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**1983 - 2001**

**A Critical Evaluation of the International Role of the  
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the  
Response of the Government of Sri Lanka  
From 1983 to 2001**

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## ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is a country with a multi-ethnic society. While the Sinhalese constitute the major ethnic group in the country, the Sri Lankan Tamils form the principle community among the minority groups. Even before Sri Lanka gained independence differences of opinion began to surface among the leaders of these two communities regarding the sharing of power in the political and administrative sectors and in the post-independence Sri Lanka. These differences developed into what has now come to be known as 'the ethnic conflict.' The long- drawn ethnic crisis between these two ethnic groups and the resultant civil war between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan security forces has become the main problems the Sri Lankan government has been facing since the 1980s.

The LTTE which is a major contributor to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka can be considered as a terrorist movement or a guerrilla organization. It can however, be best described as a movement that oscillate between guerrilla warfare and terrorism. Further there is also a view that the LTTE is a national liberation movement since it is functioning as the main representative of Tamil nationalism. But at a close examination of their activities it may be problematic to characterize it national liberation movement.

At the beginning, the activities of the LTTE were confined to the Northern and Eastern provinces but after the anti Tamil violence unleashed in 1983 they

extended their activities to India and other foreign countries. This laid the foundation for the setting up of an international network for the LTTE, which initially received the support of the Indian Government. In addition it received the unofficial support from other countries besides India, based on the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora.

In this way, there came in to being an ethnic community of Sri Lankan Tamils, based on the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora living in countries outside India. The international machinery of the LTTE have been based on this Tamil community living in countries such as Canada, United States, Britain, France, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Australia. This consists mainly of three kinds of activity, namely propaganda, fund-raising and procurement of arms.

The course of action adopted by the Sri Lankan government to face the LTTE challenge can be described a two fold military and non military. The non-military course of action included the steps taken to re-consolidate the relation with India, working towards a political solution internally, launching variety of programmes to minimize the violations of human rights and the efforts to win the good-will of other foreign countries. While taking steps in this manner to counter-act the LTTE opposition non- militarily, the Sri Lankan government was also forced to conduct military operations against them. Accordingly a number of strategies were adopted to counter the LTTE militarily, by increasing the numerical strength of the security forces, setting of special force units , improving in the intelligence services, procuring

of high quality and ultra-modern weapons, launching of offensive and strategic military operations and enlisting the support of Tamil groups opposed to the LTTE.

The response of the Sri Lankan government for the LTTE propaganda in the international arena produced mixed results. The counter strategy launched by the Sri Lankan government was not wholly successful or unsuccessful. The failure of the Sri Lankan government to launch an effective propaganda campaign was a result of the support the LTTE received from the Tamil population in the Northern and Eastern Provinces as well as the Tamil Diaspora for its struggle.

It must however be mentioned that the various measures adopted by the Sri Lankan government since 1994 against the LTTE activities in the international arena did meet with a certain amount of success. This went a long way in making a number of foreign countries change their earlier opinions and attitudes towards the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and banning the LTTE by a number of countries such as the USA and Great Britain .

This study concentrates on the international role of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eealm, during the period 1983-2001 and the response of the Sri Lankan government towards it. However beyond this period, a 22 month old cease-fire agreement between the LTTE and Sri Lankan government and a peace process of several rounds of talk had come into effect. Therefore, a record of the developments that took place during the years 2002 and 2003 too was included in this narrative. The

research methodology of this study was based on the historical method. Primary and secondary resources constitute the sources of main data. Published works, journals, newspapers and pamphlets relevant to the study were extensively consulted. The internet also extensively used in soliciting information.