

LTTE terror and counter-insurgency moves. (1995, October 29) *The Sunday times.*

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By Our Military Analyst

The LTTE established with the blasting of the oil installations in Colombo and the massacres in the bordering villages of the northeast, two military aspects that did not need confirmation. First its inability to meet a conventional military force in face-to-face combat and win. Second, its willingness to break the rules of war to survive.

Both in innovation and ruthlessness, the LTTE also demonstrated its placement as the leader of the insurgent movements of the world. It surpassed the traditionally accepted theory that Peru's Shining Path was the most ruthless insurgent organisation in the world. There is no guerrilla leader who can take the credit for the assassination of two heads of government other than the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. Both were killed by suicide bombers. Had the former Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi lived, there was all the possibility that the Indian armed forces would have been reintroduced to Sri Lanka. Similarly President R. Premadasa was determined to get the Sri Lankan forces to march into Jaffna.

Already, the operation to take Jaffna, has cost the government

very heavily. No other operation, except, Operation Liberation in May 1987 and Operation Pawan in October 1987 had been so costly.

It is likely that the LTTE will target both economic and tourist institutions in the future. It is likely that even if a comprehensive security plan is made operational, the Tiger Movement will study the loopholes and strike. But, with time, the government will learn and develop effective counter measures.

In terms of LTTE strategy, any installation - from a hotel to the port and the parliament is vulnerable. They will strike anything and everything that will hurt the government and support their war effort. The LTTE has declared "total war". There are no rules in a "total war".

In terms of strategy the government is also faced with limited options. If the LTTE war machinery is not weakened, the national security of Sri Lanka, that is already dented by the loss of the north to rebel control, will be damaged irreversibly.

By the time the operation is completed the costs may be higher. The thinking of both Sri

Lankan and foreign military analysts is that it is better to lose men and material by conducting operations than sitting, sleeping or resting in camps.

The Tiger insurgency provides a number of important lessons to the international community on the nature of future threats. Similarly, the Tiger insurgency demonstrates the effectiveness of small group suicide squad operations which the LTTE and the government identify as Black Tiger operations.

Today, the Western intelligence and security community is carefully watching the Tiger movement for it has established links with a number of insurgent groups both in the East and in the West. Their particular concern is the transfer of suicide bomb technology.

Among the groups that have benefited by the interaction with the Tiger Movement are the Indian insurgents who recently suicide bombed a chief minister and the Middle Eastern insurgents who regularly perform suicide strikes.

There are only two instances where insurgent groups have blown up oil installations as a diversionary tactic in warfare. The best known of this is the Algerian Islamic insurgents against the French troops in Algeria. The

Algerian FLN was instrumental in doing so, but they were not as effective as the LTTE.

The French finally managed to destroy the FLN militarily through a large scale sweep of Algeria from east to west. The offensive took 400,000 troops. The French also did not believe in forward defence lines or in holding ground, the latter which they called "quadrillage". Finally, the French withdrew because colonialism was on the way out and the French campaign in Algeria had become very costly.

Despite its violent nature, the Tiger movement has been successful in mobilizing the support of many Tamil expatriates through front organisations both in the East and the West. Last Week's demonstration opposite the UN building in New York should have come as no surprise as the LTTE has two front organisations, both in New York and New Jersey.

Similarly, LTTE offices throughout Europe and Australia have been told to activate their propaganda machinery on the theme of "genocide and ethnic cleansing" two catch words. The only way the government can counter this type of propaganda is to ensure that no Tamil civilians or their property is harmed or damaged either in Colombo or

during operations in the northeast.

For counter insurgency to be effective and to produce results two elements are vital. First, there should be no retaliation. Concepts of collective punishment and indiscriminate strikes have proved to be counter productive. Second, there should be political and economic action simultaneously with the military effort, if, not before or just after. There should be focus on psychological warfare, which is virtually zero under the PA regime.

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Jaffna is a hostile terrain. The only opportunity of transforming this unfriendly terrain into friendly terrain is by rebuilding war-devastated Jaffna.

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The past performance of the

Sri Lankan forces as well as the role of the civil administration in their attempts to develop the East demonstrates that it is too big an assignment for Sri Lanka.

It is tragic that the government has failed to enlist the support of India in fighting the LTTE and in rehabilitating or reconstructing the northeast. The fact that the LTTE is a common threat to Indian and Sri Lankan security has not been exploited. It is very clear that the Foreign Ministry and the Presidential Secretariat have failed in this regard.

Wars, even with an insignificant force (which the LTTE is not), particularly if it is a transnational movement (which the LTTE is) is fought with allies. Sri Lanka has failed miserably to develop an alliance with India to engage the LTTE.

The concept of collective security is emerging the world over due to five factors. Boundaries have become increasingly porous. Communication and the flow of ideas have enhanced. Migration and travel have increased. Access to information and technology has become easier, and ethnic and religious nationalities are asserting themselves much more than during the Cold War.

With these developments, no single country can assure its national security without the coop-

eration of the neighbouring countries. A conflict in one country is bound to affect the security of nearby countries. For narrow political reasons Premier Narasimha Rao is uncooperative with Sri Lanka to fight a movement that the intelligence agencies of that country assisted in creating to this level.

It is not a secret that when Premier Indira Gandhi ordered the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) India's premier agency for gathering foreign intelligence and conducting overseas operations, to extend military, training and financial assistance, the then foreign minister was Narasimha Rao.

Indian newspapers revealed how Mr. Rao called the editor of the Indian magazine and reprimanded him for publishing a story that confirmed Indian government assistance to Sri Lankan Tamil insurgents and exposed the training facilities for the LTTE in Tamil Nadu.

India paid very heavily for covert and overt intervention. The death of Rajiv Gandhi, over four thousand casualties and a military misadventure that cost billions of rupees, are only some of the consequences. India has not yet paid the price in full.

The LTTE continues to have a presence in Tamil Nadu. The

LTTE continues to maintain close links with some of the major political parties in India including Congress I. The LTTE has extended financial and military support to 22 Tamil Nadu separatist political and militant organisations that are committed to fighting for an independent Dravidistan.

It is also known that nearly 1000 members of the Tamil Nadu Retrieval Force have been trained by the LTTE both in Jaffna and in a remote island off Myanmar, where the LTTE has secured an external base with the help of some corrupt members of the military junta.

According to Indian intelligence and security agencies, the LTTE has been targeting not only Premier Narasimha Rao but also Sonia Gandhi who is bringing tremendous pressure of the Indian government to bring Prabhakaran and his associates to trial. The LTTE is known sooner or later to hunt down its victims.

As a pro-Gandhi Congress leader recently remarked, "It is better for Narasimha Rao, who is well known for allowing issues to solve by themselves, to take a clear stand on the LTTE issue. Already, he is a prime target of the LTTE. At least he can die as a hero".