

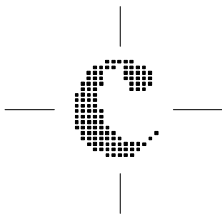
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Sri Lanka:
Political-Military Relations

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Introduction¹

There is an amazing variety of policies and experiences in civil-military relations in the successor states of the British *raj* and the empire in South Asia. Sri Lanka was not part of the *raj*, and always had a more civilian-oriented government system under colonial rule. Like India, Sri Lanka too has had a long and virtually unbroken tradition of democratic rule since independence; both countries have had an unbroken record of subordination of the military to the civil authority. Unlike in India, Sri Lanka has had two abortive coup attempts in 1962 and 1966. Again, post-independence Sri Lanka provides an interesting case study in the expansion and indeed virtual creation of combat-oriented security services and a defence establishment in response to the rise of an aggressive separatist movement. Much of that expansion took place over the 15 years beginning in 1985-86. Despite the creation of a very large security force, there has been no attempt since the early and mid-1960s for the military to play a role in Sri Lankan politics, much less to subordinate the civil power to its authority.

It is all too easy to assume that the current subordination of the military to the civilian authority in Sri Lanka is a perpetuation of the practice and tradition of British rule in South Asia, in the *raj* and Empire, where there was a clear subordination of military to civilian authority. The record – as we shall see – was not all that clear. Despite its geographical location in close proximity to the British *raj* – the territories presently constituting India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (and Myanmar itself for a time) – Sri Lanka was not part of the *raj*. As a crown colony Sri Lanka inherited a more civilian-oriented administration than the countries which emerged from the *raj*. Civilian control over the military was a central feature of administration in the *raj*, as it was in a colony such as Sri Lanka, but the military was a much more powerful presence there than it was in colonial Sri Lanka where even the police force was relatively small. Moreover, Sri Lanka, traditionally, has taken pride in its social welfare system developed since the mid-1930s. The price it paid for this was the neglect of its security services.

¹ This paper has been written in the framework of the research project entitled ‘Coping with Internal Conflict Project’ (CICP) executed by the Conflict Research Unit (CRU) of the Netherlands Institute of International relations ‘Clingendael’ for the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The CICP consists of four different components, namely ‘Power Sharing’, ‘Political Military Relations’, ‘Political Economy of Internal Conflict’ and ‘Resources, Entitlements and Poverty -related Conflict’.

2 The Armed Services in a Period of Change: 1949-1966

In less than 10 years after their post-independence foundation, Sri Lanka's armed forces confronted some of those difficult issues that have caused so much turmoil in other newly independent states. These included politicisation in appointments and promotions; concerns over religious identity and ethnicity in the officer corps of the services; and the use of the armed services in support of the police during civil disturbances – a particularly sensitive issue on which the armed services everywhere have generally been very wary.

Beginning with the army, the two other security services were formally established in 1949, more than a year after independence. Just as significantly the first commanders of the Sri Lankan army, navy and air force were seconded British officers, while the nucleus of the officer corps of the army consisted of men who had been commissioned in the late 1930s or early 1940s, and had served during world war II. Most of the officers of the new regular army had served in the old volunteer units. Once the regular army was established, the former Ceylon Defence Force reverted to its earlier designation of Volunteer Force, and each regular army unit had a parallel unit of volunteers. As early as 1953 volunteers were called in to reinforce the regulars in dealing with civil disturbances, a *hartal* called by left-wing forces. Such duties came at irregular intervals; generally the army was a parade ground force wheeled out on ceremonial occasions. At this stage, the *esprit de corps* of the armed forces and the police had not been damaged by the divisive forces of ethnicity and religion as they were after the mid-1950s.

The most striking feature of the ethnic and religious composition of the officer corps of the army – the largest of the armed services by far – in the early and mid-1950s, was the over-representation in it of the Tamils and Burghers (a minuscule community of Dutch and Portuguese extraction), the latter far out of proportion to their numbers in the population. More significantly in relation to the problems of the next decade, Sinhalese-Buddhists, who were just above two-thirds of the population, formed only two-fifths of the officer corps in the pre-1956 period, while Christians – Sinhalese and Tamil – less than a tenth of the population, were over-represented by a factor of six. The rank and file of the army, on the other hand, reflected much more accurately the demographic profile of the country, with the Sinhalese forming about 70% of the other ranks.

In just over 10 years after the establishment of the army, however, the Sinhalese began to be over-represented in the officer corps as well. The principal factor in that over-representation was, undoubtedly the change of government in 1956 marking the beginnings of a period of ethnic confrontation interspersed by outbreaks of violence in 1956 and 1958. Perceptible changes in the criteria used in appointments to the higher bureaucracy – the elite Ceylon Civil Service – could be seen very early in S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's period of office as Prime Minister (1956-59), changes in which neither seniority nor proven ability received as much attention as they did in the past. Similar changes in the equivalent grades in the police and armed services came much more slowly. The first of the changes came in the police force late in 1958 when the post of Inspector General of Police (IGP)

became vacant, and the Prime Minister overlooking the claims of the three deputies to the IGP reached out to the public service to find a man whom he regarded was a suitable IGP. The three deputies were all Christians, one a Roman Catholic and the other two were brothers from a Protestant Christian background. The new IGP was a Buddhist. The message was clear: religious affiliation was an important consideration in appointments to politically-sensitive posts such as that of the IGP. The armed services were spared such changes till the early 1960s, i.e., till after Bandaranaike's assassination and the succession of his widow Sirimavo Bandaranaike as Prime Minister in July 1960.

When anti-Tamil riots erupted in Colombo and elsewhere in the wake of the changes in language policy introduced in May 1956, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike had to rely on the armed services to put them down. While the situation was quickly brought under control by the armed services acting in support of the police, and through a resort to the Public Security Act, the continuing political crisis resulting from the debates and negotiations on changes in language policy left little room for any active interference in appointments to the armed services. In May-June 1958 there was a much longer period under emergency regulations as the armed services brought the second of the ethnic riots of this period under control.

With the assassination of its leader, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in September 1959 the SLFP was led to another decisive electoral victory in July 1960 under his widow, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and it was in 1961, during her first period as Prime Minister, (1960-65), that the armed services were used for the first time, in the Tamil areas of the country, against a civil disobedience movement. Very little has been written about this episode partly because there were no casualties in this peaceful episode and partly because it preceded more significant events. In less than a year the hitherto untroubled relationship of subordination of the armed services to civilian authority first came under great strain. These strains appeared when she sought to increase the number of Sinhalese-Buddhists in the officer corps of the armed services and the police, and to give greater influence to them in the running of the armed services and police. At the time she came to power, fewer than half the officers commissioned in army line units were Sinhalese. Major shifts in the ethnic and religious composition of the police and army officer corps became evident almost as soon as she came to power. These were accelerated after an abortive *coup d'état* in 1962. Political divisions were less sharply focussed, but were growing in prominence.

One of the paradoxes of civil-military relations in Sri Lanka is that the two coup attempts of the 1960s came at a time when there were no significant episodes of civil commotion in the form of anti-government political agitation, or ethnic tensions that erupted into episodes of violence, and when, moreover, the armed services were so much smaller than they were to become in the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast the tradition of the subordination of the military to civilian authority has prevailed throughout the much more turbulent 1980s and 1990s when the Sri Lankan state faced a severe threat from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), and when – as in 1988-90 – the very survival of the state was at stake. Apart from the abortive coup attempts of 1962 and 1966, there has been no attempt by the military to play a role in Sri Lankan politics, much less to subordinate the civil power to its authority.

In seeking to explain how this could have happened, one can only make some tentative hypotheses. The

1960s were a time when military regimes still had the reputation of being more efficient and less corrupt than civilian authorities. Pakistan under Ayub Khan seemed to be doing much better than that country's civilian politicians in holding it together and at stimulating economic growth; some of the leaders of the abortive coup of 1962 in Sri Lanka regarded him and his experiment in "indirect" democracy as a model to be emulated in Sri Lanka then in the throes of its first phase of the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict, and in the penultimate phase of the conflict between the Buddhists and Roman Catholics. All the coup leaders blamed the governing party for the ill-effects of their populist policies: turmoil in the form of ethnic riots; economic stagnation if not decline; and political instability. They believed they had a remedy for all this, in the substitution of a Sri Lankan form of "indirect" democracy under the rule of a *junta* of ex-prime ministers.

Fortunately for Sri Lankan democracy the coup never got off to a start; one of the plotters got cold feet and leaked the information to his father-in-law, a MP in the ranks of the ruling party. Had the coup succeeded, Sri Lanka's subsequent political evolution would have followed the Pakistani or Bangladeshi pattern, not the Indian. Its failure strengthened Sri Lankan democracy but not without adverse effects on the country. Since the bulk of the leaders from the armed services and the police belonged to the country's religious and ethnic minorities, the purge of the officer corps – of the armed services and police – that followed transformed the armed services and police into overwhelmingly Sinhalese-Buddhist entities.

When a United National Party (UNP) led coalition was in power shortly afterwards (1965-70) there was yet another abortive coup attempt. The objectives of the coup plotters of 1966 could only be understood in the context of the radical changes in the ethnic and religious composition of the armed services and to a lesser extent the police force made under Mrs. Bandaranaike. This time the conspirators – with one exception – were subalterns and non-commissioned officers, Buddhists to a man, and intent on protecting the Sinhalese-Buddhist identity of the armed services from any possible dilution by the new government. Also prosecuted on this occasion as being part of the conspiracy were General Richard Udugama, the army's commanding officer who had enjoyed the confidence and support of Mrs. Bandaranaike when she was Prime Minister (1960-65), and a powerful *bhikkhu* (member of the Buddhist order) well-known for his political sympathies (which were with Mrs. Bandaranaike) and political activities. The prosecution failed to establish its case and the accused were discharged by the courts. The fragmentary evidence that is available about the motives of those engaged in this futile enterprise would appear to suggest that they hoped to ensure that the recently established Sinhalese-Buddhist dominance in the armed services would not be reversed through the change of government that had taken place in 1965.

Not surprisingly one consequence of the failure of the coup of 1962 had been a purge of the officer corps since the coup leaders were senior officers in the army, the police and the navy, almost all of them Christians, Roman Catholics or Protestants. The guiding spirit in this drastic process of reconstitution of the officer corps of the armed services and the police was religion not ethnic identity, an important aspect of the long conflict between Buddhist and Christian in Sri Lankan society which was reaching its climax at this time.

The third phase in the changing composition of the officer corps of the armed services came in 1970 when Sirimavo Bandaranaike was back in power at the head of the United Front coalition between her party and two Marxist groups. The commissions of a number of officers were withdrawn. This time the guiding principle was not religious identity but political conviction if not affiliation. Anyone suspected of not toeing the new political line of the left-of-centre coalition that Mrs. Bandaranaike led was removed, and for the first time influential political appointees were introduced into the army, at least one of whom – a kinsman of the Prime Minister – was

an active politician and continued to be one during his brief and not very distinguished career in the regular army (this individual, Anuruddha Ratwatte, later became Deputy Minister of Defence in the current PA government in 1994). The rank and file, both in the armed services and the police, were by now overwhelmingly Sinhalese and Buddhist.

3 The Military Confronts Armed Rebels: 1971-1977

The first serious threat to the security of the state was the insurgency of 1971, led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) which combined a fiery Marxism with an equally fiery Sinhalese nationalism. Since the JVP attacks were concentrated on the ill-equipped police force and the principal targets were police stations, it required the intervention of the three services, the army, navy and air force, to repel this threat to national security. Although the security forces quelled this insurgency with ease, they were seen to be both undermanned and grossly ill-equipped in terms of *materiel* when they confronted this unexpected upsurge of politically-motivated violence. At the request of Mrs. Bandaranaike's coalition government, the United Front, a small number of Indian troops were rushed to the island to defend Colombo's international airport, while the Indian navy patrolled the seas to prevent ingress of *materiel* that could help the insurgents.

In the wake of the JVP attacks, there were some efforts, in 1971-74, to provide the armed services and the police with more modern equipment. However, the additional expenditure incurred did not amount to an increase of more than 2% to 3% in the defence expenditure in the annual budget. This increase was not sustained into the mid-and late 1970s despite the perceptible change in the politics of the north of the island and the beginning of a threat from Tamil separatist forces operating from there, a threat that had a transnational aspect because of the support these separatist activists enjoyed from their co-ethnics in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

The point to be emphasised is that it was the JVP, a Sinhalese group, which first resorted to armed violence against the state. The armed attacks on the police and security services by Tamil separatist groups came a few years later. To what extent they were emulating the example set by the JVP is not clear. From the outset, however, there was an external or regional aspect to Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu was a great reservoir of Tamil identity just across the narrow and shallow seas that separate the Jaffna peninsula, in the north of the island, the principal centre of Tamil habitation in the island, from southern India. Once a separatist movement emerged among the Tamils of Sri Lanka it was fostered, nurtured and protected by Tamil Nadu.

Equally relevant for our purposes is that the security forces and in particular, the police, stationed in the north of the island were soon sucked into the vortex of Jaffna's increasingly turbulent politics. Law enforcement proper in Jaffna, naturally, was the work of the police, a multi-ethnic but largely Tamil force. There had always been Sinhalese in all ranks of the police force in the Jaffna peninsula and quite often they were regarded, by sections of the Tamils themselves, as impartial arbiters in conflicts whenever and wherever caste issues were a factor. But the attitude of the Tamils to the police and the security forces stationed there began to change in the 1960s and with it their view of the role these forces played.

In the Jaffna peninsula, the principal centre of Tamil residence in the island, the police began to be seen as part of the state's security network devised to keep the Tamils down. The police and security forces themselves

were often compelled to take hard decisions for reasons that were perceptibly political. Once the phenomenon of youth unrest and violence came to dominate the political scene in the north, the police force found that the boundary between the routine business of maintaining law and order on the one hand and political activity on the other became increasingly blurred. Tamil officers in the police force faced an impossibly difficult conflict of loyalties, between their commitment to their duties, and their own ethnic identity. The result was that more Sinhalese officers were sent to the north, for the government regarded Tamil officers as either unreliable or ineffective. Thus the police force in the north had larger numbers of Sinhalese than in the past while the smaller security forces became largely Sinhalese in composition. Their lack of proficiency in Tamil widened the gulf between them and the people among whom they served.

Attacks on the police became a regular feature of Tamil political activity, and as these increased and were intensified, normal law enforcement activity of the police became much more difficult than it had been before. By the late 1970s the police in Jaffna were seen to be incapable, any longer, of maintaining law and order, and when this happened the army was called in occasionally to back up the police. In time these calls on the army became more frequent.

4 Militarisation and Ethnic Conflict: 1977-2000

One of the features of this period was a reliance on the security services during frequent episodes of ethnic conflict, beginning with the outbreak of ethnic violence in 1977, just after the UNP government took office, the most serious episode of rioting since 1958. After a lull there was another episode of violence in 1981, of brief duration and restricted to a few localities. Then came the riots of 1983. These surpassed anything that had happened before, both in the geographical range of the disturbances and their intensity. Thereafter, the conflict between the security services and Tamil separatists has been a central feature of the island's history.

It must be emphasised that the regular use of the armed forces to quell disturbances did not lead to any relaxation of civilian control over them. From 1977 to early 1983 the UNP government, quite deliberately, abstained from imposing a state of emergency during outbreaks of violence since the use of the Public Security Act would give the armed services too much independent authority despite the control over the armed services by the civilian executive. With the establishment of the executive presidency in 1978 under the new constitution introduced that year the President of the Republic became Commander-in-Chief of the armed services. The post of Secretary of the Ministry of Defence went to a political associate of the President, a Colonel in the army reserve service. His appointment breached a well-established tradition under which this position had been held hitherto by a senior member of the higher bureaucracy. In 1981, moreover, the retiring head of the army was brought in as secretary of defence, evidence of the government's perception that military expertise was essential in this key post in the changed circumstances. From 1981 to the end of 1994 a succession of retired army chiefs held this post. While this important change did not reduce, in any way, the principle of civilian control over the armed forces, the effects of this mechanism on the co-ordination of the growth of the armed services needs to be studied. So far, there has been no attempt to do so.

With the victory of the People's Alliance at the elections of 1994, Chandananda de Silva, the former Commissioner of Elections, a senior member of the higher bureaucracy, was brought in as Secretary of Defence, a reversion to the practice that had prevailed before 1977. Along with him there was a senior military officer – a General normally – serving as a co-ordinator of the armed services on active duty.

From the last quarter of 1983 there was a qualitative change in the nature of the separatist threat to the Sri Lanka government. There was a purposeful challenge from Tamil separatist forces with their attacks becoming more daring in scope and powerful in impact. The government responded as it did in the case of the JVP insurgency by a resort to force through the security services; and in 1984-85 with a new institutional structure for these services – which is referred to below – and new policies. For the first time since independence a very urgent need was felt for a rapid increase in the number of personnel in the armed services and the police as well as modernisation of their equipment to match those in the possession of the Tamil separatists, all of which resulted in a substantial increase in the budgetary allocation for defence. In the early stages of the rapid expansion of the army

discipline was often poor and there was also a lowering of morale in the face of setbacks. There were frequent charges of attacks on civilians; certainly there was evidence to support some of these charges.

The fact is that by the early part of 1984 the army was the only law enforcement agency left in Jaffna in the north of the island, the main separatist stronghold. The guerrilla forces were now much larger, much better trained, and much better equipped than they were before. This training – much of it in India under the auspices of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and other agencies of the Indian government – and equipping of guerrilla forces had begun well before the riots of July 1983, but there is no mistaking the intensification of these processes as a result of the violence inflicted on the Tamils in July 1983. Tamil Nadu had always been a ready haven for these guerrilla forces, but now the support they received was strengthened immeasurably, as was the extent of the protection they enjoyed.

The perception of the army – in particular – in Jaffna as a group or groups of ill-disciplined young men with a predilection for violence directed against civilians was something new, and a change that emerged as a result of a confluence of two others: a change in the composition of the forces – they became largely Sinhalese and Buddhist – and a fundamental change in the nature of the problem they confronted in their traditional role of the peace keepers of the last resort. In earlier phases in Sri Lanka's post-independence cycles of ethnic violence, that is to say in the mid and late 1950s, the army had earned the plaudits of the Tamils as a tough and impartial peace keeping force that cracked down hard on trouble makers and refused to be intimidated by politicians, however highly placed they may have been, when such persons sought to protect those who disturbed the peace.

There was a distinct improvement in the discipline and morale of the army by the beginning of 1985, and that was before the post of the General Officer Commanding the Joint Operations Command was created to take overall charge of security forces, and to co-ordinate security operations, a major structural innovation which has been maintained in some form ever since. The new post was also necessitated by the rapid increase in the size of the armed services between 1982 and 1986 when the personnel in the armed services increased from around 15,000 to 30,000. The increases that came after 1986 were more numerically significant.

Even as late as 1978, the annual expenditure on defence was only US\$ 40 million, or 1.5% of the Gross National Product (GNP). In 1985, J.W. Bjorkman, an American observer of Sri Lanka's welfare policies made the point that Sri Lanka "unlike its South Asian neighbours or even most other countries of the third world is virtually demilitarised." Saadet Deger in a study of the economic effects of military expenditure in the third world made the same point a year later, even more emphatically. Ironically just at the time these comments were published – i.e., 1985-86 – large sums of money were being diverted to the expansion and modernisation of the armed services in response to the threat posed by the Tamil separatist activists and the guerrilla and terrorist groups associated with them.

By 1985 expenditure on the armed services had risen to US\$ 215 million or 3.5% of the GNP, and this steep increase in the level of expenditure has been maintained since then thus diverting to defence purposes money that would normally have gone to the maintenance and expansion of Sri Lanka's welfare state, or on roads and telecommunications. Defence expenditure as a proportion of the annual national budget reached 16.8% in 1987 by which time the total number of security personnel had reached around 75,000 consisting of the army, navy, air force, police and paramilitary forces. The police had developed its own paramilitary wing, the Special Task Force

(STF) which combined police duties with security operations in the eastern region. The other paramilitary group was the home guard, armed peasants given the task of defending their villages in the periphery of the Tamil districts or within them, from attacks by Tamil guerrilla bands whose incursions in which unarmed civilians were the deliberately chosen victims could not be checked in any other way.

Successive Sri Lanka governments resorted to a two-pronged policy in dealing with the threat posed by the Tamil separatist activists. A military response was often accompanied by political negotiations, while the priority given to one or the other of these depended on the success achieved or the political pressures exerted by and from India. The salient features of this two-pronged policy are summarised here. Throughout the period 1984 to 1986 negotiations for a political settlement continued sporadically against the background of regular outbursts of ethnic violence, especially in the north and east of the island, and conflicts between the security forces and Tamil guerrillas and terrorist groups. India was drawn into the conflict in the 1980s as a mediator but eventually became a combatant. She had other roles as well: especially in internationalising the conflict, through the use of her diplomatic missions in the more important capital cities of the western world and in initiating or lending support to moves at the UN and in UN sub-committees to espouse the cause of Sri Lanka's Tamils. This was apart from providing assistance, moral, financial and military – including training facilities and the supply and shipment of arms – to Tamil separatist groups. India's involvement in Sri Lankan affairs reached its apogee with the Indo-Sri Lanka peace accord of 1987.

With the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord on 29 July 1987 the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) arrived in the island. Peace keepers soon became combatants, against the LTTE forces and their allies, and grew from a small force of 5,000-7,000 men into an Indian army of around 100,000 men, almost as large as the Soviet army then in Afghanistan, and bigger than the British content of the Indian army of the *raj* in its heyday in the late 19th century and early 20th century. The Indian forces brought to the island operated independent of the Sri Lankan forces. Despite assertions by the then Sri Lanka President that the IPKF was subject to his direction and authority, the ground reality was that the IPKF forces took their orders from the Indian government.

The Indo-Sri Lanka accord of July 1987, like the other well-publicised accords negotiated by Rajiv Gandhi in India (in Punjab and Assam), failed in nearly all its objectives. Worse still were the consequences that flowed from it: apart from the failure to pacify Jaffna, it precipitated a serious political crisis in the Sinhalese areas of the country. The signing of the accord had led to violent protests, in and around Colombo and parts of the south-west coast, among the most serious anti-government riots since independence. The government forces took three days to a week to quell the riots and they were able to do so only because of the rapid transport by air (by the Indian air force) of several thousand Sri Lankan troops from Jaffna. Although the IPKF was never seen outside the north and east of the island (save perhaps in the North-Central province on their way to the east coast) its shadow lay across the country's political landscape. Its presence in the country was exploited, politically, against the government by a combination of the SLFP and the now revived JVP, but most of all by the JVP, and the opposition to the IPKF became the catalyst for political confusion, and sporadic but calculated acts of violence in the Sinhalese areas of the country.

The IPKF's presence in the north and east of the island, was not without its advantages to the Sri Lanka government. Sri Lanka's expenditure on defence dropped noticeably after mid-1987. The Indian government bore the heavy expenditure involved in the pacification of the north and east. However, this decline in defence spending

on the part of Sri Lanka might have been more substantial if the threat posed by the JVP had not proved to be so serious. As it was, no reduction in the number of defence personnel was possible. On the contrary, because of the JVP threat the army was expanded – by 1990 it had three divisions instead of the two that had existed up to that time – as was the police.

With R. Premadasa's election as President in December 1988, the IPKF's presence in the island became a point of contention between the Sri Lanka and Indian governments. The negotiations on the removal of the IPKF from the island were both long drawn out and acrimonious. Eventually the IPKF was withdrawn on a timetable determined by the Indian government. The process was completed in March 1990. By that time there had been a surprising rapprochement between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), drawn together by a common opposition to the IPKF, and in the hope that the hostilities of a decade could be overcome by negotiations. These latter were cordial enough at the beginning, and this period of peace (after May 1989) enabled the army to devote its attention to meeting the challenge posed by the JVP. It is grimly ironic but nevertheless true that the continued presence of the IPKF in the island, and peace talks between the government and the LTTE helped the Sri Lanka security forces, and in particular the army, to meet and overcome the threat posed by the JVP.

In June 1990 just when the LTTE seemed to be on the verge of winning at the bargaining table what they had not been able to win on the battlefield, the hostilities between them and the Sri Lanka government were renewed. The LTTE broke the cease-fire, and the battle between them and the Sri Lankan armed services has raged since then with the inevitable consequence that Sri Lanka's defence expenditure has increased to meet the costs of the war in the form of purchases of military hardware from abroad, (especially between 1996 and 2000) and the expansion of the manpower resources of the security services.

The People's Alliance (PA) coalition, elected in 1994, inherited these problems. Its immediate response was to place greater emphasis on the restoration of peace in the country. Its leader projected herself as the peace candidate in the parliamentary and presidential campaigns of August and November 1994. After a narrow victory at the parliamentary elections in August 1994, she went to secure an overwhelming one in November that year at the presidential election; among the principal features of this latter being the massive vote she received from the Tamil minority, including the Indian Tamils, wherever it was possible for the Tamils to vote (i.e., outside the Jaffna peninsula). With this solid mandate, it turned almost immediately to resume negotiations with the LTTE – begun in the wake of the victory at the parliamentary elections and interrupted only briefly after the assassination of Gamini Dissanayake, Kumaratunga's UNP opponent at the presidential election – intent on exploiting its electoral triumph to devise a political settlement. This was the second set of direct negotiations with the LTTE by the Sri Lankan government. The first had been in 1989 and 1990 under R. Premadasa. The negotiations with Premadasa had lasted for over a year before they broke down. On this occasion the talks collapsed within a few weeks, by 19 April 1995, once again because of the intransigence of the LTTE and its attacks on the Sri Lankan security forces notwithstanding the formal cease-fire. Later this violence was directed against Sinhalese living in the Eastern Province.

Eventually the government decided on a more vigorous course of action, a military campaign in the Jaffna peninsula, the LTTE's stronghold. The campaign began in early July 1995 and despite some early setbacks its first

stage culminated later in the year in the capture of Jaffna town and parts of the Jaffna peninsula, with a surprisingly small number of civilian casualties. The next stage began in May 1996 when the army drove the LTTE out of the whole of the Jaffna peninsula. This was the second time in the space of 10 years that the Sri Lanka army was engaged in a military campaign in the Jaffna peninsula. In July 1987 when the first attack was made, it was stopped in its tracks, after some early success, by the threat of Indian intervention. On this latter occasion, India maintained a studied silence, evidence that it had no intention of intervening. The third phase began in May 1997, in an attempt to establish control over the road from Vavuniya to Jaffna, the main supply route as it was called. After some initial success this campaign, Operation Jayasikuru as it was called, faced stiff resistance from the LTTE, and was terminated later in 1998.

As they had done in 1987-90 when the Indian army brought the Jaffna peninsula under their control, the LTTE moved their operations headquarters to the areas just south of the peninsula, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, and retained control of it. In September 1996, the Sri Lanka army captured Kilinochchi town after a long battle with the LTTE (but lost control of it again by mid-1998). The Mullaitivu district serves as the last LTTE stronghold and its *soi disant* administrative capital. Over 10 years earlier the LTTE had survived in the forests of the Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts for over two years against the efforts of the IPKF to dislodge them. The low-intensity conflict in the country's north-east continued into the last quarter of 2000. In a brief and brisk campaign in November 1999, the LTTE recaptured townships and villages they had lost to the army 18 months earlier. The campaign culminated in the capture of the army base of Elephant Pass, and posed a threat to the armed forces in Jaffna and the Jaffna peninsula. Within a month the LTTE advance lost its early momentum, and by mid-June 2000 the LTTE's threat to the government's control over Jaffna town and the Jaffna peninsula had clearly receded.

The PA's military campaign was based on the assumption that the LTTE can be defeated militarily, or at least weakened to the point where it is likely to settle for something much less than the separate state for which it has fought for so long. Certainly, the fall of Jaffna town and the loss of control over the Jaffna peninsula in 1995-96 was a significant reverse for the LTTE, a reversal which could yet be a decisive defeat if they are unable to prevent the Sri Lankan armed forces from consolidating their hold on that densely populated region.

5 The Current Situation: 2000

Despite the rapid increase in the defence services since the mid-1980s and constant use of the army and other services against Tamil separatist guerrillas and against the JVP in the period 1988-90, Sri Lanka has been spared any significant militarisation of its politics. On the other hand there has been, regrettably, the emergence of what the American scholar Stephen P. Cohen, an expert on the military of India and Pakistan, calls “civilian militarism” that is to say “the adoption of military – like values and public style by civilians”. A refinement of this “civilian militarism” has emerged in Sri Lanka, and now poses a serious threat to the country's democratic system. Because of a genuine or perceived threat to government ministers from assassination attempts by the LTTE, especially for those with defence responsibilities, there has been a proliferation of security men, including commandos, travelling with them wherever they go. A conspicuous example of this is the country's current and very controversial Deputy Minister of Defence, Anuruddha Ratwatte, who generally travels around with a huge entourage of security men armed with automatic weapons. When he takes this security entourage with him for electioneering purposes, for the humdrum business of canvassing support at election time, or even more humdrum – and private – business of casting his vote, as has happened over the last few years whenever a national election was held, it has had a powerfully intimidating effect on the electorate and the average voter, especially his political rivals and opponents. During the recent parliamentary election of October 2000, his attempts to rig the election in his favour in his polling division and in favour of his party in the Kandy district at large, attracted public criticism from some of his Cabinet colleagues, his political opponents, and the national press. Many other ministers also have a security entourage, generally smaller than his, and not a few of them travel around the electorate at election time accompanied by a very visible security staff. Thus the line between genuine security needs, and the deliberate use of such security forces for party political purposes is blurred.

However, the politicisation of the military that one saw under the Bandaranaiques, husband and wife, and Mrs. Bandaranaike in particular, has been kept under careful check in the far more turbulent 1980s and early 1990s. Under the PA government (1994C) there has been little evidence of politicisation of the military. As with the UNP governments of the period 1977-1994, the civilian executive continues to have the final say in promotions to the top positions in the services, especially the army, and, of course, in the recruitment and enlistment of officers and other ranks. These recruitment and enlistment procedures also have institutional checks and balances which effectively prevent any blatant attempts to favour party supporters or children of party supporters.

One feature of the expansion of the armed services, the dominance of the Sinhalese, is often referred to, but was actually quantified only recently in research conducted by the ICES, Kandy, Sri Lanka. The current situation in regard to the ethnic composition of the armed services shows that Sinhalese in the officer corps and other ranks in all the services ranged from 95% to 98% in number. The representation of the minorities in the armed services has become minuscule. The transformation of the armed services into ethnic soldiers, sailors and airmen (with a

sprinkling of women) began in the late 1950s; it was accelerated in the 1960s, and reached this present position of total Sinhalese dominance largely as a result of the conflict between the Sri Lankan armed forces and Tamil separatist activists which assumed its current form from the mid-1980s. So long as the current ethnic conflict continues in the form of an armed struggle, Tamils will not join the armed services or the police for that matter because their families are vulnerable to threats if not direct attacks by the LTTE and its allies. The LTTE has quite deliberately targeted Tamil officers and other ranks in the services and police. The few Tamils who serve in the army, navy and air force have their homes in the Sinhalese areas of the country, and they and their families are relatively safe from reprisals by the LTTE. But these are not the only reasons; in the current reality of Sri Lanka's prolonged ethnic conflict with the armed services engaged in battle against Tamil separatists, Tamils are treated with suspicion by recruiting officers at the point of entry, and by their peers once they have joined.

In contrast the Indian army has demonstrated how effective ethnically mixed forces are in dealing with situations of violent ethnic conflict in Assam and the north-east, in Punjab and in Kashmir. Although the situations in India and Sri Lanka are not strictly comparable in view of the greater ethnic diversity in India, nevertheless the Sri Lankan armed services too would benefit from an infusion of minority representatives in much larger numbers than at present. The pendulum that had swung so far against the Sinhalese and Buddhists in the early days of independence, has swung so dramatically in the opposite direction that even a moderate reversal of the swing would benefit the country and the armed forces as well.

At no stage in the 1980s and 1990s was the principle of the subordination of the armed forces to the civilian authorities ever challenged. The armed services have a presence in the Sri Lanka polity today which they did not have in the 1960s. The Sri Lankan army, for instance, is a large professional fighting force of more than 120,000 men (and a small number of women). In terms of the population ratios, and given that India has 50 times Sri Lanka's population, Sri Lanka has more active servicemen per million people than India and the other countries of South Asia including Pakistan. The recruits are volunteers and not conscripts. One of the urgent requirements of our project is a study of recruitment mechanisms and the range of villages and towns from which the recruits come.

Up to very recently the armed services have never had much difficulty in attracting recruits. While the high level of unemployment in the country, generally over 10%, explains why this is so, nevertheless given the risks that service in the armed forces carry in a situation of violent confrontations with well-entrenched separatist forces, unemployment is not the sole explanation for the attraction the armed services have for the country's Sinhalese youth. The fact of the matter is that the army is a genuinely popular national institution. While there has been no threat to the subordination of the armed services to civilian authority since the 1960s, the popular support the armed forces have in the country – generally, and understandably, the police force does not enjoy a similar popularity – does act as a constraint on the freedom with which a government could move regarding issues on which the electorate, in general, or large sections of it, hold strong views. There is always the nagging fear that the armed services themselves would be affected by such views and strong expressions of opinion, or indeed the ebb and flow of debate. This is not to suggest, however, that the principle of the subordination of the armed services to civilian authority or leadership is any serious danger but merely that an army as large as the one Sri Lanka has today is something new, and politicians need to be aware of this.

The most powerful source of support for the principle of subordination of the armed services to civilian authority lies in the strength of Sri Lanka's well-established two-party system. It is not merely that the system now has such wide acceptance in the country that any attempt to subvert it through the use of the armed services would carry too many risks of failure for any individual or group to contemplate it with equanimity, but, more important, the likelihood that the sharp party divisions in the Sinhalese areas of the country are reflected in the armed services would make such an attempt a futile one. Equally important are the personal rivalries and divisions within the general staff which have made successful operations against the LTTE difficult till very recently i.e. 1994-95. All this is quite apart from the change in the international climate of opinion, with the end of the cold war, in the attitude to military regimes.

Critical Bibliography

Despite the truly phenomenal growth in the size of the Sri Lankan armed forces, and Sri Lanka's army in particular, since the late 1980s, there has been very little scholarly work and research on the armed services. The first essays to deal with the use of the police and armed forces in the suppression of rioters were the pamphlets by P.B.G. Keuneman whose *Story of the Hartal of August 12 1953* was published by the Communist Party's People's Publishing House Colombo in 1953; and Colvin R. de Silva's *Hartal*. They were both Marxist politicians involved in organising the hartal. The first monograph to deal with the use of the armed forces during periods of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was by a well-known journalist, Tarzie Vittachi, whose *Emergency'58: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots* published by Andre Deutsche in London, 1958 and is still the best we have on this episode. It was 22 years before the next monograph appeared – Donald L. Horowitz, *Coup Theories and Officers' Motives: Sri Lanka in Comparative Perspective* published by Princeton University Press in 1980. This was five years before the publication of his monumental study of *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press (1985) which earned him international recognition.

Horowitz's *Coup Theories and Officers' Motives...* was an excellent study of the attempted coup of 1962 for which he had interviewed 23 leading participants. Some of the leaders could not be interviewed. Most of the interviews were conducted in 1968. Quite apart from the attempted coup, the book provides an excellent study of the early years of the armed services, covering both the period of the Second World War, and the period from 1949 to 1962. The author explains that in view of the very sensitive nature of the problem he preferred not to question those he interviewed on what they knew or heard of the ultimate responsibility for the attempted coup – briefly were any politicians involved in it, and if so who they were?

That information is provided in K.M. de Silva and Howard Wriggins – *J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka: A Political Biography. Volume Two From 1956 to His Retirement (1989)*, London and Honolulu, 1994. On pages 107-120 there is an analysis of the attempted coup of 1962, based on interviews with most of the leaders of the coup, and with some important politicians. It shows that some politicians were involved in planning the coup. On pp. 154-156, there is a short study of the attempted coup of 1966, based on documents in the J.R. Jayewardene Mss.

There are also two short studies on these themes by a US scholar, Angela Burger whose "Changing Civil-Military Relations in Sri Lanka" was published in *Asian Survey*, August 1992, pp. 744-756. This short essay, not very solid in its research, was the first on this important theme. Her essay "Civilian Rule and Abortive Coups in Sri Lanka" was published in the same year in (ed.) C. Danupoulus, *Third World Civilian Regimes*, Westview Press, Colorado adds very little to the information available in the works by Horowitz, de Silva and Wriggins. Two years earlier there was a useful essay by Robert J. Levy, "National Security" chapter 5 in *Sri Lanka - A Country Study* (eds) Louis S. Mortimer *et.al.*, Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, Washington

DC, 1990, pp. 221-254, a well researched pioneer study.

In 1987, General Anton Mutukumara, first Sri Lankan army commander, published his *The Military History of Ceylon - An Outline*. Published in Delhi by Navrang, it covers the recorded military history of Sri Lanka over a period of 2000 years, but provides little of importance for the post-independence army. Edgar O'Balance's slim volume (139 pages) *The Cyanide War: Tamil Insurrection in Sri Lanka, 1973-88* published in London by Brassey's in 1989 is a rather a sketch study, of the subject and, in any event, provides very little material on the Sri Lankan armed forces.

The Sri Lanka Army: 50 Years on - 1949-1999 published by the army in 1999 to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary is a more substantial work. This 932-page "coffee-table" volume traces the evolution, development, and personalities involved in the building of the army. It provides a wealth of information and data which political analysts should be able to use in the study of political-military relations. The Sri Lanka air force has published two volumes of its official history in 1998-1999: *A History of the Air Force*, Vol. I and Vol. II *The Sri Lankan Airforce - A Historical Retrospective, 1985-1987*. A third volume, *Fifty Years of the Airforce* is to be published in March 2001.

Early in 2000 came the publication of Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe's *A Soldier's Version: An Account of the On-going Conflict and the Origin of Terrorism in Sri Lanka* (published by the author). This is the first book on the conflict by a recently retired army officer who had been directly involved in the conflict in the north-east of the island. Munasinghe recently won a seat in the national legislature at the parliamentary election of 10 October 2000 and is currently Deputy Speaker of the Parliament.

Apart from these books and monographs, the reader could turn to K.M. de Silva, "The Police and Armed Services" in *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, K.M. de Silva (ed.), New Delhi, Konark, 1993, pp. 347-371, and "Sri Lanka's Security and Strategies for Survival", *ibid.*, pp. 372-395 and "Sri Lanka: From Demilitarisation to Militarisation, 1985-1999" in *Pursuit of Peace in Sri Lanka: Past Failures and Future Prospects*, K.M. de Silva and G.H. Peiris (eds), Kandy, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2000, pp. 131-162.