



NEW DIMENSION OF ASYMMETRIC WARFARE: LTTE'S GUERRILLA WAR IN SRI LANKA

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This paper intends to revisit the military theory of "Asymmetric Warfare" from a new dimension based on the guerrilla campaign led by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a terrorist group that fought against the Sri Lanka's legitimate government for thirty years. The task of this study contains a specific approach as it highlights "Composite Warfare", a new dynamic emerged much later.

The results emerging from this study unfolds how nation states in the 21st century concern about the irregular warfare as the subject matter of this paper, LTTE's Guerrilla War against State of Sri Lanka, provides a classic example. LTTE utilizes a variety of tactics and strategies, some of which are well-known, tried, and tested, while others are new and original. The result is a new dimension of asymmetric warfare.

Keywords: Sri Lanka; LTTE; asymmetric warfare; guerrilla; insurgency;

INTRODUCTION

Asymmetric warfare describes a conflict where there is a significant disparity in power between the opposing actors, causing the weaker power to use indirect and innovative ways and means to compensate. It is the direct opposite of symmetric warfare, where two powers have more or less the same military power and resources and rely on tactics that are broadly similar overall. The term is frequently used by academics and military theorists to describe what is also called "guerrilla warfare", "insurgency", "terrorism", "counterinsurgency" and "counterterrorism"; the clash between a formal military and an informal opponent with inferior resources and manpower. Although an idea as old as warfare itself, it is comparatively recent in its origins. It is thought to have its roots in an article by Andrew J.R. Mack in the journal *World Politics* in 1975, *Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict*. (Mack, 1975). The concept and the study of asymmetry is primarily American.

It occupies a significant place in American military thinking and many of the most influential works have their origins in the American defence establishment. Asymmetry was first officially mentioned in 1995, in the *Joint Warfare Doctrine of the U.S. Army* (Jablonsky, 2008). It defines asymmetric conflicts as battles between dissimilar forces. The element of surprise is seen as a vital component and it is noted that it can prove particularly lethal if the force being attacked is unprepared or unready to defend itself. Asymmetric warfare began to receive greater attention in the late 1990s, featuring in the Report of the *Quadrennial Defense Review* (1997) and then in the Joint Strategic Review (1999). One of the main public documents describing the US military doctrine, The *Quadrennial Defense Review* discusses the possibility that America's dominance in the conventional arena could lead its enemies to employ asymmetric tactics against it.

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This could entail the use of unconventional approaches to circumvent or undermine America's strengths while at the same time exploiting its vulnerabilities.

Carl von Clausewitz (1792-1831) describes warfare as "... a continuation of politics through other means". (Clausewitz, 2003). There is no universally accepted term or clear definition for asymmetric warfare. Broadly speaking, it can be described as a war between belligerents whose relative military power differs significantly.

In his study, *Asymmetric Warfare: Sizing the Threat* (1997), Paul F. Herman defines asymmetric warfare as a set of operational practices focused on negating advantages and exploiting vulnerabilities rather than engaging in traditional engagements (Herman, 1997). In their 2001 study, *Asymmetry and U.S. Military Strategy: definition, background, and strategic concepts*, Dr. Steven Metz and Dr. Douglas Johnson define asymmetry very clearly and precisely: "In the realm of military affairs and national security, asymmetry is acting, organizing, and thinking differently than opponents in order to maximize one's own advantages, exploit an opponent's weaknesses, attain the initiative, or gain greater freedom of action. It can be political-strategic, military strategic, operational, or a combination of these. It can entail different methods, technologies, values, organizations, time perspectives, or some combination of these. It can be short-term or long-term. (...) It can have both psychological and physical dimensions" (Metz, Johnson, 2001).

Asymmetric conflicts, especially against the backdrop of interstate, ethnic, and civil conflicts, are the most likely threats to the sovereignty of a vulnerable state. An asymmetric attack may be direct or indirect. It could be used in covert or overt ways to undermine the foundations of the elements of national power and threaten the "Centre of Gravity". The ability to harness the unpredictability of their tactics gives the insurgent force a key advantage over even the most formidable armies. Ivan Arreguin-Toft, in his article on *How the Weak Win Wars* (2001), describes two different strategies which have been traditionally used by strong actors against weak actors: direct attack – the use of military resources to capture or eliminate an adversary's

armed forces. The main goal would be to win the war by destroying the adversary's capacity to engage in an armed struggle. The attacker would typically aim at economic nerve centres such as industrial cities, airports and harbours; barbarism – the systematic violation of the laws of war in pursuit of a military or political objective. Although this may include the use of prohibited weapons like chemical and biological agents, the key characteristic is that non-combatants are also targeted (e.g., the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, August 1945) (Arreguin-Toft, 2001). During the final stage of the Second World War, atomic bombs were dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing at least 129,000 people. It constitutes the only use of nuclear weapons for warfare in human history. The shock of those events caused Emperor Hirohito to intervene and made Japan concede both defeat and unconditional surrender (Kennedy, 1988).

Warfare in the 21st century is a new "animal" – one that looks like its predecessors on the outside but which, on closer examination, reveals itself to be driven by different tactics, different thinking and even a different breed of fighter. Though security experts have largely taken note of this – resulting in a wide range of material that deals with the general topic – they have ignored Sri Lanka's struggle against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). As a result, one would be hard pressed to find more than a handful of works that are as accessible to the general public as they are to more seasoned readers.

In order to address this gap, I have taken a specific approach to the topic. Drawing on my expertise as a theorist, I have taken Sri Lanka as a self-contained case study in asymmetric warfare. Using the lessons and observations that came out of the Eelam War, I have tried to put forward my theories regarding use of asymmetric warfare. The nature of these new dimensions that have emerged in asymmetric warfare unveils how unconventional wars such as guerrilla campaigns can challenge the security apparatus. The modern dimensions of asymmetric warfare related to Sri Lankan context give a great admonition for military strategists as it enhances how a non-state actor can accelerate all its force disrupting the order of the society.



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THE DISTINCTIONS AND SIMILARITIES THAT EXIST BETWEEN THIS NEW STYLE OF WARFARE AND ITS PREVIOUS “INCARNATIONS”

Tactical Asymmetry

The Tamil Tigers had their own judiciary, their own police and even a banking system for the territory they controlled. This paper seeks to explore some of the military tactics of the LTTE and the challenges they posed to the Sri Lankan state. As the world moves into an increasingly globalized capsule, the exchange of information, strategy and technology is now easier than it has ever been before. The story of how the LTTE managed to evolve from a band of young men to a formidable and ruthless terrorist group is indicative of the very future of warfare itself. Non-state actors no longer have any reason to pursue their resistance with conventional tactics – an example like the LTTE clearly demonstrates just how potent asymmetric warfare can be in the hands of an imaginative and unpredictable adversary.

The LTTE extensively used improvised explosive devices, some of which had never been used before, to attack the Sri Lankan armed forces and non combatants. Velupillai Prabhakaran – the leader of the organization – founded the LTTE on 5 May 1976, accusing the Sinhalese majority of having deprived the Tamils of their territory, language, citizenship, economic life, employment and education, thereby destroying all the attributes of their supposed nationhood. In 1983, the group had no armoury and less than 50 hardcore members. Four years later it had registered an astonishing growth rate, becoming a force capable of taking on the Indian armed forces, the fourth largest armed forces in the world (Chandrapaeruma, 2012, p. 45).

The LTTE pioneered the use of suicide bombers in modern warfare and the use of human shields as well. Both tactics demonstrated their ability to completely subvert the traditional norms of warfare, which ultimately provided certain precedents to international terrorism. Considering the example of human shields for instance, the LTTE’s utilization of human beings as protective barriers demonstrated the extent to which their modus operandi focused on the unexpected. The Sri Lankan conflict can be divided into four stages; Eelam War I

(1983-1987), Eelam War II (1990-1995), Eelam War III (1995-2002) and Eelam War IV (2006-2009). Each stage reveals remarkable diversity in the LTTE’s tactics and strategies. Even terrorist groups as infamous as Al Qaeda and insurgents in Iraq have been inspired by the LTTE (Swamy, 2009).

The LTTE was organized into two main components – a military and political wing. A central governing body oversaw both divisions, headed by the organization’s leader himself. The military wing consisted of: an Air Wing with several lightweight aircraft, arguably the world’s first air force owned and controlled by an organization proscribed as a terrorist group; a Naval Wing with large numbers of low profile, lightweight craft; and a Land Force consisting of infantry, artillery, engineers and signallers. Their suicide bombers, the Black Tigers, were a major component of their tactics. Various units specialized in a wide range of military features, as in conventional armed forces. The LTTE also possessed a highly efficient intelligence unit, operating internationally. The LTTE cannot simply be categorized as yet another “irregular” or “guerrilla” fighting force. In addition to their irregular capabilities, they possessed all the attributes of conventional armed forces and had the ability to wage conventional war against the “Centre of Gravity” as well, a fact that is often forgotten today (Gunaratna, 1987). It is important to note at this stage that during the first Eelam War, the Sri Lankan Armed Forces were not that technologically advanced. Despite their numerical superiority over the LTTE, the guerrilla tactics used by the latter overcame the disadvantage. The LTTE’s basic strategy could be defined as the “3 M”s. (lb.)

In the history of warfare, asymmetries of organization have also been important. In order to balance the numerical disparity, the LTTE mobilized civilians for their war efforts. Through innovation in their organization, they acquired an advantage that they did not have in the conventional sense. (Stokke, 2006). As an insurgent movement, the LTTE realized that their strength lay in their people and in the civilians who supported them. The LTTE developed and manufactured its own weapons and ordinance. To enhance their own firepower, they invented weapons similar to mortars. One of them was the Baba Mortar which had a maximum range of 1-2 kilometres. It was followed



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by the Pasilan 2000, a heavy mortar or anti-mortar, which had the characteristics of a rocket launcher. The warhead carried 25-30 kg of explosives and reports suggest that the latest variant may have had a range of up to 25 km.

The LTTE ordinance factories were also capable of manufacturing improvised anti-personnel mines, anti-tank mines, mortar bombs, sea mines, claymore mines, improvised explosive devices, sub-surface suicide attack crafts and air bombs. Some of their installations proved themselves capable of modifying smaller commercial aircraft into attack aircraft. Those workshops were also able to build a mini submarine.

Maximum Impact and the Psychology of Chaos

For the LTTE, mines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and booby traps provided an integral asymmetric weapon. They knew that the Sri Lankan armed forces had to come forward, so they exploited this opportunity to the fullest. Improvised or clustered claymore mines, with a large quantity of explosives, were commonly employed to optimize casualties. Those mines were carefully camouflaged and activated by remote control devices. The targets were always carefully selected for impact, often military top brass, military convoys, leading political figures and heavily loaded public transport vehicles. Other types of bombs and explosive devices, such as “Johnny Mines” and “Booby Traps” were created specially to target the advancing troops. For that purpose, metal debris and bits of explosives were often utilized to make impromptu anti-personnel booby traps. Those tactics had a profound psychological impact. The objective was not to kill, but to inflict mutilation and sap morale (Ganguly, 2018).

Although it was an irregular force fighting on guerrilla lines, the LTTE did rely on heavily fortified defences, especially in the last phase of the Eelam War. At times it functioned like conventional armed forces defending fortified lines, at others it operated like a guerrilla group. It is the blend of conventional and irregular approaches that made the LTTE so unique. The LTTE had a series of defence lines where they could resist any advancing force. The first defence line comprised an earth bund and camouflaged underground or ground level bunkers every

25 meters. Palmyrah-leaf fences were constructed to avoid observation and sniping from the Sri Lankan military. Minefields were often laid in front of the defence lines, along with improvised anti-personnel mines called “Johnny Mines”. Communication trenches were dug for reinforcements or for withdrawal to the next line of defence to provide combat support. Every approach was lined with “trapping” (Swamy, 2009).

Suicide Attacks

During the early stages, the Tamil Tigers could not afford the heavy conventional weaponry which they needed to confront the Sri Lanka government and the armed forces. To make up for it they recruited the Black Tigers, a special unit of carefully selected and trained cadres to carry out suicide attacks against military and civilian targets. In the true traditions of asymmetric warfare, they created a new and terrifying weapon to compensate for their lack of firepower. That was the human bomb. The employment of the suicide bomber as an offensive weapon, both as a political and military tactic, became part of the modus operandi of the LTTE. It became a regular feature of their armoury, which they deployed time and again. As a psychological weapon, the impact was devastating. The main aim was not just to kill and destroy but to shock, horrify and terrorize.

When analysing these details, it is clear that all assassinations were pre-emptive; intended to prevent potential political and military campaigns against the LTTE. In an interview given a few days before his death, Rajiv Gandhi stated that if he came back to power again, he would send the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to disarm the LTTE. The Tigers were very concerned about the general elections in 1991. They felt that if Rajiv Gandhi came back to power, the IPKF would be sent back again to Sri Lanka. Ranjan Wijeratne was assassinated for similar reasons. He was renowned as an effective and ruthless leader. By 1989 he had just crushed the JVP rebellion and had made it clear that the LTTE was to follow. The list of the LTTE's failures is even more significant. They included suicide attempts on the then President, Chandrika Kumaratunga (18 December 1999), the Secretary of Defence, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa (1 December 2006) and the then Commander of the Sri Lanka Army, General Sarath Fonseka (25 April 2006).



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Urban Ambushes

Ambushes were carried out in an unconventional manner by the LTTE, even in the capital city of Colombo. On 14 August 2006, a convoy carrying the Pakistani High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Bashir Wali Mohamed, was hit by a claymore which was concealed in an auto rickshaw. Speakers made in wooden boxes for the stereo system were a common sight in auto rickshaws all over Sri Lanka. The claymores were concealed inside those speakers and the vehicle was parked on the side of the road, triggering minimal suspicion. While the motorcade was passing by, the mine was activated via remote control.

The High Commissioner escaped unhurt, but seven people (including four Army commandos) were killed and a further seventeen injured in the blast. The objective of the attack was to warn the Government of Pakistan, which had been providing military hardware to the Government of Sri Lanka. The method employed was simple, ingenious and innocuous. The auto rickshaw was an everyday part of the urban scene in Sri Lanka, so widely conspicuous that it was taken for granted. Less than four months later, a similar method was used in the attempt to assassinate the Secretary of Defence Gotabhaya Rajapaksa (DeVotta, 2009).

Modern Dimensions of Counterinsurgency

Sri Lanka is the only country to have defeated terrorism thrice, although this fact is not highlighted much in political or military historical discourse. In 1971, the Sri Lankan military defeated the insurgency in the South, waged by the Janatha Vimukthi Perumana/JVP (Peoples Liberation Front), whose objective at the time was to topple the government. When the JVP re-emerged in 1989 and attempted to overthrow the government once again, it was similarly extinguished. It is noteworthy that in 1971 most of the commanders of the organization were eliminated by the Sri Lankan military, although the leader of the rebellion remained alive; it led to the movement's resurrection 19 years later.

It was only after the elimination of the leader in 1989 that the JVP was unable to re-emerge as a threat. The third instance is of course the defeat of the LTTE, a far more powerful and ruthless organization

than the JVP. It is interesting to observe that, although Velupillai Prabhakaran, the supreme leader of the Tamil Tigers, was eliminated along with all the other levels of leadership, the LTTE are still able to move towards their desired goal of a separate state. The "Centre of Gravity" of modern insurgent and terrorist groups is rooted in their ideology, and as this is intangible the movement does not collapse on itself even if its iconic figures are eliminated. Modern warfare is an interlocking system of political, economic, psychological and military actions that aim to overthrow the established authority of a country (Schmid, 2005). To achieve this end, the aggressor tries to exploit the internal tensions of the country through ideological, social, religious and economic means, using anything which is liable to have profound influence on the population. Clausewitz's principle enunciates that "War therefore is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will".

The LTTE used political rivalries to undermine the government in Sri Lanka in order to avoid a prolonged military campaign against them. Its philosophy was to exploit any and every opportunity to destabilize the country and diminish the national will to fight. It was even able to bring international pressure against the legitimate government and compel it to concede to their own conditions. Military tactics and hardware are essential on a basic level, but are quite useless if one has lost the confidence of the population for whom one is fighting. The battlefield today is no longer a restricted field or area; it can encompass an entire nation challenging the whole notion of sovereignty. The LTTE carried out attacks all over the country; it did not restrict itself only to the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.

Today, victory in combat does not necessarily lead to victory in the conflict. Planning, war gaming, and execution must consider all these implications. One of the weapons used by non-state actors to achieve their aim is terrorism, specifically that which directly targets the nation to make its citizens feel insecure and frightened. This will create an idea that the terrorists are invincible and that the government is no longer capable of defeating them. As a result, recruitment levels for the military campaign will fall drastically as the population begins to believe and then accept that victory cannot be achieved. The loss



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of national will invariably leads to political instability in the country and thereby enables the adversary to achieve its goals.

To counter any insurgency or terrorist campaign, it is vital to identify the adversary with pin-point accuracy. It includes identifying the “Centre of Gravity” at every level of the operation and discovering the decisive points at each stage. In today’s context, it is an enormously difficult task, as the adversary remains faceless. Often the “Centre of Gravity” is not only difficult to identify, sometimes it is invisible. Today, insurgents prefer to form their “Centre of Gravity” on something intangible, leaving counterinsurgency forces in doubt. Although Velupillai Prabhakaran was identified as the “Centre of Gravity” of the LTTE, the organization did not collapse with his elimination in the way that the JVP did.

COMPOSITE WARFARE: THE MODERN DIMENSION OF ASYMMETRIC WARFARE

The concept of weaker states or non-state actors finding innovative ways and means to compensate against a superior adversary is the fundamental basis for asymmetric warfare. They seek to exploit the weakness of the adversary to optimise success. They follow no fixed terms and conditions, no rules of engagement; they have no specific modus operandi and will often have the initiative. Insurgents tend to avoid a fair fight on the battlefield. The “Centre of Gravity” is often invisible, intangible, hard to access and capable of shifting rapidly.

The terrorist always looks for something novel, something original and something innovative to achieve the element of surprise. His main intention is to strike terror and disrupt normalcy in order to create political destabilization. A key characteristic of modern asymmetric warfare is that the primary intention of the non-state actor is almost always to fight a prolonged war. It seeks to fight a prolonged military campaign in order to diminish the national will. It may be achieved by forcing the legitimate state to spend unsustainable amounts of money on national security. If the government views the anticipated costs of preventing future terrorist acts as greater than the costs of granting their demands, it may be tempted to make some accommodation. It is observable in the three decades of prolonged conflict in Sri Lanka that,

whenever the government was in a relatively weaker position, it opted for negotiations with the LTTE.

President J.R. Jayewardene (1978-1989) had to go for a ceasefire accord as he was unable to fight the LTTE with an insurgency already raging in the South and could not continue with military operations under pressure from India. When Chandrika Kumaratunga (1994-2005) was elected as the President with a clear margin, she was new to politics and thus preferred negotiations. In 2002, when the opposition United National Party (UNP) won a majority in the legislature, there was political turmoil in the country and the economy was unable to support the military campaign. This led Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe (1993-1994, 2001-2004) to opt for negotiations, compromising several vital aspects critical to national security. President Mahinda Rajapaksa had to initially continue with the negotiations when he won the election in 2005 by a small margin and gradually consolidated his political stability until he had the power to fight a military campaign (Gunaratna, 2016).

Asymmetric approaches in military conflicts may include suicide bombers, the use of improvised explosive devices, civilian populations as human shields, hostage taking, assassinations of key persons, cyber attacks and jeopardizing information networks. Asymmetric approaches can be applied on all levels of war. Irrespective of the level, these methods are always used to achieve a decisive strategic effect. This study argues that there are also other approaches, all of which were utilized by the LTTE – political, diplomatic, economic and propaganda tools, the use of cyber space and the exploitation of the diaspora. However, victory in combat does not always lead to victory in the conflict.

During the Vietnam War, for example, the Viet Cong forces were crushed by the American forces in most of the direct confrontations. In 1968 the Viet Cong main force was almost annihilated during the Tet Offensive. But politically, the Viet Cong disaster became very important to the Communist cause (Mack, 1975). American public support for the war declined dramatically after the Tet Offensive, as the true realities and the destruction of the Viet Cong main force was hardly reported in the Western press, thereby giving a media victory to the Viet Cong,



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especially due to the heavy collateral damage. It resulted in a decline in the national will of the Americans to fight the war. It even led to a change of presidents in the USA and the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam.

Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969), who sent the first American troops to South Vietnam in March 1965, was replaced by Richard Nixon (1969-1974) in the next election. Nixon eventually signed the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973, officially ending the American direct involvement in Vietnam. Similarly, although the end of the war on the ground has given peace to Sri Lanka, this peace is still fragile in nature. The Diaspora continues its battle in cyberspace and in the streets of foreign countries to undermine the territorial integrity of the country (Amarasinghe, 2020, p. 178). The Tamil National Alliance continues to demand more power to the Northern Provincial Councils through the full implementation of the 13th amendment to the constitution. During the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), the French forces crushed the Algerian rebels; however, Algeria eventually gained independence. There are arguments that the international community should be involved in creating a Tamil homeland in the North and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka, as in Kosovo or East Timor. Hence, the territorial integrity of the country remains threatened despite the military victory.

It was believed that once the leadership is eliminated, any terrorist organization would eventually collapse. Between 1987 and 1989, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) rebellion in the South of Sri Lanka presented a potent threat to the Government. The elimination of the JVP leader, Rohana Wijeweera, in 1989 caused the rebellion to collapse. The “*Centre of Gravity*” of the LTTE was believed to be its leader as well. However, despite the death of Velupillai Prabhakaran and many senior leaders of the LTTE, the threat still remains. Although a successful military campaign was hitherto seen as the dawn of peace, the threat to territorial integrity and sovereignty remains unchanged in modern conflicts even after military success. One could also make similar observations about Al Qaeda since the elimination of Osama Bin Laden. It is thus clear that this is a new type of warfare, one that cannot be won simply by eliminating the leader, since he is no longer

the “*Centre of Gravity*”. This new warfare exploits military, political, economic, diplomatic, cyber and propaganda opportunities to achieve the desired ultimate objective. As it is composed of a mixture of methods and elements of different types of warfare and other elements essential to destroy national power, this kind of warfare can be described as “*Composite Warfare*”.

Aiming at bringing about conditions to create a Tamil homeland, the LTTE developed a unique warfare strategy to fight against the Government of Sri Lanka. The tactics they adopted were original and innovative; cutting across traditional military boundaries, they encompassed many varieties of warfare. The LTTE started its struggle by using guerrilla tactics. Initially they could not fight against the numerically superior Sri Lanka Armed Forces so they resorted to fast moving “*hit and run*” tactics. The methods that they used have been defined by military theorists as irregular. This constitutes focusing on the population to influence or gain control through political, psychological, and economic methods. As they became stronger, the LTTE began to combine irregular and conventional tactics as tools to overcome their numerical and technological inferiority. Simultaneously, using regular forces and an irregular or guerrilla force, they increased their military leverage by applying both conventional and unconventional force at the same time. It conforms to many of the criteria of which military thinkers have termed Compound Warfare (Huber, 2011). As its circumstances changed and its resources grew, the LTTE's strategies evolved, becoming more sophisticated, more subtle and more complex.

Thus, the later stages of the Eelam War see a blend of conventional and irregular military activities with non-violent means and persuasion, as well as economic and political influence, to achieve the desired end. It has been described as hybrid warfare. All of these methods were directed with the objectives of shattering the overall cohesion of the Sri Lankan state and its will to fight. As the British Manoeuvrist Approach to Warfare tells us, it calls for an attitude of mind in which doing the unexpected and seizing the initiative is combined with a ruthless determination to succeed. This seems to define the LTTE.



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CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I have tried to think about the different theories and definitions of asymmetric warfare and attempted to relate them to the Eelam War. The LTTE's tactics and its strategy seem to embody all these different characteristics. The method that they pursued was composed of many elements; some of them are well known, tried and tested, some are new and original. The result is a new dimension of asymmetric warfare.

The focus of the LTTE was "Mind Space". Targeting "Mind Space" as opposed to "Land Space", their strategies concentrated on diminishing the national will and the morale of the soldiers. Non-combatants were often targeted. Mass massacres targeting Sinhalese and Muslims were conducted at villages close to their areas of control. Bombs would explode in major cities, often on public transport. The aim was to strike terror in the hearts of citizens and force the government to bring an end to the violence. Targeting the economy led to a rise in the cost of living, rapidly making the ruling government unpopular. These tactics had the twin effects of preventing military campaigns and forcing weaker governments to concede to their terms and conditions. Wide publicity was given to their attacks within a short period of time, both locally and internationally. As a result, the LTTE was able to portray itself as an invincible force. It caused the Sri Lankan military huge problems in its recruitment campaign (Hoffman, 2002).

Another overriding characteristic is the complete lack of value for collateral damage. The LTTE did not value life in the pursuit of their objectives. All cadres wore suicide capsules around their necks in case they were captured or about to be captured. They were assassinated on any suspicion of betrayal. If they could not be evacuated after being wounded on the battlefield they would be killed. The LTTE used suicide bombers extensively during their attacks. Civilians were used as human shields. Their artillery was located near civilian areas, with the Sri Lankan military's counter bombardment units in mind. Before the final attack was launched, Prabhakaran refused to let civilians leave.

During the Humanitarian Operation, when civilians gathered in large numbers to make the crossing or to board an ICRC boat, the LTTE rounded on those attempting to leave and shot at them. This complete

lack of value for destruction and the loss of human life gave the LTTE an advantage over the government, which had to factor in political, diplomatic, economic and material costs. Marking the difference between state and non-state actors, in the future, it makes the actions of any terrorist group difficult to predict, as often they cannot be imagined. The end product, however, is often easier to forecast – instability, insecurity and fear.

This is a key distinguishing feature of "Composite Warfare". It was believed that Prabhakaran's leadership was the "Centre of Gravity" of the LTTE. Many military thinkers including the Sri Lankan military assumed that eliminating Prabhakaran would be the end of Tamil separatism. However, even 15 years after the elimination of not just Prabhakaran but the entire top leadership of the LTTE, the threat has not disappeared. The time has come to reconsider what the "Centre of Gravity" of the LTTE was.

Prabhakaran was perhaps the military or operational "Centre of Gravity". But it is the ideology of the LTTE, its demand for a separate homeland, which is the true centre. This is something intangible and this is why it continues to endure. A tangible "Centre of Gravity" can be eliminated and, as a result, the organization will collapse. Intangibles, however, cannot be eliminated in this way. Ideologies continue to live on; they motivate, inspire and instigate generations who adhere to that ideology. It will take a long period of time and a strategic and cognitive, behavioural approach which is asymmetric in nature to counter this intangible "Centre of Gravity".

It is clear that the LTTE adopted various strategies to destabilize the Government of Sri Lanka. Their tactics varied from guerrilla to conventional warfare, aiming to attack elements of national power and giving paramount importance to diminishing the national will. The LTTE started their campaign using primary level guerrilla tactics, but developed into a formidable force, which succeeded in keeping at bay the Indian armed forces, the fourth largest in the world.

The LTTE is the only group to have successfully assassinated two world leaders – Rajiv Gandhi of India in 1991 and Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka in 1993. In both instances, the LTTE carried out extremely well planned and orchestrated suicide strikes



Prabhakaran was perhaps the military or operational "Centre of Gravity". But it is the ideology of the LTTE, its demand for a separate homeland, which is the true centre. This is something intangible and this is why it continues to endure. A tangible "Centre of Gravity" can be eliminated and, as a result, the organization will collapse.



that successfully breached the tightest Indian and Sri Lankan security cordons. A critical intervention in the politics of both countries, it was a decisive factor in determining which government or leader would govern India and Sri Lanka.

The LTTE adopted all types of warfare strategy. They also had the ability to influence global scenarios in their favour. Characteristics of irregular warfare, compound warfare, hybrid warfare and guerrilla warfare were commonly used. Many of the LTTE's approaches were unique to them and thus cannot be placed under a single form of warfare existing at present. It is thus clear that the LTTE used all the dimensions in a way which would help them to achieve their objective. It is this mixture of many existing approaches and their exploitation of the intangible "Centre of Gravity" which distinguishes modern asymmetric warfare from other types of warfare. As it is a mixture of strategies, warfare styles, concepts and tactics, I have defined it as "Composite Warfare". It is vital that practitioners and theorists should identify that this is a new brand of warfare that is, by its very nature, far more dangerous than previous "incarnations" of asymmetric conflicts.

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