PROVINCIAL COUNCILS

President Jayewardene presented new proposals to a Political Parties Conference (PPC) on June 25, 1986. They included the creation of elected Provincial Councils (PC) with responsibility for maintenance of internal law and order and land settlement. Provinces would have powers in agricultural and industrial development, elementary education, and the promotion and conduct of cultural activities. Sri Lanka would remain a unitary state; appointed governors would head the PC. Jayewardene promised that the responsibilities of the provincial councils could be enlarged though negotiations but not reduced. These proposals eventually became law after a year and a half of debate. They were discussed in three rounds of discussions that ended on December 19, 1986. Despite extensive diplomatic efforts by India, the talks foundered over the question of the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, which the militants demanded as necessary for the integrity of the Tamil homeland. The government resisted this on the grounds that the Eastern Province had a substantial Muslim (32 percent) and Sinhalese (25 percent) population. Their final proposal was to detach the Muslim- and Sinhalese-majority regions from the Eastern Province to leave the remainder a Tamil-majority province. A compromise was negotiated on September 28, 1987. The government pushed through the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the Provincial Council Bill in November 1987 over violent Sinhalese-Buddhist protests and objections from all sides. The Supreme Court ruled favorably on the constitutionality of the measure by a 5–4 vote. The Government of India thought that the PC did not have enough power and that the government should lift emergency regulations before the PC elections. Elections were held in 1988, resulting in UNP control of seven provinces and the EPRLF in control of the newly created Northeastern Province. The TULF said it did not contest because it could not field candidates as an “unarmed, nonviolent” party. There were 36 seats in the Northern Province and 35 in the Eastern Province. The EPRLF won all 36 seats in Jaffna uncontested, and 17 of the 35 seats in the Eastern Province; the SLMC won 17 also and the UNP a single seat in the colonist area of Amparai District. After much delay, Jayewardene proclaimed the merger of the North and East at midnight Friday night, September 9, 1988. Premadasa ordered the powers be devolved to Provincial councils in January 1989, but the process was slow. A referendum was scheduled on the unification of the North and East on July 5, 1989, but Premadasa (and his successors) postponed it. At this time, the predominantly Tamil-speaking Muslim community became politicized after years of isolation. They had tended to support the UNP, but some Muslims turned away from the UNP after the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. In 1988 Muslims increasingly supported the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) led by Mohamed Hussain Mohamed Ashraff. It was based in the Eastern Province. The party did well in the PC elections and won one seat in each of three districts in the general election. It gathered the third highest vote total in the latter, even though it contested only 13 of 22 electoral districts. It won seven seats in the 1994 parliamentary election.

### INDIA INTERVENES 1987–1990

The negotiations over provincial councils did not prevent the resumption of hostilities between the government and LTTE, which controlled the northern peninsula, having exterminated rival separatist groups and restricted the government forces to their camps. Facing increased hostility in India, it moved most of its operations from Tamilnadu and became the de facto government of the district. The government cut off the supply of essential materials to the north and clashed with the LTTE in the Eastern Province. On February 7, 1997, the expanded government military began an offensive to crush the LTTE in Jaffna while still negotiating with India to find new proposals. Fighting continued inconclusively for three months. The civilian population of the north suffered greatly as the LTTE used civilian hostages as firescreens and government attacks, including aerial bombardment, hit civilians. The government faced pressure from Sinhalese extremists to defeat the LTTE military and from the Indian government to stop military operations in order to bring them back to the negotiating table. Violence against civilians reached new heights in 1987. Reprisals by security forces against civilians in the Eastern Province received international attention, including a UN Commission on Human Rights resolution calling on the country to renounce violence, seek a negotiated solution, and cooperate with the ICRC. On April 17, the militants attacked two busses and massacred 127 passengers in Trincomalee district. Four days later an explosion at Colombo’s main bus station killed more than 100 people. The government blamed the bombing on EROS, but they denied it and in turn suggested that it was the act of a revived JVP.

The government in turn resumed aerial bombing of what it said were guerrilla bases in the north for three days. Sinhalese protesters, including *bhikkhus*, demanded even more aggressive measures, and the government, taking advantage of internecine battles among the militants, established a foothold in the northeast of the Jaffna peninsula and prepared to recapture the remainder of the peninsula. India, which had warned against a military solution, airdropped food and medicine on June 3, after Sri Lanka refused to allow relief shipments to come by sea. Relations between the two nations were extremely strained until the announcement of a peace accord on July 29, 1987, which Sri Lanka was too weak to refuse. Both Premadasa and Athulathmudali were hostile to Indian pressure for settling the civil war and had opposed the accord. Other government ministers supported a political settlement based on a federal solution. Dissanayake helped draft the peace agreement. India sent 6,000 troops of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) into Jaffna to disarm the LTTE and enforce the accord. The three parties announced a settlement on September 28, 1987. Five days later Indian troops captured 17 heavily armed LTTE members and turned them over to the Lankan Army. They attempted a mass suicide, killing 12, and the LTTE embarked on a rampage, including massacres of

Sinhalese villagers. Within days Indian troops launched a major offensive against them in Jaffna. Violence escalated between the IPKF and the LTTE. The Indian troops were ordered to use restraint to avoid civilian casualties, to limit their own casualties, and to leave opportunity for negotiations to resume. This affected both their fighting capacity against their ruthless enemies (some of whom had been trained by India military working for the RAW) and their morale. There were estimated to be 72,000 troops at their height in February 1988, but they were unable to defeat the LTTE. Before they finally left, the IPKF had spent about about \$1.25 billion on the campaign. President Premadasa attempted to seize the anti-IPKF issue from the JVP with outrageous demands for an immediate withdrawal—something that would have damaged Sri Lanka greatly, even if it were possible. An agreement was reached on September 18, 1988. India had already made a few symbolic withdrawals, and numbers were already declining. In March 1989 there were four divisions with approximately 45,000 troops, and the final troops left in March 1990. The final break between India and Tamil separatists came with the May 19, 1991, assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. India dismantled their aid network, and support for the Tigers among Tamil politicians evaporated. After a thorough investigation, India found Velupillai Prabhakaran guilty of planning the assassination. In 2006, the LTTE attempted to improve relations with India by apologizing for it. Annamalai Varadaraja Perumal had become the Chief Minister of the Northeast Provincial Council (NEPC) in December 1988. Perumal was a Marxist and former militant who had been a lecturer in Economics at Jaffna University. The NEPC was doomed from the start because of its close association with the IPKF, without the protection of which it could not have survived.

Their heavy-handed use of IPKF favoritism created the resentment among Tamils. President Premadasa thought they were a stepping stool for Indian occupation. He placed an army officer, Lt. Gen. Nalin Seneviratne, as governor and withheld funding. The NEPC struggled despite Indian support and dissolved after a bizarre sequence of events in March 1990.

The NEPC, which had little influence outside of Trincomalee, began calling itself a national assembly and on March 3 unilaterally declared the independence of Eelam. Perumal began organizing a “Tamil National Army.” Premadasa ordered the IPKF to withdraw protection from the EPRLF and Tamil separatist groups other than the LTTE to disarm. The EPRLF leaders escaped to India on March 10, and the NEPC ended. Perumal has remained under the protection of the Government of India, but the senior EPRLF leader, K. Padmanabha, was assassinated in Madras June 19. **JVP** The ban on the JVP was lifted in May 1988, and they immediately set out to mobilize support. The resumption of war produced widespread violence in Colombo, which escalated into a JVP’s campaign of sabotage and assassination, intended to prevent the presidential and general elections from taking place. It repeated the pattern of its 1971 insurgency by staging raids on military facilities for arms and robberies for cash, and it recruited support within the security forces. It used Sinhalese hostility to the IPKF to attract support but terrorized any Sinhalese people who did not follow its radical reconstruction of rural society unquestioningly. Amnesty International estimates that the JVP killed more than 800 people in 1988—security forces, UNP members, and members of parties contesting elections. With the LTTE engaged with the IPKF, Premadasa turned his security forces against the JVP. He allowed UNP politicians to recruit “home guards”—private militias of 300 supporters under personal control with no legal or judicial restraint. In November 1988 new regulations made death threats, or even carrying documents that might be considered a threat, punishable by death. In December 1988 security forces were given immunity from prosecution for actions taken in the course of their duties after August 1, 1977. Estimates of the numbers killed by government death squads, known as Black Cats, range from 12,000 to 60,000 young people during the period December 1987–1991. Supporters of the opposition, civil rights workers, lawyers, and journalists were targeted as well as JVP members. The JVP was crushed in November 1989, when Rohana Wijeweera was killed in custody by security forces. Suspected JVP members continued to “disappear” for the remainder of Premadasa’s life, and thousands continued to be held in custody. In 1992, President Premadasa warned against a renewed JVP threat, and he accused the opposition of trying to revive it. The cases against police officers accused of murder during the suppression made little progress in the courts; witnesses were killed or intimidated.

## SINHALESE POLITICS

Presidential (December 15, 1988) and Parliamentary (February 15, 1989) elections were held under abnormal conditions it was marked by violence by the LTTE and the JVP and accused of fraud by the SLFP. With these battles for supremacy within the two major parties, leftist parties began to revive in the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya (SLMP) created in 1984 by a charismatic movie actor, Vijaya Kumaratunga. His wife, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, the daughter of S.W.R.D. and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, left the SLFP and became one of its vice presidents. They formed the United Left Front (ULF) with other left parties. Kumaratunga was assassinated on February 16, 1988. His widow, Chandrika, assumed the leadership of the SLMP. After some time she formed a new party called Bahujana Nidahas Pakshaya but soon returned to the SLFP. She defeated her brother Anura Bandaranaike for the party leadership in 1992 with the backing of her mother and the left-of-center faction of the party. In 1993 she led the People’s Alliance (PA) to victory in the Western and Southern Provincial Council elections. The UNP thought that neither Athulathmudali nor Dissanayake could defeat Mrs. Bandaranaike and thus made Premadasa their candidate. He won the direct public vote by a narrow margin of 50.4 percent, exceeding the margin required by law to win by less than 24,000 votes. Bandaranaike received 44.9 percent of the votes—much better than Hector Kobbekaduwa in 1982. Ossie Abeygunasekara was the candidate of the SLMP after the assassination of Kumaratunga but won only 4.6 percent of the votes.

The turnout of 54.3 percent was by far the lowest for any national election, and appears to have worked to the disadvantage of Bandaranaike. Observers thought that she might have won if the SLFP had offered a coherent alternative to the UNP peace proposals. Premadasa received 880,000 fewer votes than Jayewardene did in 1982, but he appears to have won proportionately

more Sri Lanka Tamil votes and to have continued to get strong support from plantation Tamils. Premadasa became the first head of state outside the ranks of the traditional high-caste, highly educated, and intermarried Sinhalese elite. Premadasa faced opposition within the UNP and used his power to appoint and remove Cabinet ministers to consolidate his position. Half of Jayewardene's ministers were removed, and many of the newcomers were personally loyal to Premadasa.

Premadasa kept the crucial Ministries of Defense and Policy Planning and Implementation for himself, along with the potentially sensitive ministry of Buddha *sasana*, which oversees the constitutional mandate to promote Buddhism. He named an undistinguished senior politician, Dingiri Banda Wijetunge, as prime minister and minister of finance over Gamini Dissanayake and Lalith Athulathmudali, who were given lesser portfolios. Sirisena Cooray, his close associate, was named speaker of the legislature. President Premadasa's growing autocracy—including both an increase in violence by the state against Sinhalese politicians and a centralization of all decision making in his own hands—led to an impeachment motion in Parliament in August 1991. Premadasa had created, for example, the Security Consultancy Unit in the Ministry of Policy Planning, which secretly monitored the actions of politicians, senior military officers, journalists, and others. Its existence became public only when President Wijetunga closed it after Premadasa's death. The movement was led by Athulathmudali and Dissanayake but had support from both government and the opposition. After intense political maneuvering, some MPs were induced to withdraw their support and the Speaker of the House M. H. Mohamed on October 8, 1991 refused to entertain the notice of the impeachment motion. Dissanayake was dismissed from the cabinet; Athulathmudali joined in a vote of confidence for Premadasa in the cabinet, but he also was expelled from the party.

## RESUMPTION OF CIVIL WAR

A strategy was developed by the LTTE after the IPKF left was the "ethnic cleansing" of Muslim districts under its control. On August 3, 1990, LTTE cadres stormed two mosques in at Kattanakudy on the east coast and massacred 120 Muslims at prayer and injured more than 100, many of whom later died. On October 23, 1990, Prabhakaran ordered that Muslims living in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaithivu, and Vavuniya districts should leave by October 28. Nearly 17,000 families were driven from their homes, and many are still displaced in refugee camps or with relatives. There have been accusations and counteraccusations concerning this policy; some LTTE supporters say it was done to placate east coast Tamils, but the breakaway leader Vinayagamurthy Muralitharan, known as Colonel Karuna, from the east coast denies this. President Premadasa in December 1992 said he wanted to find a political solution to the crisis accepted at national level and end the north-east war which he said was costing 20 billion rupees (\$455 million) a year. Instead, the Lankan military attempted to defeat the LTTE in the east while containing them in the north. More than 40,000 troops pursued 1,200 LTTE cadres, most of them in the Batticaloa and Ampara districts.

When the government secured the towns, LTTE retreated into the villages and the jungles, and the army gradually attempted to carry out operations there. From 1992 to 1994 both the Lankan military and the LTTE showed that they had the ability to inflict damage on the enemy and great suffering on the people. Neither showed any likelihood that they could win the war. The Lankan military appeared to be gaining the upper hand in the east; the government held the towns, and the LTTE retreated into bases in the villages and the jungles. The government troops attacked LTTE's larger bases. But they had difficulty with operations into the jungles as the poorly trained, thinly spread, and tired troops found themselves vulnerable to ambush. The LTTE could mass large attacks on military bases in the north, but only by withdrawing cadres from the east, including their commander Karuna. Security forces captured Pooneryn from the LTTE in 1992, and the LTTE captured it back the next year.

The army had some successes against the LTTE in 1992 and was poised to capture the eastern half of the Jaffna Peninsula at the beginning of August 1992 in Operation Final Countdown. On August 8, 1992, however, military operations commander Major General Denzil Kobbekaduwa and eight other senior officers were killed when their Land Rover drove over a land mine. The road had been previously used with no detonation, and an expert claimed that the explosion appeared to have been caused by a bomb attached to the vehicle. Suspicions were aroused because the LTTE claimed responsibility because Premadasa did not attend his funeral.

The government troops had lost many fighters in their attack on the Elephant Pass camp and had developed new tactics for this purpose. Many of the cadres that attacked Pooneryn in November 1993 were cadres from the east under the leadership of Karuna, and they suffered heavy casualties.

Often there was a change in strategy that was based on all-out attacks on military bases. In July 1991 the LTTE tried to capture Elephant Pass, which cut Jaffna off from the rest of the island. It was resisted after a month-long siege at heavy cost by the army. The government used the camp to attack the LTTE, who had dug in nearby to prevent traffic from entering the peninsula there. In September 1993, Government troops began a major offensive against Tamil separatists in northern Sri Lanka but were ambushed in an attack that killed more than 150 soldiers and wounded many more. On November 11 the LTTE overran a base in Pooneryn in the fiercest fighting of the war. Many of the LTTE fighters were cadres from the east coast under the command of Karuna who personally took part in the operation. Later the east coast cadres were returned to the east to discourage the army from moving more troops from the east to the Jaffna peninsula.

### Conclusion

In the post 1990 period, security concern of India and Sri Lanka took an entirely different form. India threat perceptions have grown as China has become more active in Sri Lanka. China's politico- economic initiatives and unrestrained supply of military equipment to Sri Lanka has made India nervous. India's worried over the increasing Chinese influence and its implication for India's security. India has adopted hands off in the ethnic conflict since the withdrawals of IPKF, especially after The Assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE. After this, LTTE had emerged as the biggest threat to both India and Sri Lanka. Since that LTTE had been banned in India.<sup>3</sup> LTTE of the post 1990 period was qualitatively different being much more powerful in terms of its Axis to funds and Technology and superior arms and ammunitions. The LTTE has developed extensive contract with terrorist groups all over the world.<sup>4</sup> LTTE's any attempt to establish an independent Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka was biggest threat to the India security and sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> The military defeat of LTTE in may 2009 brought an end to this threat.

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