

The Operational Code of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

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Abstract

The Tamil Tigers were one of the most organized, focused, and influential organizations in Asian politics during the last three decades. Throughout the existence of the organization, the goal of the LTTE was to establish a separate Tamil state – Tamil Eelam - comprising the Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka where Tamil-speaking populations were dense. The Sri Lankan civil war, which ended in May of 2009, claimed tens of thousands of lives, displaced hundreds of thousands of residents, and impeded the economic well-being of Sri Lanka.

This thesis employs the operational code analysis as a way to better understand the character, behaviour, and norms of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. An additional purpose of this thesis is to test the utility of this model in the case of a terrorist organization such as the LTTE.

The Operational Code Analysis framework was premiered by Nathan Leites in his two-part study of the Bolshevik Party, and was subsequently revived and re-imagined by a number of academics. The iteration of the Operational Code framework used in this thesis is a qualitative analysis which is comprised of ten questions: five ‘philosophical’ and five ‘instrumental’. This examination reveals that while this model has much to offer in analyzing this terrorist organization, it is in some ways a flawed method of exposition. However, the model produces unexpected insights about the stated beliefs of the LTTE.

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Table of Contents

Permission to use.....i

Abstract.....ii

Acknowledgements.....iii

Table of Contents.....iv

1. Introduction.....1

2. Framework and Methodology.....21

3. Operational Code Analysis: Philosophical Questions.....26

 Operational Code Analysis: Instrumental Questions.....51

4. Conclusion.....74

Bibliography.....86

1. Introduction

The Tamil Tigers were one of the most organized, focused, and influential organizations in Asian politics during the last three decades. Throughout the existence of the organization, the goal of the LTTE was to establish a separate Tamil state – Tamil Eelam - comprising the Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka where Tamil-speaking populations were dense.¹ Given that most terrorist organizations have a ‘life expectancy of less than a year’², the resilience and relevance of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is particularly noteworthy.

At its apex, the LTTE fully controlled the Jaffna region of Sri Lanka from 1990-1995.³ During this period the LTTE developed a considerable institutional presence which included the implementation of penal and civil codes in Tiger-controlled areas as well as the creation of an autonomous police force.⁴ The Tigers lost control of this territory after a Sri Lankan Army offensive successfully recaptured Jaffna in 1995 and they lost their final urban base in Kilinochi in 1996.⁵ The Sri Lankan civil war, which ended in May of 2009, claimed tens of thousands of lives, displaced hundreds of thousands of residents, and impeded the economic well-being of Sri Lanka. Although the LTTE has ceased to exist as it once did, the influence of the Tigers remains clear in contemporary post-war Sri Lanka.

The Tigers have been the subject of much academic attention, but the organization has not been the subject of an operational code analysis. The purpose of this thesis is therefore twofold: to better understand the LTTE by studying the organization using the operational code analysis and to evaluate the usefulness of the model itself. In the paragraphs to follow I will provide a concise history of the Tamils of Sri Lanka and specifically the LTTE in order to provide the context for this investigation.

¹ Jeyaratnam Wilson, A. *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 5.

² Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 241.

³ Nirupama Subramanian, “A Chance For Peace”, *India Today*, May 15, 1996.

⁴ Kristian Stokke, “Building Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institutions and Forms of Governance in LTTE-controlled areas in Sri Lanka”, *Third World Quarterly*, 27 (2006): 1027-8.

⁵ David J. Whittaker, ed. *The Terrorism Reader Second Edition*. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 86.

The Tamils of Sri Lanka were a privileged group under British rule from 1796 to political independence in 1948 despite being a minority ethnic group in Sri Lanka.⁶ Their relative proficiency in English and generally high level of education ensured that Tamils had a disproportionately high representation in government jobs.⁷ The first erosion of the Tamils' status in Sri Lankan society occurred in 1956 when the 'Sinhala Only Act' was passed, establishing Sinhala as the official language of Sri Lanka⁸. The situation worsened again in 1972, when Sri Lanka's republican constitution enshrined Sinhalese as the only official language, and Buddhism as the state religion.⁹ During this period, the Sri Lankan government also introduced policies which discriminated in favour of Sinhala applicants to Sri Lankan universities.¹⁰

While rifts between the majority Sinhalese population and the minority Tamils had emerged as early as the 1920s¹¹, the legislative changes of the 1970s prevented Tamils from attaining lucrative employment and University education at the rate which they had previously enjoyed. The increasingly bitter state of domestic politics in Sri Lanka yielded the formation of Tamil organizations, one of which was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam – a group singularly focused on the creation of a sovereign Tamil state.¹² The LTTE rose to prominence in comparison to these other groups partially because of their uncompromising stance on a Tamil homeland, but also because of their ruthless annexing of rival

⁶ Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, 1.

⁷ *Ibid*, 1.

⁸ M. R. Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*. (Konark Publishers: Delhi, 1994), 10.

⁹ Tore Bjorgo, ed. *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, realities and ways forward*. (New York: Routledge Press, 2005), 133 .

¹⁰ Bidisha Biswas, "The Challenges of Conflict Management: A Case Study of Sri Lanka", *Civil Wars*, 8 (2006), 52.

¹¹ Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, 2.

¹² *Ibid*, 4.

Tamil organizations.¹³ In fact, until 1983 the Tigers' primary targets were not the Sinhala enemy, but rather fellow Tamils seen as impediments to their cause¹⁴.

Unlike the Tigers, some Tamil groups during this period favoured a non-violent political solution to the Tamils' grievances. The Tamil United Liberation Front, for example, entered the political process in the 1977 Sri Lankan general election.¹⁵ In 1983, however, it became virtually impossible for Tamils to pursue the creation of a Tamil state or territory within Sri Lanka's legitimate political channels. An amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution introduced in this year stated:

No person shall, directly or indirectly, in or outside Sri Lanka, support, espouse, promote, finance, encourage or advocate the establishment of a separate state within the territory of Sri Lanka.¹⁶

The Sri Lankan government was unequivocal about its loyalties during this period, which undoubtedly contributed to the sense of frustration among the country's Tamils. President Jayawardene was quoted as saying "I am not worried about the opinion of the Tamil people...now we cannot think of them, not about their lives or their opinion."¹⁷ This attitude was reflected in the Sri Lankan government's complicity in the ethnic violence of 1983. Sri Lankan government and army officials were accused of engaging 'systematically...in the massacre of unarmed Tamil non-combatants, on the assumption that this would intimidate Tamils and somehow end extreme actions by Tamil groups.'¹⁸ The Sri Lankan government was unabashed in their rejection of the Tigers and their cause. In 1980, a Sri Lankan cabinet minister made the following remarks:

Sri Lanka is inherently and rightfully a Sinhalese state... This must be accepted as a fact and not a matter of opinion to be debated. By attempting to challenge

¹³ Bjorgo, *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, realities and ways forward*, 134.

¹⁴ Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*, 95.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 33.

¹⁶ Suthaharan Nadarajah and Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, "Liberation struggle or terrorism? The politics of naming the LTTE" *Third World Quarterly* 26 (2005): 92.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 92.

¹⁸ BBC Documentary, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam", <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlqTpuE2-7o&NR=1>.

this premise, Tamils have brought the wrath of the Sinhalese on their own heads; they have themselves to blame.¹⁹

This unsympathetic political rhetoric was cited by the LTTE as a cause of the organization's commitment to guerrilla warfare over other avenues of action.

Over time the Tigers grew in size and significance, and transformed from a small guerrilla movement into a sophisticated insurgent army led by Vellupillai Prabhakaran and guided in ideology and political strategy by Anton Balasingham, among others. Balasingham's influence provided a Marxist framework to the Tigers' struggle, although public acknowledgments of these political leanings were largely abandoned by the end of the Cold War.²⁰ Prabhakaran initially claimed that the LTTE's ambition was to create a socialist state:

The government of independent Eelam will be a socialist government; there will be only one party supported by the people; I do not want a multi-party democracy. Under a one-party government Tamil Eelam can develop and change much faster. In a socialist constitution the needs of the people will have priority.²¹

Prabhakaran also identified 'revolutionary socialism' as his political philosophy and explained what this entailed:

Revolutionary socialism is my political philosophy. By socialism I mean the construction of an egalitarian society where there is no class contradiction and exploitation of man by man; a free, rational society where human freedom and rights are protected and progress enhanced.²²

The influence of the Tigers' socialist principles, however temporary they were, was evident in their early conceptualizations about Tamil Eelam. The LTTE drew heavily from Leninist writings on self-

¹⁹ Robert Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), 147.

²⁰ Robert. J. Art and Louise Richardson. *Democracy and counter-terrorism: Lessons from the past*. (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2007), 494.

²¹ Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam. *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity*. (Stuttgart : Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994), 65.

²²"It is the plight of the Tamil people that compelled me to take up arms", *This Week*, March 3 1986, accessed March 18, 2010, via <http://eelamweb.com/index.php/national-leader/184-It-is-the-plight-of-the-Tamil-people-that-compelled-me-to-take-up-arms-1986.html?Itemid=108>.

determination to shape their own objectives. This excerpt from the LTTE publication *Towards Liberation* exemplifies the Tigers' once-explicit socialist tendencies:

The freedom of secession should not be confused with the reactionary bourgeois category of 'separatism' which is sometimes utilised to undermine the genuine democratic struggle of the oppressed Tamil nation. The freedom of secession articulated within the concept of self-determination exclusively implies an inalienable right of a nation of people to agitate for political independence from the oppressor nation. This complete freedom to agitate for secession is a right, which can be exercised under conditions of intolerable oppression...Therefore, Lenin rigorously held that he was not advocating a doctrine of separatism but advancing a highest principle of a socialist democracy in which absolute freedom should be accorded to a nation of people to secede under conditions of oppression.²³

Though the LTTE discarded such blatant references to socialism as the years progressed, evidence of its influence, particularly with respect to the Tigers' ideas of self-determination, remained. While the LTTE claimed at one point that they would struggle indefinitely in the hopes of achieving their "cherished goal, i.e. an independent socialist state of Tamil Eelam",²⁴ the evidence of socialist undercurrents faded noticeably with time, reflecting the Tiger maxim "The methods of war may change (but) the aim (of our war) cannot change."²⁵

The leadership of the Tigers fluctuated somewhat over time, as Prabhakaran's ruthless intolerance of betrayal (whether real or perceived) pruned once-prominent Tamils from the organization's ranks²⁶. Prabhakaran was once quoted as saying "In LTTE, the traitors have never been forgotten and will never be forgiven"²⁷, indicating his disdain for dissent within the organization. In 2001 at a rare press conference convened by the LTTE, it was noted by journalists that "Senior cadres such as Natesan, the LTTE's former Jaffna Police Commissioner; Baby Subramanian; Lawrence Thilagar; and Yogi who would

²³ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, *Towards Liberation: Selected Political Documents of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*. 1984, 68.

²⁴ Ibid, 18.

²⁵ Peter Schalk, "Resistance and Martyrdom in the process of State Formation in Tamil Eelam," in *Martyrdom and Political Resistance: Essays from Asia and Europe*, ed. Joyce Pettigrew. (Amsterdam: VU Press, 1997), 65.

²⁶ M.R. Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*. Delhi: (Konark Publishers, 2003), 54.

²⁷ Ibid, 241.

flank Prabhakaran when he used to meet reporters in Chennai between 1985 and 1987 were nowhere to be found... an entirely new LTTE leadership team sat around Prabhakaran.”²⁸ Prabhakaran’s refusal to abide any criticism inside or outside of his organization led Chandrika Kumaratunga, then the president of Sri Lanka, to remark that Prabhakaran was a difficult man to negotiate with given that he was “a merciless megalomaniac who has killed every single person who was opposed to him”.²⁹

Perhaps the most significant example of betrayal within the LTTE is the 2004 defection of Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, also known as Colonel Karuna.³⁰ Karuna was a trusted ally and former bodyguard of Prabhakaran who split from the LTTE, taking thousands of cadres with him. Karuna explained that the impetus behind his departure was discrimination against Tamils from the East and as a result, disproportionate casualties from that region³¹, but some have deemed his motivations to be more opportunistic.³² Karuna’s claims that his split had depleted the LTTE’s military strength by 70%³³ may have been exaggerated, but there is no question that his departure was a major blow to the leadership of Prabhakaran and likely contributed to LTTE defeats in Eastern Sri Lanka.³⁴

It is impossible to conduct an analysis of the leadership and norms of the LTTE without taking into account the influential personality of Vellupillai Prabhakaran. The LTTE and its supporters cultivated what can only be described as a personality cult surrounding Prabhakaran. One Tiger cadre went so far as to declare that “The Leader can do no wrong. I could fill a thousand books with all the wonderful

²⁸ T.S. Subramanian, “Prabhakaran in first person”, *Frontline*, April 17 – May 10, 2002, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1909/19090040.htm>.

²⁹ “Unmasking of Prabhakaran”, South Asia Terrorism Portal, accessed March 6, 2013, [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/idr/vol_17\(2\)/sp_sinha.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/idr/vol_17(2)/sp_sinha.htm).

³⁰ Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist* (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2007), 94.

³¹ *Ibid*, 95.

³² Lee Salter, “Crime Without Punishment: The Strange Case of Colonel Karuna”, *The Tamil Guardian*, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=1924>.

³³ “A date with a renegade rebel Tiger”, BBC News, accessed February 7, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6524869.stm.

³⁴ “UK detains breakaway Tamil leader”, BBC News, accessed February 7, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7076248.stm.

memories of him.”³⁵ Prabhakaran had this to say about the adulation he garnered from cadres and supporters of the LTTE:

I cannot help this kind of projection and characterization. I am only concerned with the political liberation and social emancipation of oppressed people. My people are aware of my commitment and trust me to lead them on the right path. That is why they show great affection. These projections may be expressions of people’s love.³⁶

Though Prabhakaran was revered within the LTTE, his ability to navigate external political relationships was less well-regarded. For example Anton Balasingham, a close advisor, once described Prabhakaran as “an isolated warlord” whose grasp of international politics was dismal.³⁷

Prabhakaran was the leader of the Tamil Tigers from the organization’s inception until his death in 2009. He was born in the coastal village of Velvettiturai (VVT) on November 26, 1954. His ancestors had immigrated to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu approximately 200 years earlier.³⁸ Much to the dismay of his father, Prabhakaran was a mediocre student who exhibited more interest in experimenting with homemade bombs than in academics.³⁹ Despite his lacklustre performance in school, Prabhakaran was an avid reader and was drawn to the writings of influential Indian leaders, specifically those of Bhagat Singh and Subhas Chandra Bose.⁴⁰ Throughout his life, Prabhakaran was fascinated by films, especially westerns.⁴¹ It has been alleged that Prabhakaran’s plan to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi was inspired by a South Asian film in which a young woman hides a bomb in a bouquet of flowers which she presents to

³⁵ Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist*, 92.

³⁶ Ibid, 92.

³⁷ M.R. Naryan Swamy, “Sri Lanka and the Peace Makers: A Story of Norway and India”, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.ipcs.org/issue-brief/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-and-the-peace-makers-a-story-of-norway-178.html>.

³⁸ Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*, 19.

³⁹ Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*, 49.

⁴⁰ Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*, 23.

⁴¹ Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*, 59.

the President of the United States.⁴² Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in 1991 in a similar manner, when a female LTTE member blew herself up while presenting Gandhi with flowers at a public rally.⁴³

Prabhakaran claims to have been influenced as a boy by a Tamil nationalist tutor who believed strongly that seceding from Sri Lanka was necessary for Tamils.⁴⁴ His relatives and neighbours also contributed to his political awareness with frequent debate and discussion about the treatment of Tamils by the Sinhalese majority.⁴⁵ Eventually and after various adolescent forays into guerrilla activity, his interest in Tamil nationalism led Prabhakaran and his peers to explore their political leanings through the Tamil Students League and Tamil Youth League. Prabhakaran then drifted to the Tamil New Tigers, an organization formed under the leadership of Chetti Thanabalasingham.⁴⁶ During this period, Prabhakaran committed his first major political act: the assassination of the Mayor of Jaffna in 1975.⁴⁷ After Chetti was arrested in 1976, Prabhakaran assumed command of the TNT.⁴⁸ As a result of his subsequent collaboration with 'Baby' Subramanian, the LTTE was formed with seed money gained in a bank robbery in Jaffna.

By 1977, the LTTE were recruiting heavily and conducting attacks using firearms and primitive bombs.⁴⁹ The Tigers began to explore an ideological underpinning for their struggle and recruited Anton Balasingham, a Tamil living in the UK, to conduct classes for the troops extrapolated from his treatise "Towards Socialist Eelam".⁵⁰ Though Tiger literature was (during its early years) Marxist in nature, Prabhakaran was decidedly less taken with political ideology than Balasingham.⁵¹ Despite being a

⁴² Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 143.

⁴³ "1991: Bomb kills India's former leader Rajiv Gandhi", BBC News *On this day 1950-2005*, accessed February 7, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/21/newsid_2504000/2504739.stm.

⁴⁴ Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*, 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 23.

⁴⁶ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 139.

⁴⁷ Art and Richardson. *Democracy and counter-terrorism: Lessons from the past*, 488.

⁴⁸ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 138.

⁴⁹ Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*, 58.

⁵⁰ Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*, 52.

⁵¹ Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*, 53.

meticulous planner and a careful thinker, Prabhakaran clearly favoured action over talk, and at one point stated: “You...intellectuals are afraid of blood. No struggle will take place without killings.”⁵²

The LTTE’s first major act of violence was the September, 1978 bombing of an Air Ceylon passenger jet.⁵³ The group continued to make occasional and relatively minor attacks on the Sri Lankan state. A common tactic during this period was the assassination of police officers or political figures by LTTE cadres on bicycle.⁵⁴ One of the LTTE’s most important attacks was the 1983 assault on a Sri Lankan military convoy, sometimes referred to as the ‘Four-Four Bravo Massacre’.⁵⁵ The attack killed 13 Sri Lankan soldiers, and elicited a disproportionately violent response from the state which proved to be an important catalyst for the LTTE.⁵⁶ The massacre provoked mass rioting which resulted in the deaths of at least 400 Tamils, and caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands from their homes.⁵⁷ As a result of the atrocities perpetrated against Tamils during this period, the LTTE experienced an influx of volunteers.⁵⁸

At the height of its potency, the LTTE’s military was divided into specialized units: the Sea Tigers, the Air Tigers, the Black Tigers (the notorious suicide unit) and the Freedom Birds (the term sometimes used to refer to a specialized unit of female suicide attackers), as well as an elite fighting wing, the Charles Anthony Regiment.⁵⁹ At the urging of the Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa, the Tigers additionally formed a political wing (the People’s Front of Liberation Tigers) as a means to demonstrate popular support and political legitimacy.⁶⁰ The LTTE leadership (both in terms of military

⁵² Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*, 69.

⁵³ Cecile Van de Voorde, “Sri Lankan Terrorism: Assessing and Responding to the Threat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)” *Police Practice and Research* 6 (2005): 181-199, 184.

⁵⁴ Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*, 86.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 93.

⁵⁶ Bjorgo, *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, realities and ways forward*, 134.

⁵⁷ Art and Richardson. *Democracy and counter-terrorism: Lessons from the past*, 490.

⁵⁸ Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*, 97.

⁵⁹ Peter Chalk, “Commentary No. 77: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) International Organization and Operations - A Preliminary Analysis,” Canadian Security Intelligence Service, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/pblctns/cmmntr/cm77-eng.asp>.

⁶⁰ Adele Balasingham, *The Will to Freedom* (Mitcham: Fairmax Publishing, 2001), 247.

and political operations) was almost exclusively controlled by Prabhakaran, to whom an oath of loyalty was made by every LTTE cadre.⁶¹ At the group's inception, Prabhakaran drafted a constitution which all new members were required to sign⁶². This contract was designed to establish moral discipline amongst the cadres and decreed that upon the creation of a casteless Tamil Eelam, the LTTE would be dissolved.⁶³ This constitution also prohibited drinking, pre-marital sex, and discouraged LTTE cadres from maintaining close family ties.⁶⁴ Young Tigers were unable to marry until they had reached what was deemed to be an appropriate age, and only after attaining permission from his or her commander could the wedding take place.⁶⁵ This rejection of vice stemmed from Prabhakaran's high regard for the strict moral code upheld by his father, a man who refused to even chew betel leaves.⁶⁶

The Tigers' apparent admiration of an ascetic lifestyle was at odds with their reliance on the smuggling of narcotics, specifically heroin, as a primary method of income in the 1980s.⁶⁷ It has been stated that during this period, a major source of funding for the LTTE was organized crime in other countries.⁶⁸ In the period following the devastating 1983 pogrom, the Tigers are said to have funded their activities primarily through bank robberies.⁶⁹ Eventually the Tigers' dependence on smuggling and illicit financing faded, as international donations became the primary avenue for funding their activities.⁷⁰

⁶¹ Michael Roberts, "Tamil Tiger 'Martyrs': Regenerating Divine Potency?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 (2005): 493-514, 496.

⁶² Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas* 1994, 59.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 59.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 59.

⁶⁵ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 141.

⁶⁶ Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*, 20.

⁶⁷ Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 60.

⁶⁸ Van de Voorde, "Sri Lankan Terrorism: Assessing and Responding to the Threat of the Liberation tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)", 192.

⁶⁹ Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, 53.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 58.

The Tamil Diasporas were integral to the function of the LTTE in terms of financial donations and logistical support.⁷¹ Funds flowed to the LTTE from various Tamil communities either by way of voluntary individual donations or by aggressively extracting money from Tamil communities abroad.⁷² It has been alleged that in addition to individual contributions, the LTTE devised schemes for skimming money from charitable organizations apparently designed to fund altruistic ventures in Sri Lanka.⁷³ Most of these fundraising sources were stymied to a degree by the designation of the LTTE as a terrorist organization and were prohibited from fundraising in many major source countries, including Canada, the United States, India, the UK, and Australia.⁷⁴

Throughout the existence of the LTTE, one of the most potent weapons in its arsenal was suicide terrorism. In terms of the number of attacks conducted by the Tigers, their efforts surpassed similar campaigns by Hezbollah and Hamas.⁷⁵ The Tigers launched their first suicide attack in 1987, when one of the LTTE's first 'martyrs', Captain Miller, drove a vehicle packed with explosives into the barracks of the Sri Lankan armed forces as the occupants slept inside.⁷⁶ The attack was modeled after Hezbollah's devastating 1983 attack on U.S. barracks in Lebanon which resulted in the death of 241 Marines.⁷⁷ The Black Tigers, the military unit devoted to suicide attacks, was headed for many years by Pottu Amman⁷⁸. Prabhakaran believed that conducting suicide attacks would result in a more expedient resolution to the LTTE's struggle, stating that 'With perseverance and struggle, Tamil Eelam can be achieved in 100 years.

⁷¹ Chalk, "Commentary No. 77: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) International Organization and Operations - A Preliminary Analysis."

⁷² Whittaker, ed. *The Terrorism Reader Second Edition*, 87

⁷³ The Gazette, "Tamil group defends fundraising", *The Montreal Gazette*, April 14, 2008, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/news/story.html?id=5b2f3aaa-c594-4673-9782-0506b4409da4&k=71308>.

⁷⁴ Nadarajah and Sriskandarajah, "Liberation struggle or terrorism? The politics of naming the LTTE", 95.

⁷⁵ Van de Voorde, "Sri Lankan Terrorism: Assessing and Responding to the Threat of the Liberation tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)", 187.

⁷⁶ Ami Pedhazur, *Suicide Terrorism*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 73.

⁷⁷ NPR News, "Tamil Tigers: Suicide bombing innovators", May 21, 2009, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104391493>.

⁷⁸ Chalk, "Commentary No. 77: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) International Organization and Operations - A Preliminary Analysis."

But if we conduct Black Tiger [suicide] operations, we can shorten the suffering of the people and achieve Tamil Eelam in a shorter period of time⁷⁹.

The Tigers continued to use suicide attacks as a primary tool for political assassinations and as strikes on public and symbolic targets, and were judicious in selecting targets for suicide attacks which would further their political interests.⁸⁰ The Black Tigers, the section responsible for suicide attacks, were a particularly elite and highly trained unit of the LTTE's military operations, and did not suffer for lack of volunteers despite the certainty of death:

Mr. Prabhakaran is held in such reverence that more than are needed volunteer for suicide missions. Those selected get a rare meeting with the secretive leader and are handed a cyanide capsule. Many are in their teens, some as young as 13.⁸¹

Prabhakaran deliberately cultivated an environment which elevated the personal sacrifice of the suicide bomber. The LTTE's suicide operations were described using the Tamil word *thatkodai* (to give yourself) rather than *thatkolai* (suicide), and Black Tigers were described as having given the 'gift of the self' in the name of Tamil Eelam.⁸² The copious supply of prospective bombers in combination with the measure of damage inflicted by these attacks made suicide bombing the go-to tactic of the LTTE. In 1998, Prabhakaran stated that:

In terms of manpower, firepower, and resources, the enemy was strong and the balance of military power was in his favour. Yet we had an extraordinary weapon which was not in the arsenal of the enemy. The courage and commitment of our fighters was our most powerful weapon in the battle.⁸³

While Black Tigers were promised no eternal rewards for their sacrifice, the culture honouring suicide bombers was significant in Tiger-controlled areas. Two female Black Tigers describe the posthumous distinctions which will eventually be bestowed on them in the documentary 'My Daughter the Terrorist'. Darshika, one of the so-called Black Tigresses, explains: "Say we conduct a blast somewhere... If the

⁷⁹ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 141.

⁸⁰ Pedhazur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 79.

⁸¹ Suzanne Goldenberg, "Tigers slink away from peace table to renew jungle attacks", *The Guardian*, May 30, 1995.

⁸² Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 141.

⁸³ Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, 32-33.

battle is won there, they will build a tomb at the site.” Her compatriot, Puhai, adds that “if that area is within our territory, if the battle is won there, they will build a tomb at the site...Otherwise they will build a small memorial over there.”⁸⁴ The shrines to which Puhai and Darshika make reference are decorated with flowers and trees to honour the cadres who “planted” their lives for the land’.⁸⁵ In addition to these memorials, the contributions of LTTE suicide bombers were honoured annually on July 5th,⁸⁶ sometimes called ‘Heroes Day’, ‘Martyrs Day’, or ‘Black Tigers Day’.⁸⁷ The LTTE’s use of suicide bombers abated somewhat after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. According to an LTTE spokesperson, the events of September 11th made suicide attacks the focus of international condemnation and attention, which became problematic for the LTTE’s public image in the international arena.⁸⁸

Another dimension to the Tigers’ preoccupation with self-sacrifice was the use of cyanide to avoid capture or death at the hands of the enemy. New recruits to the Tigers were oriented to the group’s practice of consuming cyanide to evade capture and interrogation by enemy forces. LTTE soldiers describe keeping the cyanide capsule between their teeth during battle, ready to bite if capture or death is imminent.⁸⁹ This practice is not exclusively relegated to foot soldiers and low-ranking Tigers: several prominent leaders within the organization have died by swallowing their cyanide capsules.⁹⁰ Tiger cadres declared themselves to be ‘married to their cyanide’⁹¹, a statement which is emblematic of the larger culture of martyrdom within the Tamil Tigers⁹². As of 2005, over 600 Tamil Tigers had committed

⁸⁴ “My Daughter the Terrorist”, video clip, accessed February 7, 2013, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j89ZVnfOqEw>.

⁸⁵ Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, 193.

⁸⁶ Michael Roberts, “Tamil Tiger ‘Martyrs’: Regenerating Divine Potency?”, 497.

⁸⁷ Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, 193.

⁸⁸ Pedhazur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 85

⁸⁹ “My Daughter the Terrorist.”

⁹⁰ Roberts, “Tamil Tiger ‘Martyrs’: Regenerating Divine Potency?” 496.

⁹¹ Hellmann-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity*, 67.

⁹² Roberts, “Tamil Tiger ‘Martyrs’: Regenerating Divine Potency?” 496.

suicide using cyanide, with even more having been captured and treated medically before their attempt could succeed.⁹³

The Tigers' use of suicide bombings and reliance on cyanide were not the only elements of their strategy which diverged from conventional warfare: the Tigers were also infamous for their aggressive (and sometimes manipulative) recruitment of child soldiers. As of 2007, it was estimated that 60% of LTTE casualties were soldiers under the age of 18. The LTTE has oft been criticized for coercing its' youngest members into action by visiting schools and recruiting displaced children.⁹⁴ Additionally, families which supplied LTTE members received preferential treatment from the LTTE, including breaks in taxes and employment opportunities.⁹⁵ Unsurprisingly, Prabhakaran and other leaders have been quick to assert that children who join the Tigers do so voluntarily after having 'seen the atrocities committed against their friends and families by the Sri Lankan army'⁹⁶ and are 'well looked-after'.⁹⁷ It was not uncommon for Tamil parents to worry that their rations would be cut off if they did not allow their children to join, and therefore did not resist recruitment attempts.⁹⁸ Some young Tamil Tigers claim that the financial and physical security provided by the LTTE as being the primary motivation for joining the Tigers.⁹⁹ Other young LTTE members, however, claim that they were coerced or manipulated into joining the Tiger ranks. One such soldier, Shutharasan, describes his situation:

There I met some members of the movement who had been pestering me since I was 12 years to join them; they asked me to come with them. They said it is for our people, and we all have to sacrifice. Anyway, they had been telling me about all the terrible things that have happened to our people and how bad the Sinhala people are.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, 143

⁹⁴ Rohan Gunsekera , "Child Warriors spearhead Sri Lanka's Tamil Eelam War", *Reuters*, December 11, 1995.

⁹⁵ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 33.

⁹⁶ Christopher Morris, "Teenage rebels with a cause vow to free their homeland" *The Guardian*, September 20, 1991.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, 65.

⁹⁹ Rachel Brett and Irma Specht, *Young soldiers*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004), 44.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

In 2003, UNICEF estimated that the LTTE had recruited 709 children in that year alone, and had approximately 1300 children serving in the Tiger ranks.¹⁰¹ Some have claimed that of all the child soldiers in the world, those in the ranks of the LTTE feature most prominently in terms of a combat role.¹⁰² Despite international attention and efforts to thwart the recruitment of minors into combat roles, the LTTE was still recruiting hundreds of children annually as of 2007.¹⁰³

The LTTE was unique not only in its use of child soldiers, but also for the large numbers of female cadres. Women played a unique and prominent role in the combat ranks of the LTTE. Women were recruited heavily to the LTTE after 1987, a point at which the shortage of soldiers was impeding the group's military operations.¹⁰⁴ Between 1980 and 2003, 20% of suicide attacks conducted by the LTTE were led by women.¹⁰⁵ The female Tiger unit, sometimes referred to as the 'Freedom Birds'¹⁰⁶, played a prominent role in combat. Prabhakaran spoke frequently about the necessity of women's liberation and tied this to the Tamil nationalist struggle in his rhetoric.¹⁰⁷ While he frequently espoused the virtues of gender equality, some have countered that it was material necessity and not 'a concerted ideological shift' that precipitated the induction of women into the LTTE's ranks.¹⁰⁸

The LTTE was not an exclusively errant political entity, and it made occasional forays into diplomacy, but the record shows almost no success or long-term interest in this realm. The first attempt at peace

¹⁰¹ "UNICEF urges Tamil Tigers to stop recruiting child soldiers in Sri Lanka," UN News Centre, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=9533&Cr=child&Cr1=soldiers>.

¹⁰² Van de Voorde, "Sri Lankan Terrorism: Assessing and Responding to the Threat of the Liberation tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)", 186.

¹⁰³ "Sri Lankan rebels, breakaway faction still recruiting child soldiers- Ban Ki-Moon", UN News Centre, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25179&Cr=sri&Cr1=lanka>.

¹⁰⁴ Radhika Coomaraswamy, "Women and the LTTE", *Frontline*, January 10, 1997, 61.

¹⁰⁵ Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, 208.

¹⁰⁶ "War is over for 'freedom bird'; after injury", *Gulf News*, August 23, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Schalk and Alvappillai Velupillai, trans., "Tamil Source in English Translation: Reflections of the Leader, Quotes by Vellupillai Prabhakaran", accessed February 7, 2013, <https://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=OCC4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fuu.diva-portal.org%2Fsmash%2Fget%2Fdiva2%3A173420%2FFULLTEXT06&ei=HEAUUZ-8MeWZyQHtr4HIDA&usg=AFQjCNEjsN2v8RyVelwvIr0e2KYEHXlf-A&bvm=bv.42080656,d.aWc>.

¹⁰⁸ Coomaraswamy, "Women and the LTTE", 62.

talks between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan government occurred in 1985 in Thimpu, Bhutan. The talks were convened by New Delhi and included several other Tamil groups, including TULF, PLOT, and the ENLF.¹⁰⁹ The Tigers participated with reticence, and the talks ultimately collapsed.¹¹⁰ Although the Tigers were not present at the table, the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord had wide-ranging effects on the LTTE and the greater Tamil population. The Accord resulted in the deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces to the Jaffna peninsula in the name of maintaining peace. The presence of the IPKF was strongly resented by both Tamils and the Sinhalese, however, and served only to catalyze brutality.¹¹¹ The IPKF left the island in 1990, after which the LTTE declared the commencement of Eelam War 3.¹¹²

In 1992, the Tigers declared publicly that they would consider an alternative to a sovereign Tamil Eelam if the Sri Lankan government was willing to accommodate a 'confederal arrangement'.¹¹³ Chandrika Kumaratunga, the daughter of two former Sri Lankan Prime Ministers, was elected in 1994¹¹⁴, after which she convened an additional round of peace talks. These collapsed in 1995¹¹⁵ after the LTTE staged a major attack on a Sri Lankan presidential candidate.¹¹⁶

1998 marked another round of negotiations between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, this time with the support of the international community and Norwegian facilitation.¹¹⁷ In 2002, again with the assistance of Norwegian moderators, another attempt at peace negotiations was undertaken. These negotiations were unique insofar as both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government were both receptive to the possibility of a federal structure for Sri Lanka.¹¹⁸ This round of talks also yielded an LTTE proposal

¹⁰⁹ M.R. Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*, 124.

¹¹⁰ "Sri Lanka Timeline", BBC News, accessed February 7, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/1166237.stm.

¹¹¹ Biswas, "The Challenges of Conflict Management: A Case Study of Sri Lanka", 53.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 53.

¹¹³ Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, 133.

¹¹⁴ "Profile: Chandrika Kumaratunga", BBC News, accessed February 7, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3239821.stm

¹¹⁵ Anton Balasingham, *The Politics of Duplicity* (Mitcham: Fairmax Publishing, 2000), 2.

¹¹⁶ Biswas, "The Challenges of Conflict Management: A Case Study of Sri Lanka", 54.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 55.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 56.

for self-government, which largely reflected the Tigers' standard demands for separation of powers, political autonomy and administrative independence in the north-east part of the country.¹¹⁹ Though the Tigers claimed that they remained totally committed to peace¹²⁰, the LTTE withdrew from participation in these talks in 2003.¹²¹ In 2006, a series of talks took place in Geneva, and although the Tigers pledged at this time to uphold the existing ceasefire agreement,¹²² they once again pulled out of negotiations in 2006.¹²³

The LTTE's acquiescence to multiple rounds of peace negotiations was at odds with their other activities during these periods. By 2006, approximately 60,000 lives had been lost to the Sri Lankan civil war¹²⁴, and the Tigers continued to rely on guerrilla tactics which came with a high civilian cost. For many years the Tigers utilized suicide attacks when conventional warfare was unavailable or ineffective¹²⁵, including various assassinations and attacks in or on public spaces (for example, the deadly bombing of the Colombo Central Bank in 1996)¹²⁶. Some concluded that Prabhakaran was uninterested in considering a peaceful reconciliation to the civil conflict, saying '...time and again, most recently in December, he has rejected it when it was on offer. The evidence is that he much prefers killing to democracy'.¹²⁷

¹¹⁹ V.S. Sambandan, "The LTTE's Blueprint," *Frontline*, November 8-21, 2003, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2023/stories/20031121006501200.htm>.

¹²⁰ V.S. Sambandan, "The LTTE's Response," *Frontline*, November 22 – December 5, 2003, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2024/stories/20031205005101100.htm>.

¹²¹ "Sri Lanka Timeline", BBC News, accessed February 7, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/1166237.stm.

¹²² "Sri Lanka foes to 'curb violence'," BBC News, accessed February 8, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4742208.stm.

¹²³ "EU ban on LTTE urged," BBC News, accessed February 8, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/sinhala/news/story/2006/04/printable/060423_eu_ban.shtml.

¹²⁴ "Sri Lanka foes to 'curb violence'," BBC News, accessed February 8, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4742208.stm.

¹²⁵ Pedhazur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 73.

¹²⁶ "On This Day, 1996: Fifty Dead in Sri Lanka suicide bombing," BBC News, accessed February 8, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/31/newsid_4083000/4083095.stm.

¹²⁷ "Terror in Sri Lanka", *The Globe and Mail*, February 16, 1996.

Ultimately, the Tigers' unwillingness to entertain diplomatic overtures catalyzed the Sri Lankan army into escalated military action. Sri Lanka withdrew from the existing ceasefire agreement in 2008¹²⁸ and steadily eroded the territorial gains made by the Tigers over the previous decades, leaving the LTTE with less than a kilometre of territory by May 2009 when Sri Lanka's military victory was declared.¹²⁹ As part of the last surge of battle, Vellupillai Prabhakaran was killed (by Sri Lankan forces and not by cyanide) along with members of his family in May, 2009.¹³⁰ Despite persistent (and unsubstantiated) rumours that Prabhakaran's death was a hoax, it appears that the Tamil Tigers' seemingly resolute grip on Sri Lankan politics has been at least temporarily relaxed.

While I do not wish to enter into any significant debate about whether the LTTE was a terrorist group or a liberation movement, it is important to acknowledge that such a discussion exists. For the purposes of clarity and consistency throughout this thesis, I will not deliberate the legitimacy of the LTTE's cause or the possible justification of their actions (except where it pertains directly to the operational code questions). Because of the Tigers' consistent and prolific utilization of tactics which impacted civilian populations, and because of the prevailing international classification of the LTTE, I will consider them herein to be a terrorist organization.

As previously mentioned, the LTTE has been the subject of significant research and analysis, particularly with respect to the more unusual aspects of the organization. The Tigers' reliance on suicide attacks, the role of female combatants in the LTTE, and the use of child soldiers have all been subjected to thorough academic analysis. I will attempt to capture some of the most prominent areas of inquiry with respect to the LTTE in the following paragraphs.

¹²⁸ "Government takes policy decision to abrogate failed CFA [Updated]," Sri Lanka Ministry of Defense, accessed February 8, 2013, http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20080102_12.

¹²⁹ "Sri Lankan Army 'defeats rebels'," BBC News, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8053542.stm>.

¹³⁰ "Tamil Tiger founder Prabhakaran dead at 54," Reuters, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSCOL326349>.

The Tigers successfully employed conventional and unconventional military tactics, and among their more unconventional approaches to combat was their use of women and children as soldiers. This distinguishing characteristic of the Tigers has been the subject of considerable academic analysis. In particular, the sincerity of the LTTE's assertion that women's participation was a matter of principle and equality has come under scrutiny:

Severe losses sustained by the LTTE after fighting various battles with the Sri Lankan Army left their forces rather depleted and it made practical sense to include women in the fighting forces. Many therefore argue that the inclusion of women in the LTTE was more the result of necessity, rather than a real commitment to gender equality.¹³¹

Women's participation in suicide attacks was significant, with female bombers comprising 30-40% of the LTTE's attacks.¹³² Some observers have posited that some female suicide bombers, most notably Dhanu, Rajiv Gandhi's assassin, were victims of rape and took up arms because their traditional roles in Sri Lankan society had been compromised as a result of their victimization.¹³³ Regardless of the initial motivations for the inclusion of women in the LTTE's operations, women's participation and the rhetoric surrounding it has been deemed significant:

The extent to which Prabhakaran may in fact be as progressive in private as the views he expounds in public is also debatable. However, his own possible contradictions aside, the powerful messages contained in his speeches... have been important in shifting certain gender relations within Tamil society.¹³⁴

While women's participation in the LTTE's activities could have conceivably yielded some positive results in broader Tamil society, the same has not been said with respect to the inclusion of children in the Tigers' activities. It has been said that the LTTE took advantage of the vulnerabilities of children affected by the conflict:

¹³¹ Tahira Gonsalves, "Media manipulations and agency: Women in the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) of Sri Lanka", *The Ahfad Journal* 22 (2005): 44.

¹³² Rosemarie Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2006), 88.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 95.

¹³⁴ Gonsalves, "Media manipulations and agency: Women in the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) of Sri Lanka", 39.

The LTTE is also known to have exploited the very young for their idealism and adopted a deliberate strategy of using child soldiers as spies, couriers and suppliers in violation of international conventions and law¹³⁵

Without question, however, the facet of the Tigers which has garnered the most academic attention is their use of suicide attacks. As a rare secular entity which consistently employed suicide bombings, the motivation of Black Tigers to sacrifice their lives – and the strategic motivation for the use of such attacks – has been frequently discussed by observers. The evaluation of the Black Tigers indicates that the absence of an eternal reward or sense of religious obligation was easily overcome:

Blowing oneself up often depends on an absolute commitment to certain beliefs... This is true also of secular organizations such as the LTTE, where giving up one's life for the nation or land is seen as the noblest value.¹³⁶

The Tigers had methods of ensuring that this commitment to sacrifice did not in advance of a mission:

...potential attackers are invited to have a 'last supper' with their charismatic leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, in which they receive the highest honors, whilst their images are placed near those of previous attackers. The effect of such indoctrination and rituals is to exert psychological pressure on the subject in order to overcome any doubt concerning his or her intentions.¹³⁷

As has been previously mentioned, suicide attacks were strategically advantageous in that they compensated for the Tigers' 'absence of heavy weaponry'¹³⁸ but they have also been assessed as being very effective as a 'precise weapon for assassinating government officials and political rivals' and military targets.¹³⁹ While these areas of academic focus are by no means an exhaustive summary, they do highlight the major areas of study in which the LTTE has been examined. The operational code analysis serves to provide a more high-level view of the organization rather than focusing exclusively on its tactics and activities.

¹³⁵ Riaz Hassam, *Life as a Weapon: The Global Rise of Suicide Bombings* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 161.

¹³⁶ Domenico Tosini, "A Sociological Understanding of Suicide Attacks" *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (2009): 85

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 88.

¹³⁸ Hassam, *Life as a Weapon*, 157.

¹³⁹ Martha Crenshaw, "Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay," *Security Studies* 16 (2007): 137.

2. Framework and Methodology

This thesis will employ the operational code analysis as a way to better understand the character, behaviour, and norms of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Academic attention to terrorism and terrorists is typically focused on the motivations for terrorism and the demographic, psychological and sociological origins thereof. While many of these studies have attempted to identify the psychological traits which are common among individual terrorists, there have been very few considerations of the characteristics, norms and strategies of terrorist groups. There is no existing operational code assessment of a terrorist group which would endeavour to explain not only why the terrorist group exists, but how it exists and pursues its goals. As such, it is important to test this model against a significant terrorist organization like the Tamil Tigers.

The term 'operational code' first emerged in 1940 as a reference to the 'values, worldview, and response repertoire' of a politician.¹⁴¹ The operational code analysis emerged years later as a method of analysing political actors and entities after Nathan Leites created the framework as the guide for his two works about the Bolshevik Party: *The Operational Code of the Politburo* (1951), and *A Study of Bolshevism* (1953). Leites attempted to create a summation of the Bolshevik character based on the 'sacred texts' of Bolshevism – the writings of Lenin and Stalin. Leites deliberately narrowed the scope of his sample to these works as a means to conduct a more intensive analysis of Bolshevism.¹⁴²

The model put forth by Leites was later adopted by Alexander George, who revised and resurrected the framework in 1960. George intended to excise the psychoanalytic components from the works of Leites and to expand on the framework with a focus on political maxims.¹⁴⁴ George rightly stated that the term 'operational code' is misleading 'insofar as it implies, incorrectly, a set of recipes or repertoires

¹⁴¹ Stephen G. Walker, "The Evolution of Operational Code Analysis" *Political Psychology* 11 (1990): 403.

¹⁴² Nathan Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism*, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953), 15.

¹⁴⁴ Walker, "The Evolution of Operational Code Analysis", 404.

for political action that an elite applies mechanically in its' decision-making'.¹⁴⁵ I accept George's critique of the term 'operational code', and will herein employ the caveat that the phrase should not be construed as providing a prescriptive model for the LTTE's behaviour, but rather a lens through which to understand it.

Despite his misgivings about some aspects of Leites' project, George concluded that Leites' model may be helpful in studying an actor's decision-making style and suggested possible applications for future use.¹⁴⁶ Various academics (notably Stephen Walker) have applied various iterations of the operational code analysis since this point, using both qualitative and quantitative assessments in their research. Iterations of operational code analyses have been applied to Bill Clinton, Yassir Arafat, Vladimir Putin, Henry Kissinger, Fidel Castro, and Kim Il-Sung, among others. Some of these studies have ranged beyond merely identifying the operational code of a particular actor and have attempted to use the actor's code for further elucidation. For example, an operational code analysis of Castro and Jong-Il measured whether or not the 'code' for each individual was altered by their personal experiences during the Cold War.¹⁴⁷ An operational code analysis of Bill Clinton was primarily concerned with the possible disparities between the 'code' represented by his prepared statements and that which emerged from his spontaneous remarks.¹⁴⁸ The analysis of Putin was an attempt to utilize the operational code framework in order to predict the future behaviour of a new political actor.¹⁴⁹ Despite these wide-ranging applications of the operational code framework, it does not appear that an operational code analysis of any variety has yet been applied in a study of a terrorist or terrorist organization.

¹⁴⁵ Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 13 (1969): 191.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 221.

¹⁴⁷ Akan Malici and Johnna Malici, "The Operational Codes of Fidel Castro and Kim Il Sung: The Last Cold Warriors?" *Political Psychology* 26 (2005).

¹⁴⁸ Mark Schafer and Scott Crichlow "Bill Clinton's Operational Code: Assessing Source Material Bias," *Political Psychology* 21 (2000).

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Benedict Dyson, "Drawing Policy Implications from the 'Operational Code' of a 'New' Political Actor: Russian President Vladimir Putin," *Policy Sciences* 34 (2001).

In keeping with the methodology employed by Leites in his operational code of the Bolshevik party,¹⁵⁰ I will derive my analysis based on the written and verbal statements of members of the LTTE. This analysis will seek to provide an understanding of what the Tamil Tigers 'believe to be necessary for effective political conduct'.¹⁵¹ I will consult propaganda produced by the Tigers, such as pamphlets, speeches, press releases, and other documents which contain statements by LTTE members from the group's inception until its demise in 2009. I have gathered as many of these statements as possible, and will filter this information using the guiding questions detailed below.

It is desirable for the primary sources used for this analysis to be a balanced sample of prepared and spontaneous remarks in order to maintain provide breadth in the type of material being analyzed. In the case of the Tigers, press conferences and interviews with the LTTE brass were relatively rare, and the LTTE's leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran was notably reclusive until his death in May 2009.¹⁵² As a result, interviews and public statements may be supplemented with anecdotal accounts from LTTE members where relevant. As was the case with Leites' *Study of Bolshevism*, using a variety of sources will help to illustrate which beliefs were pervasive within the LTTE.¹⁵³

It should be noted that any analysis which relies heavily on statements from political actors is susceptible to risks with respect to the honesty of the speaker. This is equally problematic with respect to the reliability of publications (and propaganda) of an organization or political party (the LTTE or Bolsheviks, for example). I must therefore make the important clarification that my analysis will not endeavour to determine what the LTTE believes as much as it will study what the LTTE claims to believe. Just as Leites did not attempt to assess the realism of the Bolshevik code, I will make no attempts to

¹⁵⁰ Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism*, 15.

¹⁵¹ Nathan Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo* (McGraw-Hill: Toronto, 1951), xi.

¹⁵² Alastair Lawson, "The enigma of Prabhakaran", BBC News, accessed February 8, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/212361.stm.

¹⁵³ Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism*, 20.

determine the veracity of the LTTE's claims, but will instead present a composite view of the claims themselves. Academics who have used the operational code approach acknowledge that 'foreign policy...addresses itself not to the external world, as is commonly stated, but rather to "the image of the external world" that is in the minds of those who make foreign policy'¹⁵⁴. Implicitly, this analysis accounts for possible flaws and inaccuracies in the 'image' at which policy and action is directed.

I intend to employ the operational code framework as presented by Alexander George in his paper "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making". George's framework is derived from earlier operational code studies by Nathan Leites. He lays out two clear categories of questions by which an individual or party's basic beliefs, and therefore the behaviour of that individual or party, might be understood. These questions are presented below:

Philosophical Questions

1. What is the 'essential' nature of political life? Is the political universe essentially one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one's political opponents?
2. What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one's fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic or must one be pessimistic on this score? And in what respect the on and/or the other?
3. Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?
4. How much 'control' or 'mastery' can one have over historical development? What is one's role in 'moving' and 'shaping' history in the desired direction?
5. What is the role of 'chance' in human affairs and in historical development?

Instrumental Questions

1. What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?
2. How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?
3. How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled, and accepted?
4. What is the best 'timing' of action to advance one's interest?
5. What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one's interests?

¹⁵⁴ George, "The "Operational Code": A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making", 190-191.

The operational code framework is unique in its ability to analyze the character of the organization rather than the psychology of an individual leader. It is best positioned to provide 'a perspective that bridges the gap between motivation and cognition as mechanisms of political choice'.¹⁵⁵ It should be noted that there were subsequent developments and expansions of the operational code framework that I have elected not to utilize. The questions listed above were developed by Ole Holsti into a six-part typology of beliefs. Many operational code analyses have used this typology to categorize the subject of analysis, and Stephen Walker expanded even further on these typologies in his 1983.¹⁵⁶ It is my belief that these specific typologies are better suited to operational code analyses which focus on an individual, as they have the potential to apply very specific characterizations. Given that my analysis will focus on the organization as a whole, I intend to adhere more closely to the works of Nathan Leites, as his works are focused on the characteristics of a political organization and not an individual political actor.

Although many recent examples of operational code analyses have employed quantitative evaluations of a leader's operational code (mostly using Verbs in Context software), my thesis will exclusively employ a qualitative analysis of the content of these sources in order to summarize the operational code of the Tamil Tigers.

¹⁵⁵ Stephen G. Walker, "Psychodynamic Processes and Framing Effects in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Woodrow Wilson's Operational Code," *Political Psychology* 16 (1995): 699

¹⁵⁶ Walker, "The Evolution of Operational Code Analysis", 411

3. Operational Code Analysis: Philosophical Questions

What is the 'essential' nature of political life? Is the political universe essentially one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one's political opponents?

A survey of the LTTE's actions over the last thirty years might lead to the conclusion that their view of the world was one that saw conflict and violence as unavoidable. A study of their commentary on political life, however, reveals a more complex set of attitudes towards their struggle and their opponents. In the paragraphs to follow, I will illustrate that while the strategies of the LTTE indicate the organization's belief that political life (for the Tigers) was by necessity difficult and violent, it was ultimately noble and virtuous:

Politics is not a matter of ruling over the people or of exercising power. Politics is a performance of service to people, contributing to the welfare of the people.¹⁵⁷

From the early days of the LTTE, the Tigers were consistent in the way they characterized their struggle. In 1986, Prabhakaran said: "I will categorise the struggle of the Tamil people as the struggle for the right to self determination. It is the struggle for political emancipation, a struggle to determine their own political destiny."¹⁵⁸ The LTTE appeared to believe that the legitimacy of their claim to self-determination guaranteed their eventual realization of this goal. In this sense, it seems that the Tigers saw the political world as a meritocracy. Early in the Tigers' movement, Prabhakaran stated the following:

It is wrong to call our movement 'separatist'. We are fighting for independence based on the right to national self determination of our people. Our struggle is for self determination, for the restoration of our sovereignty in our homeland.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 259.

¹⁵⁸ "It is the plight of the Tamil people that compelled me to take up arms", *This Week*, March 3 1986, accessed March 18, 2010, <http://eelamweb.com/index.php/national-leader/184-It-is-the-plight-of-the-Tamil-people-that-compelled-me-to-take-up-arms-1986.html?Itemid=108>.

¹⁵⁹ "Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984", *Sunday Magazine*, March 11-17 1984, accessed March 18, 2010, <http://www.eelamweb.com/index.php/component/content/article/188:Nature-is-my-friend-Life-my-philosopher-and-history-is-my-guide-1984.html?Itemid=108>.

In 2002, Prabhakaran reiterated that the Tigers' struggle was premised on the legitimate right to self-determination:

We are prepared to consider favourably a political framework that offers substantial regional autonomy and self-government in our homeland on the basis of our right to internal self-determination. But if our people's right to self-determination is denied and our demand for regional self-rule is rejected, we have no alternative other than to secede and form an independent state...¹⁶⁰

He went on to say that the purpose of the Tigers' struggle was "...based on the concept of self-determination as articulated in the United Nations Charter and other instruments...".¹⁶¹ The LTTE's emphasis on self-determination (and especially their references to the framework established by the United Nations) indicates that they believed politics was a useful forum for the recognition and realization of these goals. While this denotes a generally optimistic view of what they could achieve through politics, the Tigers' views on the nature of their opponents were considerably less generous.

The LTTE's opinions of the moral character and intentions of their opponents were almost universally damning and unambiguous, regardless of whether the opponent in question was the Sri Lankan government, Tamil 'traitors', or the Indian Peace Keeping Forces . In the paragraphs to follow, the aforesaid groups will be considered in the context of this question. The examples provided will illustrate that in all cases, the LTTE concluded that their opponents were fundamentally cruel, unjust, untrustworthy, and malicious. The LTTE did not view their political opponents merely as political entities with differing goals and beliefs, but as enemies.

Given the consistent condemnation of the moral character of its enemies, particularly the Sri Lankan army and government, one might assume that the LTTE viewed political life as being intrinsically discordant. This does not appear to be the case, as the LTTE frequently (and particularly in the last

¹⁶⁰ V.S. Sambandan, "Sticking to his guns", *Frontline*, Volume 19 - Issue 25, December 07 - 20, 2002, accessed September 13, 2010, <http://hinduonnet.com/fline/fl1925/stories/20021220007912800.htm>.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

decade of the organization's existence) stated its interest in negotiation and diplomacy. The LTTE does not appear to have concluded that political life was inherently one of conflict, but rather that its enemies forced the organization into violent struggle after eliminating any other avenues for pursuing political goals. The LTTE did not shy away from the use of violence, and acknowledged its reliance on guerrilla tactics. The Tigers consistently claimed, however, that this was the case because all alternatives for alternate forms of political action have been closed to them, including negotiations and diplomacy. As many of these examples overlap significantly with the following section of this chapter, they will be discussed in further detail in the following paragraphs.

When Prabhakaran spoke of the Sri Lankan government, his comments were usually prefaced by adjectives like 'racist' or 'chauvinist'; he even described an attack by the Sri Lankan army as a 'grave act of terrorism'.¹⁶² Throughout three decades of existence, the LTTE did not relent from their damning summations of the essential nature of the Sri Lankan government. It is clear from the cumulative commentary of the LTTE on the Sri Lankan state that they believed the government not only disagreed with their political objectives, but actively sought to destroy the Tamil race. For example, the LTTE made the following claim in a 2008 speech:

The underlying intent of the Sinhala state is to wipe out the national life and resources of the Tamils and subjugate the Tamil nation under alien Sinhala military despotism.¹⁶³

In July of 1983, rioting erupted after the LTTE ambushed and killed 13 Sri Lankan soldiers. The subsequent violence was described by Prabhakaran as being a premeditated attack on the Tamil people rather than a response to the LTTE's assault:

¹⁶² "TE National Leader Mr. V. Prabhakaran's speech – 1997", accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.tamilcanadian.com/page.php?cat=305&id=1378>.

¹⁶³ V. Pirapaharan, "We have never planned to act against the interests of any country", Ilankai Tamil Sangam, accessed July 15, 2010, http://www.sangam.org/2008/11/Prabakaran_2008.php?uid=3169.

Our view is that the July holocaust was a pre-planned. [sic] pre-orchestrate [sic] genocidal pogrom against the Tamils, carried out by the racial elements of the ruling party. Initially, these racist elements did attempt to put the whole blame on the Tiger...But in fact, it is the racist leaders of the present government who should be the responsibility for this tragic loss of life and property of our people.¹⁶⁴

Despite the clear relationship between the ambush and the reactionary violence against the Tamil population, it seems from the statement above that the Tigers determined their provocative strike was not the true impetus behind the pogrom.

The Tigers repeatedly claimed that the Sri Lankan state was not simply politically opposed to the LTTE and its' objectives, but also that it sought to destroy the Tamil people and their property out of malice, characterizing it as a "...totalitarian Fascist State bent on destroying an entire race of people."⁹. In his 1992 Heroes Day speech, Prabhakaran stated: "Our enemy is heartless and committed to war and violence. His objective is to destroy our homeland."¹⁰ The Tigers frequently made reference to a deliberate policy of repression and violence on the part of the Sri Lankan state:

Successive Sri Lankan governments aimed at the annihilation of the national entity of the Tamils... This oppression was not simply an expression of racial prejudice, but a well-calculated genocidal plan aimed at the gradual and systematic destruction of the essential foundations of national community.¹⁶⁵

They were equally consistent in predicting that this campaign of repression would never be abandoned in favour of a negotiated solution to the conflict, as aforementioned. In his Heroes Day speech in November of 1997, Prabhakaran stated that "We do not anticipate that the Sinhala chauvinists will renounce their policy of oppression and be prepared to do justice to the Tamils."¹⁶⁶ He went on to further criticize the Sinhala leadership for its perceived malevolence:

¹⁶⁴ "Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984", *Sunday Magazine*, March 11-17 1984, accessed March 18, 2010, <http://www.eelamweb.com/index.php/component/content/article/188:Nature-is-my-friend-Life-my-philosopher-and-history-is-my-guide-1984.html?Itemid=108>.

¹⁶⁵ Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, 148

¹⁶⁶ "TE National Leader Mr. V. Prabhakaran's speech – 1997".

...the Sinhala state has been adopting a singular policy of oppression against the Tamils...Unless this policy is radically changed the war will continue for ever [sic] with its disastrous consequences. It is not the LTTE, but the Sinhala chauvinists who have chosen this path of violence and destruction.¹⁶⁷

The LTTE was particularly sceptical of the Sri Lankan government's intentions with respect to cease-fire agreements. The following excerpt from a 1986 interview reveals that Prabhakaran had reached a decisive conclusion about the aims of the Sri Lankan government:

Under the guise of a cease-fire, the Sri Lankan State has embarked on a policy of ruthless repression, military domination and annihilation of our people. The present chauvinistic Sinhala leadership has no genuine interest in bringing about a fair and just solution through peaceful negotiations, but is committed to militarily subjugating the Tamil people. Such a policy has made the present, [sic] situation very critical and dangerous.¹⁶⁸

Early in the LTTE's existence, Prabhakaran stated his apparent frustration with the opponent's unwillingness to commit to an attempt at negotiations and ceasefire and blamed them for violence enacted by the LTTE: "The cease-fire is a drama...the Sri Lankan armed forces continued to attack civilians, forcing us to retaliate."¹⁶⁹ By Prabhakaran's own admission, a cease-fire was 'not advantageous' for the Tigers, but he claimed the LTTE's commitment to bringing about the 'right climate for genuine peace' was enough to persuade the Tigers to commit.¹⁷⁰ Years later in his 1999 Martyr's Day speech, he again criticized the Sri Lankan government for failing to support a peaceful resolution:

In my annual speeches on the Martyrs' Day, I have always emphasised the importance of peace and peaceful ways of seeking a negotiated political settlement. At the sametime, [sic] I have also pointed out the fact that Sinhala

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ "It is the plight of the Tamil people that compelled me to take up arms".

¹⁶⁹ "We are prepared to pay for freedom with our lives", *Sunday Magazine*, 29 September – 5 October 1985, accessed March 18, 2010, <http://www.eelamweb.com/index.php/component/content/article/186:We-are-Prepared-to-Pay-for-Freedom-With-Our-Lives-1985.html?Itemid=108>.

¹⁷⁰ "Sri Lanka's Broken Pacts and Evasive Proposals [sic]", Eelam Web, September 13, 1994, accessed March 18, 2010, <http://eelamweb.com/index.php/national-leader/183-Sri-lanka-s-broken-pacts-and-evasive-proposals-1994.html?Itemid=108>.

Buddhist chauvinism was not prepared to resolve the ethnic conflict through peaceful means.¹⁷¹

On many occasions the LTTE suggested that they were open to non-military options, but that these opportunities were continually declined by the Sri Lankan state, an entity Prabhakaran believed was "...committed to violence."¹⁷² In stating their openness to negotiations while castigating the government for a commitment to violence, the Tigers placed the onus for the success or failure of peace talks on the state, and in doing so attempted to absolve themselves of any of their own shortcomings in this regard. In an interview with the BBC in 1994, Prabhakaran made an unequivocal statement on the matter:

If talks in the past failed, it was simply because successive Sinhala governments refused to redress the genuine, fundamental grievances of the Tamil people, and failed to act with fair-play and justice.¹⁷³

A decade later, Prabhakaran displayed increased cynicism in his Heroes Day address regarding the utility of negotiations with the Sri Lankan state:

I do not wish to elaborate here the bitter historical experience of political negotiations we have engaged in with the Sinhala political leadership for more than fifty years to resolve the ethnic problem of the Tamil people. This is a political truth deeply buried in the collective psyche of the Tamil nation. Over a long period of time, we had talks on linguistic rights, on equal rights, on regional autonomy, on federal self-rule and entered into pacts and agreements, which were later torn apart and abrogated. Our liberation organisation is not prepared to walk the path of treachery and deception once again.¹⁷⁴

The Tigers came to similar conclusions about various Sri Lankan politicians, deeming each one to be uninterested in non-military solutions to the Tamil question. Of Jayawardene, the Tigers stated that "The massive military mobilisation clearly shows that Jayawardene is bent on a military solution rather

¹⁷¹ "Sri Lanka must end oppression for Peace", Tamil Net, accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=4257>.

¹⁷² "TE National Leader Mr.V.Prabaharan's Speech – 1992", Tamil Canadian, accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.tamilcanadian.com/page.php?cat=305&id=1373>.

¹⁷³ "Sri Lanka's Broken Pacts and Evasive Proposals [sic]".

¹⁷⁴ "LTTE Chief V. Prabhakaran's 'Heroes Day' speech on November 27, 2004", South Asia Terrorism Portal, accessed June 29, 2010, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/document/papers/heroday2004.htm>.

than being committed to the peace process of a negotiated settlement.”¹⁷⁵ In an interview in 1986,

Prabhakaran further commented on President Jayawardene’s alleged disinterest in peace:

Although Jayewardene poses as a lover of peace, he does not desire a peaceful settlement... Under the facade of a peace process he has unleashed military terror aimed at the genocidal destruction of our people.¹⁷⁶

He stated further that Jayawardene was untrustworthy and simply stringing the Tamil people along:

We don’t have faith. We know the history of the last 30 years and Jayewardene’s history also. Even common people do not have any faith (that anything will come out of the talks)...the results are in Jayewardene’s hands. I don’t have faith that he will put forward something...¹⁷⁷

Prabhakaran similarly concluded that President Chandrika Bandranaike Kumaratunga held ill intent for the Tamil people, and presumed her interest in peace talks to be a farce. In his Heroes Day speech in 2000, he declared that nature of the years ahead would be determined exclusively by her government’s behaviour:

...Whether it is going to be a turbulent period characterised by war and violence or whether peace will prevail during this period depends entirely on the policies to be adopted by Chandrika... We have our doubts...¹⁷⁸

In his 1999 Heroes Day speech, Prabhakaran reiterated his belief that the failure to secure a non-violent resolution to the civil war was due to the obstinacy of the Sri Lankan government:

We are keeping the doors of peace open and are sending signals of peace and goodwill to the Sinhala nation. But we are aware that Sinhala political leadership will not agree to create a peaceful environment as we suggest.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ “Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984”.

¹⁷⁶ “It is the plight of the Tamil people that compelled me to take up arms”.

¹⁷⁷ “The chances of attaining Eelam are bright”, Eelam Web, December 30, 1985, accessed March 18, 2010, <http://www.eelamweb.com/index.php/component/content/article/187:The-chances-of-attaining-Eelam-are-bright.html?Itemid=108><http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1909/19090040.htm>.

¹⁷⁸ “Annual Hero's Day Speech of the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, 27 November 2000”, South Asia Terrorism Portal, accessed July 16, 2010, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/document/papers/annual_heros_speech_by_prabhakaran.htm.

From the examples provided here, it is clear that the LTTE's public position was that the organization was prepared and willing to engage in non-military avenues of conflict resolution, but was protested that these would be unsuccessful because their political opponents were not similarly committed.

One notable exception to the Tigers' convictions about the unwaveringly hostile nature of the Sri Lankan state was the position taken by the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham. In a speech in 2002, Balasingham reported that negotiations had established 'stable peace' and that 'conditions of normalcy [were] slowly returning' to the island.¹⁸⁰ He went on to assure the international community that the LTTE is 'sincerely and firmly committed to peace and negotiated political settlement.'¹⁸¹ Balasingham then expressed his hope that the Sri Lankan government would adhere to the ceasefire. This show of faith with respect to the state and the negotiation process was incongruous with the litany of other disparaging remarks on the subject. It may be significant that this speech was directed at the international observers of the peace process and not the usual audiences addressed by the LTTE.

As the examples above illustrate, the LTTE commented frequently on the Sri Lankan government's purported lack of interest in non-military options and their purported intentions of genocide. The LTTE also asserted that the state was fundamentally untrustworthy and underhanded, accusing the Sri Lankan state of orchestrating "devious schemes by which our lands have been forcefully annexed"¹⁸². Prabhakaran also criticized the Sinhala for betraying the trust of the Tamils, especially in the context of negotiations:

¹⁷⁹ "Sri Lanka must end oppression for Peace", Tamil Net, accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=4257>.

¹⁸⁰ "Speech of the LTTE Chief Peace Negotiator Anton Balasingham", Tamil Canadian, accessed June 30, 2010, <http://www.tamilcanadian.com/page.php?cat=39&id=1416>.

¹⁸¹ Ibid

¹⁸² "Sri Lanka must end oppression for Peace", Tamil Net, accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=4257>.

Time and time again, the, [sic] Tamils were cheated. Breaking gentlemen's agreements, dishonouring pacts and agreements, it was the Sinhala. [sic] governments that had been abusing the trust that the Tamil people placed in them. No one can refute these facts of history.¹⁸³

In a 1986 interview with the BBC, Prabhakaran declared that the Sri Lankan state had continually disappointed and betrayed the Tamils for decades even before the formation of the LTTE, saying "...the pattern is this: when it looks as if a political solution might emerge, racist upheavals occur. This has been our experience from 1958."¹⁸⁴ Prabhakaran declared in the same interview that the political environment made it impossible to believe in the government, saying that "... circumstances do not permit us the luxury of trusting Sinhala politicians!"¹⁸⁵ Years later in his 1999 Heroes Day Speech, Prabhakaran reiterated his distrust for the leader of the day, stating "We do not trust Chandrika. She does not have the honesty and determination to resolve the Tamil national conflict in a fair and reasonable manner."¹⁸⁶

The LTTE also accused the Sri Lankan state of trickery and deceit in the context of the projection of the LTTE's image in Sri Lanka and the international community. The Tigers refuted the accusation that they were a terrorist group, countering that such a categorization was based on the "...false malicious propaganda of the Sri Lankan state".¹⁸⁷ In 2002 this claim was reiterated by Prabhakaran, who again stated that the Tigers were besmirched unjustly by a "...propaganda campaign carried out by the Sinhala chauvinists that we are enemies of peace."¹⁸⁸ In 2008, the Tigers again declared that their cause and people were suffering because their opponents were not only perpetuating the conflict, but also a campaign of misinformation:

¹⁸³ "Sri Lanka's Broken Pacts and Evasive Proposals [sic]".

¹⁸⁴ "The view from the Tigers (Part 1), *The Hindu*, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.hindu.com/nic/prabakaran-interview1.pdf>.

¹⁸⁵ "Making of a militant leader (Part 2)", *The Hindu*, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.hindu.com/nic/prabakaran-interview2.pdf>.

¹⁸⁶ V. Suryanarayan, "Mixed Signals," *Frontline*, December 25, 1999 – January 07, 2000, accessed March 6, 2013, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1627/16270630.htm>.

¹⁸⁷ Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist*, 98.

¹⁸⁸ Subramanian, "Prabhakaran in first person".

The Sinhala nation is conducting a major war of genocide against us in our land, the news about which is denied to the outside world. Successive Sinhala regimes have hoodwinked the international community with a series of deceptions.¹⁸⁹

The LTTE clarified that not every Sinhala was considered a political opponent, proclaiming that the Sinhala people were not the enemy and that the LTTE hoped to maintain a peaceful relationship with them despite the hostility displayed by the Sri Lankan state. The LTTE claimed that sympathetic Sinhala politicians were doomed by the political environment in Sri Lanka: "...no Sinhala party expressing support to the Tamils in any way can flourish there."¹⁹⁰

During the early years of the LTTE when much of their rhetoric was couched in the language of Marxism, the Tigers claimed that the Sinhalese people were, like the Tamils, oppressed by the ruling class. The Tigers suggested that when Tamil Eelam was achieved, the nation would act as a "revolutionary ally to the oppressed Sinhala masses".¹⁹¹ This willingness to engage with the Sinhala people was put forth again by Prabhakaran in a 1986 interview:

Our cause is fair and legitimate, but we are unable to mobilise the Sinhalese people in our favour because of the chauvinistic politicians and the Buddhist clergy who have been poisoning their minds against the Tamils.¹⁹²

In an interview with the BBC, Prabhakaran made a statement which again differentiated the Sinhala people from their government:

We hold the Sinhalese people with affection. We bear no hostility towards them. Those responsible for the present predicament, and the enmity between the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples, are the forces of Sinhala chauvinism.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ V. Pirapaharan, "We have never planned to act against the interests of any country", Ilankai Tamil Sangam, accessed July 15, 2010, http://www.sangam.org/2008/11/Prabakaran_2008.php?uid=3169.

¹⁹⁰ "Making of a militant leader (Part 2)".

¹⁹¹ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, *Towards Liberation: Selected Political Documents of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*, 73.

¹⁹² "It is the plight of the Tamil people that compelled me to take up arms".

¹⁹³ "BBC Interview by LTTE Leader Mr. Velupillai Pirabakaran", InfoLanka Forum, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.infolanka.com/ubb/Forum1/HTML/000922.html>.

In the 2006 Martyrs' Day speech, Prabhakaran similarly condemned the Sinhala 'chauvinist' politicians not only for persecuting the Tamil population, but also for restricting the engagement of the Sinhala people:

The Sinhala nation remains misled...and remains trapped in the chauvinistic sentiments thus created. Unable to free itself from this mindset, it has adopted Sinhala Buddhist chauvinistic notions as its dominant national philosophy.¹⁹⁴

This differentiation between the people and the state, which was initially framed as a class issue, appeared consistently in Tiger speeches and documents throughout the organization's existence. Just as consistently, the Tigers stated their belief that the Sri Lankan state was oppressive, cruel, and genocidal. From these remarks, it can be concluded that the Tigers cleaved the Sinhala people from the state in categorizing their political opponents. (It cannot be said, however, that the LTTE upheld this rhetoric when selecting the targets of its attacks).

The LTTE reserved particular contempt for political opponents within the Tamil community, especially those who Prabhakaran considered to be traitors within the organization. There was no ambiguity in the Tigers' rhetoric for those Tamils who declined to align themselves with the LTTE. For example, the LTTE described the TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) as "retarding the liberation struggle", advising further that "you can term the TULF leaders as betrayers."¹⁹⁵ The TULF was described by the LTTE as compromising the liberation struggle with their "selfish ambitions" and was accused by the Tigers of "gross betrayal and opportunism."¹⁹⁶ Prabhakaran identified his greatest frustration as "the betrayal of some of my trusted friends: those who pretended to be sincere to the cause. Bet [sic]

¹⁹⁴ "Heroes Day' speech by LTTE Chief Velupillai Prabhakaran", accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/document/papers/29nov2006.htm>.

¹⁹⁵ "Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984".

¹⁹⁶ "It is the plight of the Tamil people that compelled me to take up arms".

turned out to be self seeking opportunists.”¹⁹⁷, and delivered the following warning to fellow Tamils about quislings in their midst:

It is easy to recognize our enemy and his intention, but traitors wearing masks go around and function as marionettes of the enemy. They do not even hesitate to betray their own ethnic community due to their egoism. Our people should take care especially from these dangerous and reactionary forces.¹⁹⁸

One such ‘traitor’ was the government of India, a former ally of the Tamil movement. The Indian government, and specifically the government of Tamil Nadu, was sympathetic to the Tigers’ cause in the 1980s, going so far as to provide training and refuge to Tamil militants.¹⁹⁹ The policies of the government changed dramatically with the election of Rajiv Gandhi after his mother, Indira Gandhi, was assassinated. As a result of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord in 1987, India sent up to 100,000 troops into Sri Lanka.²⁰⁰ This ultimately inflamed tensions and violence, and the relationship between the LTTE and India was damaged irreparably. Prabhakaran described the conflict with the IPKF as a shock and a betrayal:

Neither the Tamil people nor the LTTE anticipated, even in their wildest dreams, a war with India. For the Tamils, India was their protector, guardian, and saviour and the presence of the Indian troops was looked upon as an instrument of peace and love. For the LTTE, India was their promoter, a friendly power who provided sanctuary and armed assistance, an ally who respected its role in the liberation war and recognized its political importance. Therefore, the Indian decision to launch a war against the LTTE shook the Tamil nation by surprise and anguish.²⁰¹

In a letter to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Prabhakaran accused India of betraying the Tamil people and ‘committing inhuman atrocities’.²⁰² He claimed that the brutality of the IPKF had ‘deeply wounded

¹⁹⁷ “Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984”.

¹⁹⁸ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 266.

¹⁹⁹ Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas*, 109.

²⁰⁰ Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, 151.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 153.

²⁰² Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*, 187.

the sentiments of the people' and as a result 'the hate for the Indian army became widespread.'²⁰³ The Indian government's shift in policy jolted the Tigers, and the perceived betrayal eventually led Prabhakaran and the LTTE to plot and execute the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi with a suicide attack in 1991 – an incident about which the Tigers later expressed regret.²⁰⁴

The Tigers had a view of politics which was without ambiguity. They expressed certainty about the nature of their enemies and seemed to believe that political life rewarded those with just motives. Despite the overwhelming shortcomings of their opponents, they believed that the political universe had merit and was not intrinsically rife with conflict.

What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one's fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic or must one be pessimistic on this score? And in what respect the one and/or the other?

The preceding question highlights the Tigers' confidence in the potential of politics, but this confidence was conveyed in terms of inevitability rather than optimism. This section will evaluate the extent to which the Tigers actually felt optimistic about the realization of their objective.

The LTTE was an organization with a singular political aspiration: the establishment of a Tamil homeland, Tamil Eelam, within Sri Lanka. The Tigers' focus on this aim was uncompromised and did not waver over time, despite significant shifts in fortune for the organization. They conveyed confidence that they would eventually realize their objectives because their cause was just: "We will win ultimately since the everlasting dharma and truth are behind us."²⁰⁵ It can safely be said that the Tigers were optimistic about the probability of achieving their objective of creating Tamil Eelam, and that their

²⁰³ Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, 152.

²⁰⁴ "Tamil Tiger 'regret' over Gandhi", BBC News, accessed September 12, 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5122032.stm.

²⁰⁵ "Resistance and Martyrdom in the process of State Formation in Tamil Eelam," in *Martyrdom and Political Resistance: Essays from Asia and Europe*, ed. Joyce Pettigrew. (Amsterdam: VU Press, 1997), 64

positivity in this regard seems to have been based in their confidence in their unparalleled perseverance and military might rather than external political conditions.

The Tigers' statements about the future of their organization reveal that the LTTE was certain about the justness of its cause and its military capabilities. The Tigers were just as convinced that the circumstances of their struggle would not become more favourable. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the Tigers frequently stated that their opponents were racist, untrustworthy, and unlikely to see the validity of the Tigers' aspirations and foster conditions for peaceful change. The passage of time seemed to make the Tigers more pessimistic about the relationship between the Tamils and Sinhala, but the Tigers were concurrently unwavering in their confidence about achieving Tamil Eelam. It is apparent that the LTTE harboured no delusions that a change in circumstance or speedy resolution was likely, and instead was optimistic about the movement's objectives because of the Tigers' own initiatives and capabilities: "The chances of attaining Eelam are bright because the people's determination is firm. We are prepared for a long-drawn struggle (to attaining Eelam)."²⁰⁶

In this sense, the LTTE displayed a somewhat paradoxical attitude towards the probability of achieving Tamil Eelam. The Tigers frequently asserted their military capabilities and the determination of their members. Conversely, they were pessimistic with respect to the possibility of a negotiated or peaceful resolution to the Sri Lankan conflict. From the organization's inception, the LTTE espoused as fact that a convivial relationship between the Tamil people and the Sri Lankan government was out of the realm of possibility. In 2004, Prabhakaran made the following assertion in his Heroes Day speech:

²⁰⁶ "The chances of attaining Eelam are bright".

As never before, this general election has polarized the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic formations into two distinct nations, as two separate peoples with divergent and mutually incompatible ideologies, consciousness and political goals.²⁰⁷

This reiterates the Tigers' previously-stated belief that the grievances between the Sinhala and Tamils were insurmountable. In a 1992 speech, Prabhakaran declared that "...there has been no change in the hegemonic attitude of the Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism to dominate and rule over the Tamil nation by armed might."²⁰⁸ The Tigers saw no hope for a reversal of their opponents' stance on the Tamil question, and were resigned to a continuation of their campaign of armed struggle:

We do not anticipate that the Sinhala chauvinists will renounce their policy of oppression and be prepared to do justice to the Tamils. We have not launched this liberation struggle with such expectations.²⁰⁹

They also concluded that the civil war would continue indefinitely without a change in the position of the Sri Lankan state:

For the last fifty years, the Sinhala state has been adopting a singular policy of oppression against the Tamils. This irrational policy has given rise to war and violence destroying the peace in the island. Unless this policy is radically changed the war will continue for ever [sic] with its disastrous consequences.²¹⁰

In an LTTE publication entitled *Viravenkai*, the Tigers also stressed that "A solution which keeps Sinhalese and Tamils together in one state, cannot last."²¹¹ The LTTE claimed that an independent state was the only guarantor of the safety of the Tamil people, saying in 1984 that "Tamils will never be safe until they establish an independent state of Tamil Eelam with a powerful patriotic army to protect their life and property."²¹² Rather than causing pessimism about the fate of Sri Lankan Tamils, the Tigers'

²⁰⁷ "LTTE Chief V. Prabhakaran's 'Heroes Day' speech on November 27, 2004", accessed June 29, 2010, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/document/papers/heroday2004.htm>.

²⁰⁸ "TE National Leader Mr.V.Prabaharan's Speech – 1992.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ "TE National Leader Mr. V. Prabhakaran's speech – 1997", accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.tamilcanadian.com/page.php?cat=305&id=1378>.

²¹¹ Hellmann-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity*, 61.

²¹² "Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984".

assuredness about the grim circumstances of their struggle seemed to galvanize their optimism in the eventual realization of an independent state.

Over its three decades of existence, the LTTE was consistently optimistic that its capacity for armed conflict was sufficient to meet its objectives. As early as 1984, Prabhakaran affirmed that the LTTE was optimistic about its ability to achieve its goals: "Several successful guerrilla raids have convinced our people that the Sinhala forces can be defeated and freedom can be won."²¹³ In 2005, Anton Balasingham declared in his address at the London celebration of Heroes Day that the Tigers were certain about the viability of attaining an independent Tamil state, even after periods of negotiation, ceasefire and incremental loss of territory:

The Liberation Tigers have sufficient manpower, firepower and people's support... And our recent successes have demonstrated our capability, giving new confidence that an independent Tamil Eelam can be established.²¹⁴

Prabhakaran displayed supreme confidence about the inevitable creation of Tamil Eelam and consequentially encouraged the Tamil people to anticipate emancipation of their nation:

It is sure that one day Tamililam will arise. It is sure that you also, our people, will obtain release. It is sure that our country as an egalitarian society will flourish. With this hope and determination of spirit we shall without hesitating march heroically on our way for liberation.²¹⁵

It does not appear that the Tigers' optimism was affected by the events around them, even when those events might indicate cause for pessimism or a change in position.

While the Tigers did not indicate ambivalence about the likelihood of achieving Eelam, they did imply that there were some contingencies on their forthcoming success²¹⁶ and acknowledged that meeting this goal would be challenging. Prabhakaran once stated that the Eelam struggle would pose

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ "Anton Balasingham addresses London Heroes Day", Tamil Net, Saturday, 27 November 1999, accessed May 19, 2010, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=4258>.

²¹⁵ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 270.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 291.

'Himalayan obstacles', but that when these arose the Tigers 'never failed to confront them with courage... We have not been shaken even by violent storms of powerful forces.' The LTTE emphasized the importance of national unity and engagement in the quest for Eelam, an attitude which was unsurprising given Prabhakaran's distaste for dissent. Sentiments of this nature were communicated in a book of Prabhakaran's musings entitled *Reflections of the Leader*. This collection contains various statements which are almost instructional: "If we become devoted to the true aim, determined and united as one mass of people, no power whatever can shake or destroy us."²¹⁷ In the same publication, Prabhakaran again asserted the need for unanimity: "It is assured that our aim for liberation will be victorious if all Tamil people participate in the struggle with nationalistic feeling that they are one ethnic community."²¹⁸ Later in the same book, Prabhakaran declared his belief about the fixed nature of the Tamil people: "We the Tamil people have a national formation. Historically we have lived as a nation. We live as a nation and shall live as a nation."²¹⁹ He succinctly stated three prerequisites for military success of the Tigers' movement: "Victory is certain if all three – exercise – tactics – courage – are found together in a regiment."²²⁰ The Tigers also iterated that the success or failure of their movement was not reliant on external forces or circumstance, but on their own conviction and commitment:

The truth is that the victory of our war is not dependent on the hand of the world, our victory is in our hands, is dependent on our strength and on our determination. Right and justice alone on our side is not enough. We need strength. We must have excellence for fighting. We must have determination without hesitation.²²¹

Prabhakaran's determination to establish Tamil Eelam was reflected in his statements about the future for Tamil youth. He was optimistic about their chances, and stated the following in a 1984

²¹⁷ Ibid, 274.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 274.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 269.

²²⁰ Ibid, 285.

²²¹ Ibid, 271.

interview: “The youths are fighting a battle for freedom. I foresee a bright future for them.”²²²

Prabhakaran commented further on his interest in procuring a secure political environment for future generations of Tamils:

I’m all afire to build up a nation; that is the life-ideal I have set for myself... My ambition is to mould a new generation of youth who will be the architects of our country’s future.²²³

The LTTE’s stated certainty regarding the establishment of Eelam sprung largely from the well of confidence in their military prowess. Prabhakaran claimed in 1985 that the determination of the LTTE guaranteed the realization of their goal:

There cannot be any talk on morale because as long as there is one soldier (in the LTTE), they will fight for our ideal (to achieve Eelam). Till there is a last comrade. We will fight for our independence... Liberation.²²⁴

As late as 2008, a time when the Tigers’ domain and military strength had been diminished considerably from their relative dominance in the 1990s, the Tigers were undeterred in their commitment to the realization of Tamil Eelam:

As the freedom movement of the people of Tamil Eelam we will never, ever allow Sinhala occupation or Sinhala domination of our homeland. Whatever challenges confront us, whatever contingencies we encounter, whatever forces stand on our path, we will still continue with our struggle for the freedom of the Tamil people.²²⁵

It is not surprising that the LTTE conveyed such certainty and optimism about the establishment of Eelam, even in the face of political and military setbacks in the domestic and international realms. The organization had been formed out of frustration and stagnation in conventional political channels, against a “background of mounting repression, at a time when our people had exhausted all forms [of] peaceful agitation, that the armed revolutionary struggle took birth in the early ‘70s.”²²⁶ The pursuit of

²²² “Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984”.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ “The chances of attaining Eelam are bright”.

²²⁵ V. Pirapaharan, “We have never planned to act against the interests of any country”.

²²⁶ “It is the plight of the Tamil people that compelled me to take up arms”.

Tamil Eelam through the military (and occasionally negotiated) tactics of the Tigers was somewhat of a last resort for those Tamils hoping for political independence. To express doubt or pessimism would have been at odds with the confidence, conviction, and brazen attacks that characterized the Tigers' existence.

Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?

The LTTE conveyed such certainty with respect to the eventual establishment of Eelam that the observer is left with an impression of confidence and predictability in this regard. In other statements, the LTTE did not hesitate to declare that its enemies and the political environment in Sri Lanka were both unspeakably terrible and likely to stay that way. Although the Tigers did not directly speak to the above question with any frequency, it can be surmised from the LTTE's general commentary that the Tigers were certain about some aspects of their political future.

As aforementioned, the Tigers were confident in the righteousness of their cause and seemed sure that eventually the justness of their cause would translate into a solution to the civil war:

Morally, we are on a firm foundation. The aim of our struggle is just. It fits in the international human dharma. Our people have a right to self-determination. They have a right to establish an independent Government. Nobody can reject this right on the basis of international law.²²⁷

The Tigers stated clearly that the struggle for an independent homeland would continue until this aim was met, and in this sense the future for the organization was predictable. In *Reflections of the Leader*, Prabhakaran states the following:

We took up arms to establish the independence and honour of our people. I want to state very clearly that that struggle will continue until that independence and honour are established.²²⁸

²²⁷ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 90.

²²⁸ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 268.

In the same publication, Prabhakaran is firm in his prognostication about the future: "It is sure that one day Tamililam will arise."²²⁹ The LTTE was certain enough that Tamil Eelam would come into existence that Prabhakaran advised Tamils to draw the same conclusions: "Let us continue to struggle with the conviction that a determined nation will eventually win."²³⁰ That said, the Tigers did not predict this outcome with any specificity. Prabhakaran cautioned that the project of self-determination could be a long one: "It could be that our aim is not fulfilled in our lifetime."²³¹

As has been addressed in the preceding paragraphs, the Tamil Tigers operated with certainty about the future behaviour of their political opponents. The Tigers were almost entirely pessimistic about the nature of their enemies, and therefore could predict to some degree how they might behave. In his 2006 Heroes Day Speech, Prabhakaran declared the following: "It is now crystal clear that the Sinhala leaders will never put forward a just resolution to the Tamil national question."²³² As has been previously mentioned, the resigned predictions about the rigidity of the LTTE's opponents seem to be at odds with the conviction that the attainment of Tamil Eelam was a certainty.

How much 'control' or 'mastery' can one have over historical development? What is one's role in 'moving' and 'shaping' history in the desired direction?

The preceding paragraphs have communicated the Tigers' sense of inevitability that the political system would reward their cause, even though they were unwavering in the negative characterization of their political opponents. The following section will explore their view of the future in terms of their own ability to influence the course of history.

²²⁹ Ibid, 270.

²³⁰ "TE National Leader Mr. V. Prabhakaran's speech – 1997".

²³¹ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 260.

²³² "Prabhakaran's 2006 Heroes Day Speech", Ilankai Tamil Sangam, accessed February 8, 2013, http://www.sangam.org/taraki/articles/2006/11-27_Heroes_Day_Speech.php?uid=2079.

In some ways, the Tigers seemed to believe that they were unable to control or influence the conditions of their struggle. This is conveyed primarily through their assessments of their political opponents (as has been discussed in the preceding portions of this chapter). In this regard, it seems that the Tigers believed some aspects of historical development were out of their control. For example, Prabhakaran claimed that armed struggle was thrust upon the Tigers by unchangeable circumstance:

We were compelled to take up arms in order to protect our people from the armed terrorism of the racist Sinhala state. The armed violent path was not our choice. It was forced upon us by history.²³³

This sentiment is one that is reiterated frequently in LTTE statements: that the Tigers were forced to behave in one way or another because of the policies and actions of their opponents. The most obvious example is the LTTE's claim that their preferred path of peaceful negotiation was cut off, and only then did the organization turn to armed combat. It might be inferred from these statements that the Tigers felt that their role in influencing the course of history was limited, as they did not have the ability to choose from a full complement of tactics and approaches.

Other remarks made by the Tigers counter this pattern, and indicate that they felt that they had some control in 'moving history in the desired direction', as they were by no means self-conscious about their scope of influence. This confidence was most clearly exemplified by the Tigers' confidence in their military capacities. In his 1993 Heroes Day speech, Prabhakaran boasted of his strategic and military achievements with respect to suicide attackers: "I have groomed my weak brethren into a strong weapon called Black Tigers... No force on earth today can suppress the fierce uprising of Tamils who seek freedom."²³⁴ In 1999, Prabhakaran asserted the following:

Our military successes have surprised and astounded the world. This is a unique historical achievement in the art of contemporary warfare. The dimensions of

²³³ V. Pirapaharan, "We have never planned to act against the interests of any country".

²³⁴ Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, 64.

this military victory have not only amazed our enemy but also astonished several international countries that have been actively helping Sri Lanka's war effort...²³⁵

It is notable, however, that the Tigers relied heavily on guerrilla attacks, suicide bombs, child soldiers, the smuggling of military equipment, and other unconventional means to facilitate warfare. It could be inferred from these activities (and from the LTTE's remarks on such matters) that the Tigers' lack of influence in 'legitimate' political channels effectively limited their ability to control the political future of their organization and narrowed the scope of strategic approaches available to them. LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham alluded to this as he explained behind the rationale behind these tactics:

We had to employ unconventional methods and strategies to fight against state oppression. So we devised these suicide attacks to attack military and economic targets to weaken Sri Lanka.²³⁶

As the Tigers' were boastful about their military capabilities, it would be misleading to claim that they completely lamented their apparent relegation to the realm of guerrilla warfare, but it could legitimately be claimed that the Tigers felt that their options were somewhat restricted. In a 1994 interview with the BBC, Prabhakaran intimated that the Sri Lankan government should be responsible for ending the conflict:

We want peace ourselves; a durable one that would enable all people to live with peace of mind. What obstructs that, [sic] is this war. Therefore, the war should be brought to an end. Those who forced this war on us, [sic] are the ones who can also bring it to an end.²³⁷

In conclusion, this is not a question which the Tigers seem to have ever answered explicitly. It could be concluded that their confidence, both in their own abilities as well as the justness of their cause, indicated a sense of control over the course of history. It could also be argued that the tactics the Tigers employed indicates that they had a lack of control in what was ultimately an asymmetrical conflict.

²³⁵ "Sri Lanka must end oppression for Peace".

²³⁶ Anton Balasingham, "BBC Sri Lankan and the Tamil Tigers: evolution of ethnic war" (Part 5), YouTube, accessed May 17, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgVQtCiMH4>.

²³⁷ "Sri Lanka's Broken Pacts and Evasive Proposals [sic]."

What is the role of 'chance' in human affairs and in historical development?

The way the LTTE saw the role of 'chance' in its own affairs is difficult to gauge. The Tigers were reluctant to make deadlines or commitments with respect to their actions, suggesting the organization was amenable to leaving some things to chance. On the other hand most aspects of the organization were highly controlled, primarily by Prabhakaran. As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, The LTTE was not inclined to spontaneity, nor did they leave their affairs to chance. It does not appear from their collected statements on the nature of their opponents that they believed that chance played a significant role in the political world. As has been discussed previously, the LTTE was unwavering with respect to the nature of those who opposed the Tigers, and displayed no uncertainty about how these entities would behave. Not only did the behaviour of the LTTE indicate that very little about the political future was left to chance, they believed that chance was akin to risk. This was at odds with the culture of discipline and planning within the organization.

The Tigers' distaste for uncertainty was manifested in the measures taken to maintain control and discipline in the LTTE ranks. Prabhakaran once said that "Nothing happens in the LTTE without my permission."²³⁸ Prabhakaran's unparalleled control of the LTTE cadres is reflected in the commentary of a Black Tiger named Darshika, who described her work in the following way: "You must be totally committed and courageous, and do exactly what the Leader decides."²³⁹ When asked to elaborate on the importance of discipline within the organization, Prabhakaran explained it in the following way:

When you have a school with a good standard of discipline and a principal who believes in this, the students acquire a good education and do well in life. You see this everywhere: there are certain schools which are rated as "good" because the teachers and, most important, the principal stand for discipline. You will find that batches and batches of students who studied under such a principal do well later on. The same principle applies to our activity. That is why

²³⁸ "We are prepared to pay for freedom with our lives".

²³⁹ "My Daughter the Terrorist."

we lay such stress on stern discipline. Ruthlessness in our organization is manifested in the battlefield.²⁴⁰

Prabhakaran claimed that the cadres' example of 'living in discipline' was in fact the reason the Tiger warriors were respected by the Tamil people, and that maintaining 'high standards of discipline and morality' aided the Tigers in battle.²⁴¹ He also claimed that discipline and order were means of controlling the risks that were inherent to politics, and particularly armed conflict:

Those who bear arms acquire and wield an extreme measure of power. We believe that if this power is abused, it will inevitably lead to dictatorship. That is why we keep our military organization in such a strict state of discipline.²⁴²

The Tigers' ruthless treatment of perceived traitors was another indication of the high levels of control exercised within the organization. In the documentary *My Daughter the Terrorist*, two female Black Tigers discuss how the organization would handle betrayal by a cadre: "Instead of losing many people, it's better to just shoot the one traitor."²⁴³ They go on to say that the Leader is apprised of all actions within the organization: "Everything, good or bad, goes right up to the Leader. So if we betray the movement, the Leader will be the final judge."²⁴⁴ The inclination to control the organization's military action also extended to planning for the future. Prabhakaran once said that in the even if the struggle for Tamil Eelam did not end in his lifetime, the LTTE had a plan "...to hand over the war to the next generation."²⁴⁵ The only clear exception to the Tigers' meticulous approach was their selection process for assigning suicide missions to Black Tigers: "It's all decided by a lottery system, kind of like 'spin the bottle'."²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ "Making of a militant leader (Part 2)", 3.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 3.

²⁴² Ibid, 3-4.

²⁴³ "My Daughter the Terrorist."

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 260.

²⁴⁶ "My Daughter the Terrorist."

From their actions, it could be concluded that the Tigers believed that chance should play no role in the development of their organization. This may not indicate, however, that the Tigers believed chance was irrelevant in human affairs. While the LTTE left little to chance internally, the Tigers seemed willing to abdicate their long-term success to fate, stating frequently that their plight would inevitably be rectified because their cause was just.

Operational Code Analysis: Instrumental Questions

What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?

The selection of goals is an interesting point of interrogation for the Tamil Tigers, as they were almost singularly focused on the creation of a Tamil homeland. The LTTE, as their name suggests, saw themselves as a liberation organization rather than a conventional political entity. The Tamil Tigers do not appear to have devoted much attention to selecting major political goals or deliberating possible projects in the same way that a political party might, as all undertakings of the LTTE were apparently directed at their oft-stated aim of liberating the Tamils of Sri Lanka. The goal selected by the Tigers did change in the ways it was articulated and envisaged by the Tigers, but most aspects of their aim were constant over time.

The Tigers described their general objectives in terms of attaining freedom and liberation for their people: "National liberation is a general aim – a national aim - indicating the liberation and awakening of all."²⁴⁷ Naturally the LTTE believed that liberation would entail freedom from persecution as well as the ability to govern, in some capacity, the Tamil homeland. Prabhakaran articulated the aspirations of the Tamil people thusly in his 2000 Heroes Day Speech:

They want to live happily in peace in their own lands without being dominated or harassed by others. The deepest aspiration of our people is to live in dignity in a political environment where they could rule themselves. The Sinhalese should try to understand the Tamil aspirations. It is on the basis of this understanding a just and permanent solution could be built up.²⁴⁸

The Tamil Tigers emphasized throughout their decades of political action that their objective in creating a Tamil homeland within Sri Lanka was derivative of the history of the Tamil people and their

²⁴⁷ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 289.

²⁴⁸ "Annual Hero's Day Speech of the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, 27 November 2000", South Asia Terrorism Portal, accessed July 16, 2010, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/document/papers/annual_heros_speech_by_prabhakaran.htm.

connection to the land. In this sense, the objective of creating an independent homeland was seen as a restorative project and not an unprecedented initiative. When the LTTE tabled their proposal for interim self-government in 2003, the Tigers summarized their aspirations as follows:

The basis of our struggle is to regain the lost freedom for the Tamil people and bring them on par with our Sinhala brethren, enabling them to enjoy human liberty and dignity and the recognition as a distinct nation of people.²⁴⁹

Prabhakaran's Heroes Day speech in 1999 reiterated the notion that creating a Tamil homeland would rectify the historical displacement and maltreatment of Sri Lankan Tamils:

For more than fifty years – ever since the Sinhala chauvinists assumed political power in the island – the lands of the Tamils have been systematically usurped. Our land has been subjected to tyranny and oppression. On one side, there have been devious schemes by which our lands have been forcefully annexed and given to Sinhala colonisers. On the other hand, our lands have been militarily occupied and their resources destroyed and the people who lived on those lands have been reduced to the state of destitution. It is against this injustice we have been fighting. Therefore our liberation war is essentially a war to liberate our lands and to establish our sovereignty: our right to rule in our homeland.²⁵⁰

The Tigers were adamant that only a Tamil homeland would suitably redress Tamil grievances, although the LTTE did indicate some flexibility in terms of how such a homeland might manifest. The LTTE was sometimes strident about the nature of the desired homeland, and conveyed a preference for seceding from Sri Lanka, as indicated in this statement from 1993:

We are firmly convinced that the creation of an independent sovereign state of Tamil Eelam is the only and final solution to the Tamil national question. Our position is well known to the enemy and to the world.²⁵¹

Concurrently, however, the organization consented to considering a solution which would see Tamil Eelam as a component of a Sri Lankan federation.²⁵² Therefore the Tigers emphasized the necessity of

²⁴⁹ V.S. Sambandan, "The LTTE Blueprint".

²⁵⁰ "தலைவர் உரை 1999", EelamHomeLand, accessed July 16, 2010, <http://www.eelamhomeland.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=150>.

²⁵¹ "தலைவர் உரை 1993", EelamHomeLand, accessed July 16, 2010, <http://www.eelamhomeland.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=144>.

sovereignty and self-government, but did not consistently state a preference for creating a state which was separate from Sri Lanka. In fact, separation from Sri Lanka was at one point articulated by Anton Balasingham as a somewhat unfavourable option for the LTTE:

If our demand for regional autonomy and self-governance is rejected and if conditions of oppression continue, then, as a last resort, our people have no option other than to fight for political independence and statehood.²⁵³

While the appetite for complete severance from Sri Lanka was perhaps limited, the Tigers stated consistently that the Tamil people's ties to specific geographic regions of the island signified their claim to govern those territories:

Sovereignty derives from the people; it is an inalienable right of a people. It is the people of Jaffna who has [sic] sovereign right over the Jaffna peninsula... As the liberation army of our people we will not allow our traditional lands to be occupied by alien forces. Whatever the challenges we have to face, regardless of the obstacles we must overcome, whichever force opposes us, our liberation movement is determined to liberate Jaffna.²⁵⁴

Although the Tigers displayed some openness to varied iterations of Tamil Eelam, they were rigid in their demands that such an entity be a permanent arrangement: "There has to be a permanent solution to the problems of the Tamil people. Only then we can think of contesting elections."²⁵⁵ Because their major political goal remained essentially unchanged over decades there is little opportunity to gain insight into their process of selecting goals based on their commentary. If anything, the assembled commentary indicates the singularity of their purpose as a political entity.

How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?

²⁵² Wilson, A. *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, 133.

²⁵³ V. Suryanarayan, "How long will the euphoria last?" *Frontline*, October 12-25, 2002, accessed April 14, 2010, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl1920/stories/20021011004713200.htm>.

²⁵⁴ "Annual Hero's Day Speech of the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, 27 November 2000".

²⁵⁵ "Sri Lanka's Broken Pacts and Evasive Proposals [sic]".

The selection of the LTTE's primary political goal was a straightforward matter, but the methods selected to pursue this objective were more varied. Although the Tigers were most notorious for their guerrilla unconventional and violent attacks, other approaches were often vaunted and occasionally even utilized. As previously discussed, the Tamil Tigers relied primarily on guerrilla tactics. While the Tigers claimed that this was not the organization's preferred method of action, statements by the LTTE suggest that armed conflict was nevertheless consistently seen as an effective way of pursuing the organization's goals. In a 1986 interview, Vellupillai Prabhakaran made the following statement about the LTTE's methods:

Twelve years of experience has convinced me beyond doubt that the armed revolutionary path we under took was the correct one. The other liberation groups who criticised our armed strategy as terrorism have now realised that armed struggle is the only way out for the emancipation of our oppressed people. Moreover the guerrilla warfare has been an effective form of struggle. Several successful guerrilla raids have convinced our people that the Sinhala forces can be defeated and freedom can be won.²⁵⁶

Not only did Prabhakaran believe that that 'armed revolutionary path' was effective, he claimed that action was a prerequisite to credibility and influence: "When you speak of a political outlook, people will respect you only if you prove yourself in action."²⁵⁷ Prabhakaran reportedly balked at suggestions that the LTTE should tend away from violence, claiming that "We need to take some action first. The people will follow."²⁵⁸, and went on to suggest that "No struggle will take place without killings."²⁵⁹ In *Reflections of the Leader*, Prabhakaran is quoted as saying that he gave "low value to talks; only after growing through action should we start talking".²⁶⁰ Prabhakaran suggested in an interview that from childhood, he was inclined to pursue his political aspirations through violence:

²⁵⁶ "Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984".

²⁵⁷ "The making of a militant leader."

²⁵⁸ Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*, 56.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 56

²⁶⁰ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 258.

The swelling thirst for freedom led me, when I was a fourteen year school boy and seven like minded youngsters in our school, to form a movement with no name. Our aim was to struggle for freedom and to attack the army. I was leader of the movement. At the time the idea that dominated our minds was somehow to buy a weapon and to make a bomb. This is how I spent my youth, filled with thoughts about struggle, freedom and the urge to do something for our people...²⁶¹

This statement (as well as biographical information about his childhood and adolescence) suggests that Prabhakaran's interest in guerrilla warfare may have provided the framework for his political actions, and not vice versa.

On other occasions, Prabhakaran emphasized that the armed struggle of the LTTE (and Tamils in general) was self-defence; a last resort for those fighting for Tamil independence. In the LTTE's 2003 document entitled "The Proposal by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on behalf of the Tamil people for an Agreement to establish an Interim Self-Governing Authority for the Northeast of the Island of Sri Lanka", the organization included the following preamble, which asserts that the LTTE's violent methods emerged as a result of the futility of other approaches:

Bearing in mind that the Tamil armed struggle as a measure of self-defence and as a means for the realisation of the Tamil right to self-determination arose only after more than four decades of non-violent and peaceful constitutional struggle proved to be futile and due to the absence of means to resolve the conflict peacefully,²⁶²

This belief was reiterated throughout the decades of the LTTE's existence. In Prabhakaran's 1999 Heroes Day speech, he emphasized that his organization was engaged in armed struggle because no other option was available:

The anti-Tamil Sinhala racist political system – which totally disregards human rights and liberties – offers no alternatives to the Tamils other than to fight,

²⁶¹ Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist*, 84-85.

²⁶² "Full Text: Tamil Tiger Proposals", BBC News, November 1, 2003, accessed April 15, 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3232913.stm.

secede and establish an independent Tamil state. It is along this secessionist path that the Sinhala nation is driving the Tamil nation.²⁶³

In an interview with *The Hindu*, Prabhakaran spoke of armed conflict as a way to prevent the exploitation and abuse of the Tamil people:

Looking at our historical background, we had to take up arms to fight for our rights. The lesson was that they could do all this because we were defenceless and disarmed. Why should we remain so? We should take up violence to counter and overthrow their violence. Only after that did I engage in this movement.²⁶⁴

Prabhakaran acknowledged that use of guerrilla tactics would force the LTTE into an underground existence, but nonetheless felt that such methods were required:

I felt that an armed struggle was the only alternative left to our people, not only ensure our survival but ultimately to free our selves [sic] from the Sinhala oppression. I have always been aware that our movement would be outlawed. It is for this reason that we organized our movement as a clandestine underground [sic] structure from its inception.²⁶⁵

Prabhakaran endorsed the LTTE's approach as effective warfare, but also as a kind of self-defence: "I strongly felt that armed struggle was the only way to confront a system which employs armed might against unarmed, innocent people."²⁶⁶ He once declared "Why shouldn't we take up arms to fight those who have enslaved us?"²⁶⁷ implying little reticence about the use of violence in pursuit of the LTTE's goals.

In spite of the fact that the Tigers embraced armed conflict with zeal and innovation, they reserved at least stated (if not actual) admiration for nonviolent tactics. In his 2006 Heroes Day speech, Prabhakaran made the following statement: "Both our liberation movement and our people never

²⁶³ "தலைவர் உரை 1999", EelamHomeLand, accessed July 16, 2010, <http://www.eelamhomeland.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=150>.

²⁶⁴ "The making of a militant leader."

²⁶⁵ "Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984."

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Narayan Swamy, *Prabhakaran: Inside an Elusive Mind*, 24.

preferred war to a peaceful resolution. We have always preferred a peaceful approach to win the political rights of our people.”²⁶⁸ In 1992, Prabhakaran asserted that the LTTE would welcome the eventual opportunity to live peacefully with its former (and then reformed) enemy: “We have not closed down the path of peace. We have no such intention. One day, when our enemy knocks at our doors of peace, we will extend the hand of friendship.”²⁶⁹ On occasion, this purported inclination towards non-military action was acted realized. Peter Schalk notes that the Tigers engaged in some ‘non-violent but militant Gandhian methods’²⁷⁰, the most significant of which was the hunger strike which claimed the life of Thileepan, a prominent Tiger who fasted to death in protest of the government treatment of Tamils in 1987.²⁷¹

It can safely be inferred from the LTTE’s (and especially Prabhakaran’s) overall commentary that the organization felt that guerrilla warfare (which evolved eventually into more sophisticated armed conflict) was the only effective way to pursue the goal of Tamil independence. Supposing that the LTTE was truly ‘forced’ into armed struggle, the Tigers did not necessarily consider it to be ineffective or unsavoury. Even after they had achieved their desired credibility through action the LTTE did not abandon armed conflict in favour of negotiation or parliamentary representation (although they did dabble in both). It is clear, then, that the Tigers favoured armed conflict as the most effective way to achieve their goals.

²⁶⁸ “Heroes Day’ speech by LTTE Chief Velupillai Prabhakaran”, South Asia Terrorism Portal, accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/document/papers/29nov2006.htm>.

²⁶⁹ “தலைவர் உரை 1992”, EelamHomeLand, accessed July 16, 2010, <http://www.eelamhomeland.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=157#p162>.

²⁷⁰ Schalk, “Resistance and Martyrdom in the process of State Formation in Tamil Eelam,” 64.

²⁷¹ “Thileepan commemorated in areas under SLA”, Tamilnet, September 26, 2001, accessed October 26, 2010, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=6341>.

How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled, and accepted?

This query will explicate an especially rich and inscrutable component of the LTTE. The assessment of risk is potentially the area where the Tamil Tigers are most anomalous relative to other political actors and entities. The ways that the LTTE managed and accepted risk, loss, and sacrifice were an integral part of the group's narrative from its inception to its defeat in 2009, and these factors are among the most fascinating and exceptional facets of the LTTE. The Tigers' views were manifested most explicitly in their musings about death in the context of suicide (both in attacks and through the use of cyanide), and more generally in the way that the organization's culture enshrined the nobility of sacrifice and, in some cases, the necessity of death.

Conventional wisdom suggests that armed organizations would endeavour to limit casualties and loss, and would express disappointment or regret when these losses were sustained – if not publicly, then at least internally or to supporters. The statements of the Tamil Tigers challenge these assumptions. For the Tigers, loss of life fomented their movement and strengthened their resolve, regardless of whether it occurred through suicide attacks or the use of cyanide pills. Both of these approaches will be discussed accordingly in the following paragraphs.

Prabhakaran saw cyanide as a strategic advantage over the LTTE's opponents, as the knowledge and acceptance of a possibly imminent death theoretically allowed Tiger cadres to proceed without fear or hesitation:

It is the cyanide which has helped us develop our movement very rapidly. Carrying cyanide on one's person is a symbolic expression of our commitment, our determination, our courage. For example, Kittu, our Jaffna area commander, has stated in an interview: "as long as we have this cyanide round our neck, we have no need to fear any force on earth!" In reality, this gives our fighters an extra measure of belief in the cause, a special edge; it has instilled in us a determination to sacrifice our lives and our everything for the cause.

While attacking, our fighters don't count their lives. They will advance nonchalantly through an artillery attack or a hail of bullets.²⁷²

Indeed, the Tigers believed that acclimatizing their soldiers to the idea of their own deaths would sharpen their focus in the battlefield:

The thought of certain death is a great trial. But to whom? Certainly not to us. Because we are married to our cyanide. Yes, our death lives with us. It sleeps with us. We carry it in our shirt pockets and around our necks. That makes us clear-headed and purposeful.²⁷³

For the Tigers, there was nothing shameful or cowardly about committing suicide in order to avoid falling into enemy hands. This act was seen as courageous and noble, and Prabhakaran himself declared that he would prefer to die in honour rather than being caught alive by the enemy²⁷⁴ – though he ultimately was killed by enemy forces and not by cyanide.²⁷⁵

The Tigers' employment of cyanide was also a mechanism for controlling the risks presented by the capture of cadres. Cyanide was not simply a way for captured soldiers to evade torture or humiliation for their own protection, but a method for limiting the interception of information by the enemy forces. While the LTTE's brass declared that "Our cadres carry cyanide pills with them to avoid falling into enemy hands"²⁷⁶, the rationale behind the use of cyanide was more complex. An LTTE soldier described the various functions of cyanide as follows:

Not to be captured alive is a tradition of our movement. It's also a necessity at this period of time in our nation. Why? First, because information can't be given to the enemy. Second, we must not be humiliated in front of the enemy.

²⁷² "The making of a militant leader".

²⁷³ Hellmann-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity*, 67.

²⁷⁴ "Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984".

²⁷⁵ Robert Bosleigh, "Tamil Tigers supreme commander Prabhakaran 'shot dead'", *The Sunday Times*, May 18, 2009, accessed October 20, 2010, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6309915.ece>.

²⁷⁶ "The Eye of the Tiger", *Newsweek* via EelamWeb, accessed March 30, 2010, <http://www.eelamweb.com/index.php/component/content/article/185:The-Eye-of-the-Tiger.html?Itemid=108>.

Third, we don't want to be tortured. The past has taught us that. Everything we do is dedicated to the nation.²⁷⁷

Another LTTE cadre articulated the rationale behind cyanide in a similar fashion:

If I am captured and I give up ten names of people in the movement, they'll capture and torture those then to get a hundred names, and after capturing a hundred people they can capture a thousand people, and so on. In this way, a movement can be destroyed. So if you ask me why I should give up my own life [by taking cyanide]? At the time when we are captured alive by the enemy, when I die, as a single individual who gives up her life, I have the capacity to protect the lives of several other people but I am able to protect the movement and the liberation struggle as a whole.²⁷⁸

This attitude is representative of the high level of control and discipline within the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, as has been mentioned in the preceding sections. The Tigers were managed meticulously by leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran, and this was a way of controlling risks to the effectiveness of the organization. Variables which might have impeded this high level of control were eliminated by the LTTE's code of conduct ("We have imposed a strict moral code on ourselves, not to use even liquor."²⁷⁹) and discipline was characterized as "most important".²⁸⁰

The LTTE's unique acceptance of some types of risk, danger, and death created a firmly ingrained narrative around the significance of sacrifice and martyrdom within the movement. The exaltation of fallen soldiers and their sacrifice was both justification for past acts and encouragement for future attacks. In all things, the Tigers considered sacrifice, and especially the 'abandonment from life' through suicide attacks, to be a prerequisite for achievement of their goals: "Death means nothing. Only great sacrifices will bring us our Eelam."²⁸¹ Prabhakaran seemed to eschew the idea the casualties should be avoided in the Tigers' struggle: "Death, destruction, suffering and grief are unavoidable in a liberation

²⁷⁷ Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist*, 94.

²⁷⁸ Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, 144.

²⁷⁹ "The Eye of the Tiger".

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Christopher Morris, "Teenage rebels with a cause vow to free their homeland", *The Guardian*, September 20, 1991, 10.

struggle. We should win our liberation only through great abandonment (from life) and dedication (of life).”²⁸² In fact, he suggested that to attempt to wage such a war without expecting these losses: “No national society in this world has attained independence without spilling blood, issuing sweat, making immeasurable abandonment (from life) and confronting catastrophes.”²⁸³

Between 1990 and 2000, the LTTE launched 69 separate suicide attacks in Sri Lanka.²⁸⁴ The Tigers did not speak of suicide attacks as the true taking of one’s own life, at least not for the reasons typically associated with such an end. In fact, Prabhakaran stated that suicide was not an accurate term for what the Tigers were doing: “It is not ‘suicide bombing’. From our point of view, we consider it a ‘life weapon’, not suicide.”²⁸⁵ The Black Tigers, as the LTTE’s suicide bombers were often called, were introduced in order to meet a specific strategic aim (as described previously by Anton Balasingham), but their existence was cloaked in the rhetoric of heroism and sacrifice: “I have groomed my weak brethren into a strong weapon called Black Tigers. They possess an iron will, yet their hearts are so very soft... They keep eagerly waiting for the day they would die.”²⁸⁶ The designation of martyrdom was not limited to the Black Tigers, however: “Every freedom fighter who sacrifices his or her life is a martyr.”²⁸⁷

Prabhakaran emphasized the commitment, and in a sense the optimism of the Black Tigers in his 1992 Heroes Day Speech: “Our heroes are supreme idealists. They loved their goal more than their lives. They embraced the liberation of their people as the highest goal in their life and they died for that

²⁸² Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 277.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, 269.

²⁸⁴ Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, 15.

²⁸⁵ Jimmie Briggs, *Innocents Lost: when child soldiers go to war* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 99.

²⁸⁶ Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, 64.

²⁸⁷ Schalk, “Resistance and Martyrdom in the process of State Formation in Tamil Eelam”, 67.

ideal.”²⁸⁸ Prabhakaran’s praise for Tiger ‘martyrs’ even suggested that the noble purpose of their deaths had given them a kind of immortality:

For the liberation of the motherland, many thousands of tiger heroes have battled and fell. We have buried those heroes by opening the breast of our heroic earth. They have not disappeared as lifeless corpses inside land. We have buried them as seeds of liberation in the lap of our mother. Mother history has embraced them. Many thousands of individual lives have entered the womb of history. Those lives have become the foetus, and have assumed a shape in course of time. They assume the form of independence of the nation. As a child of history, that independent nation called Tamililam will be born soon.²⁸⁹

Another LTTE commander once more likened the death of a Tiger to the sowing of a seed that would eventually grow and therefore live on: “The LTTE does not bury its dead, it plants them”.²⁹⁰ Black Tigers themselves seemed to offer a more pragmatic explanation of their role within the LTTE: “The Black Tigers use fewer people and less weaponry to destroy big targets. Even a single person can destroy a big target all alone.”²⁹¹ Similarly, the Black Tigers’ meditations on dying for their cause were less lyrical than Prabhakaran’s: “You stop caring about death.... as a Black Tiger, you’ll be told how and when you will die.”²⁹²

Prabhakaran consistently framed the deaths of the Black Tigers (and other deceased cadres) in a narrative which emphasized gratitude and praise: “The death of a liberation hero is no incident of normal death. That death is a historical event. It is a wonderful event that evokes a noble aim into life. In reality liberation fighter does not die...”²⁹³ Prabhakaran also offered this gratitude as an attempt to comfort to the families of the deceased Tigers:

²⁸⁸ “தலைவர் உரை 1992”.

²⁸⁹ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 294.

²⁹⁰ Schalk, “Resistance and Martyrdom in the process of State Formation in Tamil Eelam”, 66.

²⁹¹ “My Daughter the Terrorist.”

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 260.

I praise also the parents who generated Great Heroes who were the sons of the soil. Your children loved the independence of their motherland much more than their own life. You, (parents), should be definitely proud for having generated these lofty beings for a sacred aim. Your children are not dead; they have become history.²⁹⁴

The way the Tigers spoke of the demise of their soldiers suggested that their deaths were a necessity, and therefore casualties were a welcome step towards victory rather than a strategic setback, much less a tragedy: “We have sowed the seed of an ideal, we grow it by irrigating with the blood of our martyrs. This seed will grow up into a luxurious tree and make our martyr’s dreams a reality.”²⁹⁵ The Tigers did not appear to believe that loss should be avoided, saying “There is no liberation without sacrifice.”²⁹⁶ Prabhakaran claimed that Tiger cadres were eager to sacrifice their lives for the cause, knowing that their sacrifices would be meaningful: “Our warriors will compete to embrace death, if their abandonment (from life) can bring liberation to this land and if that death can push forward this liberation struggle.”²⁹⁷ It seems that the Tigers believed (or at least portrayed the idea) that the level of suffering experienced by their people and the sacrifices made by their soldiers fomented the legitimacy of their cause:

We consider such tragic experience and suffering as a tremendous contribution by our people to the cause of national emancipation. This mass exodus of half a million Tamils proclaims to the world that our people are determined to live as free beings with dignity and prepared to face any form of suffering to be independent rather than subjecting themselves to domination by the aggressor.²⁹⁸

Heroes Day (or Martyrs Day) was a special opportunity for the Tigers to pay a public annual tribute to its fallen soldiers, and this event was a forum for revealing and often hyperbolic descriptions of their contributions to the cause. The tone of Prabhakaran’s annual Martyrs Day speech rarely changed. The

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 282.

²⁹⁵ “Reflection of Tamil National Leader V. Pirapaharan”, TamilCanadian, accessed July 5, 2010, <http://www.tamilcanadian.com/page.php?cat=477&id=2687>.

²⁹⁶ “The Prabhakaran Phenomenon”, November 1, 2002, accessed November 16, 2010, <http://www.sangam.org/PIRABAKARAN/Part46.htm>.

²⁹⁷ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 274.

²⁹⁸ Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, 163.

Tigers used this annual occasion to underscore the commitment of their fallen troops, and to reiterate the justness of the Tigers' cause. Their heroism was declared incomparable by Prabhakaran:

Our heroes loved this land deeply. From the moment they fixed their eyes on the redemption of our motherland to the moment they closed their eyes permanently, the sacrifices they made have no parallel in the history of the world. No country but ours had at any time encountered such wonderful dedication as expressed in the actions of our valiant heroes.²⁹⁹

The Tigers also claimed that martyrs were absolutely essential to the movement:

Our martyrs are the pillars of our freedom movement, whose blood enriches the history of our freedom struggle, whose ideal makes our struggle supreme, whose sacrifices shape the formation of our nation, whose memories make our determination stronger. We salute our martyrs who are the architects of the freedom of our nation.³⁰⁰

And that Tiger martyrs were driven to such extreme measures by the policies of the LTTE's enemies:

Our warriors have given up their kin, education and pleasures of the youth and plunged into the battlefield for the aim of independence, considering even their life of little value. It was nothing but Sinhala State terrorism that has pushed these (people) to armed struggle.³⁰¹

Of course, there was no ambiguity in the LTTE's rhetoric about the utility of their soldiers' sacrifice. The Tigers communicated a belief that the losses they sustained had, without question, advanced their cause:

We need a country – our people need independence – our ethnic community should be liberated – with this fierce longing for the aim fall our Great Heroes in the Battlefield. Therefore every death of our Great Heroes is a loud announcement of liberty of our country and occurs as heroic proclamation of our independence.³⁰²

They claimed that these attacks were 'transforming' the political reality of the Tamils:

²⁹⁹ V. Pirapaharan, "We have never planned to act against the interests of any country".

³⁰⁰ "LTTE Chief V. Prabhakaran's 'Heroes Day' speech on November 27, 2004".

³⁰¹ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 268.

³⁰² *Ibid*, 264.

Our martyrs have died for the objective that this land should belong to us. They have died for the cause of liberating this land from the shackles of alien domination and transforming it into an independent sovereign nation.³⁰³

Because the annual Heroes Day speech was one of the few reliable outlets where the Tigers delivered public statements, their musings on sacrifice and heroism constitute a significant portion of their overall statements directed to the public. While it is possible that this gives the observer a skewed perspective of the priorities and beliefs of the organization, it is no mere coincidence that the Tigers chose this as the primary outlet for their public commentary. Until 1995, the Tigers had a special office devoted exclusively to the Great Heroes and associated festivals and rituals venerating their feats.³⁰⁴ Tamil-controlled areas of Sri Lanka were dotted with monuments and cemeteries dedicated to the memory of fallen soldiers, and the routine destruction of these sites by the Sri Lankan government generated widespread anger.³⁰⁵

It is clear from the quotations above that in terms of Tigers' approach to action, 'risk' cannot be conflated with death or loss. It seems that for the LTTE, understanding and managing the risks of their brand of guerrilla warfare entailed the wholesale acceptance of death, and in a variety of ways making these risks strategic advantages by undermining their opponents' assumption that they would avoid danger and destruction. In essence, by the LTTE's calculation, there were few risks that were too high to undertake in order to meet their objective. Prabhakaran's view was that the sacrifices of the Tamil people were guarantors of future gain: "By spilling blood, perspiring profusely, spilling tears and by experiencing of [sic] unbearable suffering you get independence indeed as a reward."³⁰⁶

³⁰³ "National Leader Mr. V. Pirapaharan's Hero's Day Speech", InfoLanka Forum, accessed July 14, 2010, <http://www.infolanka.com/ubb/Forum2/HTML/001171.html>.

³⁰⁴ Schalk, "Resistance and Martyrdom in the process of State Formation in Tamil Eelam", 80.

³⁰⁵ "SLA obliterates Tiger Heroes' Cemeteries, erects military bases", Tamilnet, July 3, 2010, accessed October 16, 2010, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=32113>.

³⁰⁶ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 261.

What is the best 'timing' of action to advance one's interest?

Given that the Tigers existed and remained relevant over three decades, the question of how they timed their actions is an interesting one. As discussed in the preceding sections, the Tigers considered their cause to be a long-term venture and were not focused on the attainment of Tamil Eelam within a specified timeframe. This is not to suggest that the LTTE were disinterested in a timely resolution, but simply that the Tigers did not seem to expect or discuss one. With respect to the timing of action, the Tigers appeared reluctant to comment on their own thinking in this area. It was rare for the Tigers to take credit for their attacks³⁰⁷, and even less rare for the LTTE to explain the rationale behind the timing of their actions. The LTTE was not likely to hint at the timing of specific objectives or a possible deadline for the resolution of their fight, except to state that their struggle would continue as long as necessary: "We took up arms to establish the independence and honour of our people. I want to state very clearly that that struggle will continue until that independence and honour are established."³⁰⁸ As early as 1984, Prabhakaran was reluctant to tip his hand in any way about the possible timeline for the LTTE's struggle: "There cannot be a blueprint or a time limit for a freedom struggle. Everything depends on the situation in our homeland and happenings on the international scene."³⁰⁹

The issue of timing became more relevant for the Tigers when they entered into the realm of negotiations, where the LTTE could no longer be totally evasive on this matter. The following excerpt from *Frontline* denotes their reticence to say too much on the subject, however:

When Tamilchelvan was asked by *Frontline* if the LTTE would insist on a timeframe for resuming dialogue to work towards the agreement on the ISGA, he replied in the negative and emphasised that setting timeframes were "always

³⁰⁷ "Army HQ attacked, air strike launched on LTTE", *Expressindia.com*, April 25, 2006, accessed October 27, 2010, <http://www.expressindia.com/news/fullstory.php?newsid=66672>.

³⁰⁸ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 268.

³⁰⁹ "Nature is my friend. Life my philosopher and history is my guide – 1984".

detrimental”, but wanted an early resumption so that Tigers could “clarify” their positions on the proposals made.³¹⁰

The Tigers’ proposal regarding the Interim Self-Governing Authority indicated a willingness to entertain some constraints on the timing of this new venture:

...If no final settlement has been reached and implemented by the end of the said five years... an independent election commission appointed by the Interim Self-Governing Authority, shall conduct free and fair elections in accordance with international democratic principles and standards under international observation.³¹¹

In itself, this indicates that the Tigers did not wish to place strict limits on the timeline of their struggle. It is clear from the dearth of LTTE commentary on the issue of timing that they did not wish to make the logic behind the timing of their actions a matter of public discussion. This is unsurprising, given the discipline and control around the Tigers’ endeavours. Additionally, the Tigers’ success in guerrilla warfare was in part dependent on the ability to take their enemies by surprise. Despite the Tigers’ repeated assertions that they were not a terrorist group, they were clear in terms of their preference for guerrilla tactics. It is therefore plausible that for the Tigers, revealing too much about the timing of their plans, or the rationale behind this decision-making, was a threat to their effectiveness. Regardless of what motivated the Tigers’ relative silence on the timing of its actions, the lack of clear statements on this general subject makes it difficult to elucidate the LTTE’s decision-making in this area.

What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one’s interests?

The Tigers’ classification as a terrorist group is potentially misleading in that it does not acknowledge the relatively sophisticated and diverse tactics and approaches used to advance their interests. The LTTE commented prolifically on the methods of action that characterized their conflict with the Sri Lankan government and other foes, but commented less frequently on their preferred

³¹⁰ “Full Text: Tamil Tiger Proposals”.

³¹¹ Ibid.

tactics. The following paragraphs will overlap somewhat with the preceding section dealing with the Tigers' commentary on the ideal methods of action (How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?), but will focus more specifically on the Tigers' assessment of different methods for different situations.

As has already been discussed at length, the Tigers paid frequent lip service to the idea of using peaceful methods to pursue their goals:

If a reasonable settlement to the Tamil national question could be realized by peaceful means we will make every endeavour, with honesty and sincerity to pursue that path. Our political objective is to ensure that our people should live in freedom and dignity in their homeland enjoying the right of self-rule. If this political objective could be realised by peaceful means, we are prepared to adopt that method. We have never shown any disinclination to win the political rights of our people through peaceful means.³¹²

In large part, the Tigers deemed such peaceful means to be unsuitable, or at least unfeasible. The LTTE repeatedly asserted that the path of armed struggle was forced upon them by circumstance, and that their true nature was more peaceful than their tactics would suggest:

Our struggle began with peaceful methods. Our previous leaders waged a struggle using peaceful means to win their rights. Since their peaceful methods were crushed and chauvinism was let loose on our people, we were pushed into a situation where we had to take up arms.³¹³

And, as previously mentioned, the LTTE viewed these actions as a means of defending the Tamil people:

As a nation entitled to self-determination our people reserve the right to defend themselves by armed struggle against State oppression of genocidal proportions.³¹⁴

³¹² "LTTE leader calls for autonomy and self-government for Tamil homeland", Tamilnet, accessed February 22, 2013, www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=7902.

³¹³ "Prabhakaran in first person".

³¹⁴ "Annual Hero's Day Speech of the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, 27 November 2000".

Of course, it was often made clear in Prabhakaran's reminiscences that his personal preference was for action over talk, which was somewhat at odds with his claims about being forced into armed resistance: "My natural inclination makes me lay less emphasis on words. In serious politics, it won't do to concentrate on talking; you must grow through action and then talk!"³¹⁵ Prabhakaran also implied that pursuing political discussions over action was a waste, saying "I wanted to achieve something through action rather than waste time in idle fancies."³¹⁶

Despite these statements, it is true that the Tigers and their allies did engage in non-violent means of protest and action (including the aforementioned hunger strike by Thileepan):

At the initial stages, our people adopted peaceful forms of agitation based on the Gandhian principle of ahimsa. They organised satyagraha campaigns and disobedience movements to protest against State violence. For more than two decades, our people demanded a form of regional autonomy to secure our political rights. But our demands never found a sympathetic hearing.³¹⁷

The Tigers' use of nonviolent means of action, including protest and negotiation, represented a relatively small proportion of their overall activity. For example, it was declared that advancing the Tigers' cause through parliamentary politics would be of no use:

Sri Lankan Parliaments have been concerned only in meeting the needs and aspirations of the numerically powerful Sinhalese population, while crushing the rights of the Tamils at the same time. It is against this background that we think there is no purpose in Tamils entering the Parliamentary process; especially when elections are held under conditions which are legally and morally indefensible.³¹⁸

There is no question that of all the methods used by the Tigers, guerrilla warfare was most frequently utilized, and within this genre a wide range of tactics was employed. The LTTE used suicide bombings, child soldiers, hit-and-run attacks, and engaged in conventional battles with the Sri Lankan

³¹⁵ "The making of a militant leader".

³¹⁶ Hellmann-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity*, 29.

³¹⁷ "It is the plight of the Tamil people that compelled me to take up arms".

³¹⁸ "Sri Lanka's Broken Pacts and Evasive Proposals [sic]".

Army at different stages of the Tigers' existence. Prabhakaran described the LTTE's shift from isolated hit-and-run attacks to a 'mass struggle' in an interview:

Out of several tactics in guerrilla warfare, one is hit-and-run. In the initial development of the LTTE. [sic] we did hit-and-run operations. But now, after an attack, we give protection to the people. The Sri Lankan Government attacks the people because we are close to the people and also it does it to create a gap between the people and us. Without people's support. [sic] We would have been betrayed and our movement would not have been there.³¹⁹

In 1992's Heroes Day address, Prabhakaran boasted of the Tigers' military ingenuity:

This year the war has intensified on an unprecedented scale. We were able to work out new strategies and stepped up our military assaults to foil the offensive plans of the enemy. As a consequence, the enemy suffered heavy casualties more than ever before in the history of the war. We have impressed upon the enemy that this land of ours will not tolerate the incursions of an aggressor.³²⁰

Later in the same speech, Prabhakaran admonished the SLA for being 'heartless and committed to war and violence', concluding that the LTTE had no alternative but to 'intensify our struggle'.³²¹ The LTTE's interest and pride in military prowess and the group's inclination to blame their opponent for violence are both present here, as they were in many of the Tigers' statements. Somewhat ironically, the Tigers chided President Jayewardene for his deceptive behaviour:

...at a time of preparing internally for war, he (Mr. Jayewardene) has been pushed into a situation of having to demonstrate to the outside world that he is a lover of peace. Or, alternatively, that he is one who strives for peace but, finding that not possible, has to resort to war.³²²

The LTTE habitually denied responsibility for their own acts of violence; they famously denied their involvement in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi for more than a decade before admitting to having

³¹⁹ "The chances of attaining Eelam are bright".

³²⁰ "தலைவர் உரை 1992".

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² "Making of a militant leader (Part 2)".

plotted the attack.³²³ The Tigers occasionally went so far as to commit acts that they had themselves committed. Of a suicide bombing committed by the Tigers in Colombo, an LTTE spokesman declared: "The LTTE categorically denies carrying out these bomb attacks...The LTTE is not foolish enough to think that such an attack would benefit our struggle."³²⁴ It is difficult to make inferences about the Tigers' use of various tactics because of their reticence to discuss their actions with any accuracy or consistency, but the LTTE did refute allegations that it was interested in violence for its own sake:

The guerrilla warfare, the form of the popular struggle we are committed to is not borne out of blind militancy or adventurism but arose out of the historical necessity, out of the concrete conditions of intolerable national oppression. Our actions and operations, as your Government attempts to paint, are not indiscriminate bursts of irrational violence or terrorism; they are acts of revolutionary violence of the oppressed against the reactionary violence of the oppressor.³²⁵

In the later years of the LTTE, the organization displayed a renewed and active interest in negotiation. This was perhaps as a result of the losses the Tigers incurred, because of the growing efforts to classify the LTTE as a terrorist group internationally³²⁶, or because the Tigers' favoured tactics (such as suicide bombing) had increasingly negative connotations after the events of September, 2001. Whatever their motivation, the Tigers' participation in peace talks in the last decade indicated a significant shift, and to some degree legitimized their repeated rhetoric of having a preference for peaceful negotiation. In 2006, Prabhakaran noted the sacrifices the LTTE had made in entering into the Norwegian-led peace process:

A long time has elapsed since we embarked on this journey for peace with Norway's facilitation. We have tried our best to take forward this peace effort. We have practised patience. We gave innumerable opportunities for finding

³²³ "LTTE 'regrets' Rajiv Gandhi's killing", *The Times of India*, June 27, 2006, accessed November 13, 2010, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/LTTE-regrets-Rajiv-Gandhis-killing/articleshow/1686104.cms>.

³²⁴ John Stackhouse, "Terrorists rip Sri Lankan peace", *The Globe and Mail*, October 16, 1997, A1.

³²⁵ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, *Towards Liberation: Selected Political Documents of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*, 12.

³²⁶ Ravinatha Arasinha, "Terrorism, the LTTE, and the Conflict in Sri Lanka," *Conflict, Security & Development* 1 (2006): 38.

peaceful resolution. We postponed our plan to advance our freedom struggle twice to give even more chances to the peace efforts, once when the tsunami disaster struck and again when President Rajapakse was elected.”³²⁷

The Tigers addressed the challenges in switching gears from guerrilla warfare to negotiation with the enemy:

It is practically difficult for both the parties who have been involved in a savage and bloody war for the last two decades with mutual animosity and distrust to suddenly enter into a peace process, while continuing hostilities. It is precisely for this reason we propose a process of de-escalation of war leading to cessation of armed hostilities and the creation of a peaceful, cordial environment.³²⁸

While the LTTE was keen to assign the blame of any failure in this department to their opposition, the Tigers were ultimately defined by their military endeavours. The LTTE was prone to ceasefire violations³²⁹, and continued to emphasize the unavoidable nature of the conflict:

This is why we have given due attention to military affairs in our organization. You know the character of our struggle. In a situation where the Sri Lankan state feeds its army on racism and chauvinism and through that army and through forced colonization, tries to displace and subjugate us. Only a political organization with military strength is capable of effective resistance.³³⁰

While the LTTE wished to be seen and understood as a peace-minded organization, the Tigers evidently preferred to utilize armed and guerrilla warfare as a means of advancing their cause. Despite their insistence of their peaceful nature, the Tigers did not articulate an explicit preference for peaceful means of resolving the Sri Lankan conflict; they simply communicated a willingness to consider it:

³²⁷ “Heroes Day’ speech by LTTE Chief Velupillai Prabhakaran”, South Asia Terrorism Portal, accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/document/papers/29nov2006.htm>.

³²⁸ “Annual Hero's Day Speech of the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, 27 November 2000”.

³²⁹ “Sri Lanka: New Killings Threaten Ceasefire”, Human Rights Watch, accessed November 17, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/07/27/slanka9153.htm>.

³³⁰ “The making of a militant leader”.

Our liberation organisation is prepared to participate in negotiations to find a political solution to the ethnic conflict through peaceful means. We are not opposed to peaceful processes of resolving conflicts.³³¹

In 2008, Prabhakaran reiterated this position: “We are not opposed to a peaceful resolution. We have never hesitated to participate in peace talks.”³³²

The LTTE’s behaviour did sometimes indicate that the organization was nimble enough to recognize that different scenarios necessitated a change in tactics. This capacity was clear in the days preceding the organization’s military defeat. In 2009 the Tigers found themselves (and a large number of civilians) trapped by the Sri Lankan Army with only a tiny strip of territory still under their control³³³. When it was clear that defeat was imminent, the Tigers made the following statement:

We need to do everything within our means to stop this carnage. If this means silencing our arms and entering a peace process, that is something that we have already agreed to... This is the need of the hour. These are historically unprecedented times and require historically prudent decisions. If this means saving the lives of thousands of people, it needs to be done.³³⁴

It can be concluded from their statements that the Tigers saw utility in negotiations during times when military approaches would be futile or strategically problematic, but drawing any further conclusions on the rationale behind their various means of action is potentially indefensible given the paucity of statements on the matter.

³³¹ “Annual Hero's Day Speech of the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, 27 November 2000”.

³³² V. Pirapaharan, “We have never planned to act against the interests of any country”.

³³³ Charles Haviland, “Anticipating an end to Sri Lanka’s war”, *BBC News*, April 25, 2009, accessed November 16, 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/8016683.stm.

³³⁴ “Dignity and respect for our people is all we ask”, *Tamil National*, May 17, 2009, accessed November 13, 2010, <http://www.tamilnational.com/news-flash/1057-dignity-and-respect-for-our-people-is-all-we-ask.html>.

4. Conclusion

Studying the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam through the lens of the Operational Code framework was useful in that it revealed noteworthy characteristics of this terrorist organization. The analysis also revealed general strengths and weaknesses with respect to the utility of the model. The ensuing paragraphs will summarize the conclusions reached by the application of this model and will also consider the benefits and drawbacks of the Operational Code model in this context.

A survey of the LTTE's statements about political life indicates, perhaps surprisingly, that the group was generally optimistic about the essential nature of political life, insofar as they believed the legitimacy of their cause would ultimately provide for their success. The opposite view was expressed concerning the nature of their enemies, who were categorically decried as immoral, genocidal, and racist. The Tigers thought of their actions as the self-defence of the Tamil nation, part of a historically established claim to independence which they were certain would ultimately be realized:

We wish to state categorically that we will carry forward our freedom struggle in the face of any obstacles until we reach our cherished goal, i.e. an independent socialist state of Tamil Eelam. We are committed to the goal of freedom and are prepared to die for this noble cause. We will certainly win our liberation struggle, whereas you will fail in your evil design in crushing the genuine aspirations of a nation of people. In the end you will stand convicted by the world conscience and condemned by history.³³⁵

Despite the LTTE's undeniably difficult and violent existence, the leadership of the organization seemed to believe that the organization's goals were attainable and that the inherent moral superiority of their claim would ensure success.

The Tigers left little to chance within their organization. The LTTE was highly controlled and abided by a strict code of conduct for all members. The Tigers remained remarkably focused and consistent in

³³⁵ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, *Towards Liberation: Selected Political Documents of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*, 18.

terms of their objectives over the three decades of the organization's existence. They were fixed on the essentially singular goal of establishing Tamil Eelam and their commentary focused on the primacy of this objective:

It is our people who put forward this demand for Tamil Eelam. The people gave a mandate to the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) for this as early as 1977. We, therefore, with people's support, are fighting for Tamil Eelam till [sic] now.³³⁶

As a result, their written and verbal statements offer little insight into the selection of their political goals and objectives. Prabhakaran claimed that "The deepest aspiration of our people is to live in dignity in a political environment where they could rule themselves".³³⁷ While the imagined iterations of this environment changed over time, the essence of the goal was constant, and the Tigers acknowledged that "The methods of war may change (but) the aim (of our war) cannot change."³³⁸

It is clear from the assembled commentary that the LTTE believed their goals were most effectively pursued by the use of guerrilla tactics. The Tigers' leadership spoke favourably of the idea of negotiation and peaceful resolution, and it is certainly possible that the Tigers had a legitimate interest in this course of action. The most consistent impediment to peaceful alternatives was, from the LTTE's perspective, the unwillingness of their opponents to participate:

All forms of peaceful non-violent agitations undertaken by the Tamil people against Sinhala state oppression were brutally repressed by state terror. Since the non-violent political struggle became futile and meaningless and at the same time the state oppression intensified in the form of genocide the Tamil people were left with no alternative other than to confront the state violence with violence.³³⁹

³³⁶ "Prabhakaran in first person".

³³⁷ Celia W. Dugger, "Leader of Tamil Tiger Rebels says he is ready for peace talks", *New York Times*, November 28, 2000, accessed January 4, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/28/world/leader-of-tamil-tiger-rebels-says-he-is-ready-for-peace-talks.html>.

³³⁸ Schalk, "Resistance and Martyrdom in the process of State Formation in Tamil Eelam", 65.

³³⁹ "An appeal to the United Nations", Tamil Centre for Human Rights, accessed February 22, 2013, http://www.tchr.net/reports_commission_2002.htm.

Therefore it does not appear that the LTTE believed political life was inherently violent, but rather that particular characteristics of their enemies forced it to be so: “Only because we realized that non-violence could not conquer violence, we have embraced the violent struggle.”³⁴⁰ This is one of the operational code questions most frequently addressed by the Tigers’ commentary. In most instances where negotiation was discussed, the Tigers assigned the blame for failure to their political opponents: “The Rajapakse regime is not giving due importance to the peace talks because it has confidence in its military approach. The two Geneva talks were unproductive because of its lack of interest in the peace front.”³⁴¹

The Tigers were hesitant to indicate deadlines or timeframes for their struggle, and often cautioned that their struggle could be a long, multi-generational affair, although the justness of their cause would ultimately guarantee a successful resolution. The LTTE sometimes alluded to the inevitability of the establishment of Tamil Eelam (“No force on earth can stop the Tamil Eelam process”)³⁴² but did not tend to comment publicly on the timing of their attacks, campaigns, or their short-term goals, even in rather general terms.

A unique and seemingly important component of their political longevity was their ability to conceive of death and loss not as a risk but as fortifier for their movement. The LTTE boasted frequently of their bravery and eagerness to sacrifice their lives for the cause, boasting that they were “not afraid of death”.³⁴³ The Tigers’ political literature often venerated death and sacrifice, as indicated by this excerpt from the LTTE-produced magazine *Kalattil*:

The thought of certain death is a great trial. But to whom? Certainly not to us.
Because we are married to our cyanide. Yes, our death lives with us. It sleeps with

³⁴⁰ Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 270.

³⁴¹ “LTTE chief V. Prabhakaran’s ‘Heroes Day’ speech on November 27, 2004”.

³⁴² Schalk, *Reflections of the Leader*, 165.

³⁴³ Schalk, “Resistance and Martyrdom in the process of State Formation in Tamil Eelam”, 78-79.

us. We carry it in our shirt pockets and around our necks. That makes us clear-headed and purposeful.³⁴⁴

The Tigers' assessment of risk was not simply that risk and loss were political realities but that they were actually essential to the achievement of the cause. As LTTE cadre Major Baba stated, "Death means nothing. Only great sacrifices will bring us our Eelam."³⁴⁵

Studying the Tamil Tigers produced a unique set of challenges. There are, of course, inherent difficulties in interpreting the meanings of statements made by others, and especially those statements that have been translated into English. The case of the Tigers is made even more complex because of their well-known tendency to deny responsibility for their attacks, which calls into question the factual accuracy of the Tigers' narration of their own movement and therefore their operational code. Their publicly projected worldview demonstrated a marked disconnect between their established reputation and their purported beliefs. This reputation for duplicity was established relatively early on by the press. In 1991 an article in *The Economist* mused that on the matter of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, "The Tigers have denied responsibility, but they usually do for their atrocities."³⁴⁶

In the mid-1990s the Tigers expelled Muslims living in the Jaffna peninsula, and when questioned by a reporter about the expulsion, Prabhakaran commented that 'unfortunate developments' had 'forced [them] to become refugees'.³⁴⁷ In 1997, an LTTE bomb attack on Colombo left 15 dead and 100 injured. Despite the media's immediate conclusion that the Tigers were responsible, their spokesman Anton Raja denied their involvement in the attacks, saying "The LTTE is not foolish enough to think that such an attack would benefit our struggle."³⁴⁸ The Tigers' selection of goals was apparently influenced by the

³⁴⁴ Hellmann-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity*, 67.

³⁴⁵ Morris, "Teenage rebels with a cause vow to free their homeland", 10.

³⁴⁶ "Death Among the Blossoms", *The Economist*, Issue 7708, Vol. 319, 25 May 1991, p. 39.

³⁴⁷ "Sri Lanka's Broken Pacts and Evasive Proposals [sic]".

³⁴⁸ Stackhouse, "Terrorists rip Sri Lankan peace Further fighting feared as Tamil Tiger bomb kills 15, injures 100 in Colombo", A1.

perceived character of their opponents: “The uncompromising stance of Sinhala chauvinism has left us with no other option but an independent state for the people of Tamil Eelam.”³⁴⁹

Like any political entity, the Tigers were interested in projecting an image of their organization that was flattering. But the LTTE had a unique predisposition for attempting to distance itself from acts it had quite obviously committed. This double-speak was also present in the Tigers’ commentary about their use of child soldiers. Prabhakaran once claimed that children in the LTTE were “well looked after. We provide for their education, and they only fight when they want to.”³⁵⁰ This claim is contradicted by reports by children who report being coerced into joining the Tigers:

...I met some members of the movement who had been pestering me since I was 12 years to join them; they asked me to come with them. They said it is for our people, and we all have to sacrifice. Anyway, they had been telling me about all the terrible things that have happened to our people and how bad the Sinhala people are.³⁵¹

The LTTE claimed in 2002 that it had ceased active recruitment of soldiers under 18³⁵², but a Human Rights Watch report indicated in 2004 that since 2003, the LTTE had actually recruited twice as many children as it had released.³⁵³

Of all the instances of deceit on the part of the LTTE, the most egregious must be the following claim made by Prabhakaran: “The LTTE has never killed any civilians. We condemn such acts of violence.”³⁵⁴ He goes on to assert that, in some instances, people who appeared to be civilian casualties were in fact government officials: “There were occasions when we had to kill home guards. But they are not civilians.

³⁴⁹ “Heroes Day’ speech by LTTE Chief Velupillai Prabhakaran”.

³⁵⁰ Morris, “Teenage rebels with a cause vow to free their homeland”, 10.

³⁵¹ Brett and Specht, *Young soldiers*, 59.

³⁵² Subramanian, “Prabhakaran in first person”.

³⁵³ “Sri Lanka: Tamil Tigers forcibly recruit child soldiers”, Human Rights Watch, accessed January 4 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2004/11/09/sri-lanka-tamil-tigers-forcibly-recruit-child-soldiers>.

³⁵⁴ “The Eye of the Tiger”.

They are trained non-combat draftees who carry guns.”³⁵⁵ Prabhakaran is said to have utilized ‘the techniques of rationalization and disavowal’ in order to bridge the disconnect between the competing images of ‘militant extremist behaviour and the freedom fighter identity’ the Tigers held for themselves.³⁵⁶ Although many observers would reject claims that the LTTE attempted to limit civilian casualties, that message seems to have resonated internally. A cadre quoted in *My Daughter the Terrorist* echoed Prabhakaran’s statement:

They spread false rumours that we don’t fight for justice, that we kill civilians. They say that we commit great atrocities... our leader would never choose a target like that. Our leader would never choose anything that causes devastation to civilians.³⁵⁷

The Tigers’ apparent duplicity was exhibited again in their denial of involvement in drug trafficking. Despite evidence that suggested this was a significant source of funding for the LTTE, Prabhakaran denied any involvement: “We have imposed a strict moral code on ourselves, not to use even liquor. How can one suspect us of drug trafficking which we condemn?”³⁵⁸

The LTTE acquired notoriety for being unreliable, prompting *Frontline* to muse that “its assurances are akin to writing on water.”³⁵⁹ In sum, it was not clear if the Tigers’ ever really meant what they said. Despite my earlier caveat about assessing the statements without regard for the accuracy of the statements, it may cast some doubt on the value of the Operational Code model. On balance, however, I believe the information that was extracted through this analysis was of value in terms of evaluating the character of the organization. If nothing else, it reveals the care and control with which the LTTE operated.

³⁵⁵ Michael P. Arena and Bruce A. Arrigo, *The Terrorist Identity: Explaining the Terrorist Threat* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 198.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 198.

³⁵⁷ “My Daughter the Terrorist.”

³⁵⁸ “The Eye of the Tiger”.

³⁵⁹ D.B.S. Jeyaraj, “The Murder of a Moderate”, *Frontline*, August 8, 1997.

In itself, the Tigers' tendency to deny their actions distinguishes them from other terrorist groups. The Tigers were not the only group to avoid claiming attacks – in fact, there is significant variation in taking credit for acts of terrorism.³⁶⁰ For example, it has been argued that in circumstances where only one terrorist group is active, credit-taking for attacks may decrease: “In this context, there is little need for the perpetrator to reveal its identity for the benefit of backers because target audiences have little trouble assigning responsibility for violence.”³⁶¹ Even though this effectively describes the circumstances in which the LTTE operated, it does not explain the Tigers' approach. The Tigers were unique in that they not only elected to take credit, but actively denied attacks which were quite obviously their own. It seems unlikely that they avoided claiming their attacks as way to avoid retribution, as some other groups have done.³⁶² It may be that the Tigers' denials were a clumsy attempt to distance their organization from violence against civilians because they hoped to reap the potential benefits of ambiguity:

... by maintaining their anonymity terrorists may believe that they are able to capitalise further on the fear and alarm intrinsically generated by their violence. Attacks perpetrated by enigmatic, unseen and unknown assailants may therefore be deliberately designed to foment greater insecurity and panic in the terrorists' particular target audience.³⁶³

The Tigers' most infamous denial was their refusal to take credit for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi until years later. While the LTTE eventually communicated via Anton Balasingham that the assassination was a “monumental historical tragedy for which we deeply regret”,³⁶⁴ there was never a formal claim of responsibility from the Tigers' camp. In fact, Balasingham revealed internal deceit on this matter in a conversation with Norwegian Minister Erik Solheim, saying with respect to alleged

³⁶⁰ Aaron M. Hoffman, “Voice and Silence: why groups take credit for acts of terror,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47 (2010): 615.

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, 617.

³⁶² Bruce Hoffman, “Why Terrorists Don't Claim Credit”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9 (1997): 5.

³⁶³ *Ibid*, 5.

³⁶⁴ “Tamil Tiger ‘regret’ over Gandhi”, *BBC*, June 27, 2006, accessed February 28, 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/5122032.stm>.

instigators Prabhakaran and Pottu Amman that “I did not believe their story, and they stopped lying to me once they realized I was not buying the story.”³⁶⁵ It is unclear if the Tigers’ habit of distancing their organization from terrorist acts was an attempt to maintain a moral high ground, was strategically motivated, or was simply the by-product of an incoherent vision of their own organization, but this pattern has been explained as strategic by at least one academic:

...the LTTE has simply ignored or dismissed its culpability for those actions deemed to be the product of militant extremists because these depictions conflict with their internalized identities of themselves as noble and just freedom fighters.³⁶⁶

It has been suggested by Dagmar Hellmann-Rajaspaske that the Tigers crafted statements directed to the international community in one way, but statements directed at the Sri Lankan population were delivered in an entirely different fashion:

A remark may be made here about the relative value of English and Tamil material: the latter shows a somewhat truer picture of the ideals and aspirations of the militants than the former. English papers are meant for ‘public consumption’, for the world’s eyes, and are dressed up accordingly, either in a Marxist or liberal fashion and probably garnished with academic and intellectual rhetoric acquired second-hand.³⁶⁷

This two-tiered approach to communications indicates that the Tigers were highly cognizant of their audience and structured their messaging accordingly. The following anecdote, recounted by *Frontline’s* T. S. Subramanian, illustrates the control exercised by Anton Balasingham at a press conference attended by the international media:

During the press conference, Prabhakaran often gave halting replies. There were awkward pauses before he answered some questions. Prabhakaran answered only in Tamil. When a question was asked and translated, Prabhakaran more often than not consulted Balasingham on the answer and responded briefly in Tamil. The

³⁶⁵ Naryan Swamy, “Sri Lanka and the Peace Makers: A Story of Norway and India”.

³⁶⁶ Arena and Arrigo, *The Terrorist Identity*, 196.

³⁶⁷ Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam. *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity*. Stuttgart : Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994, 4.

microphones picked up the consultations as well. Balasingham translated the responses in English. At times, the translation was a misrepresentation or an inaccurate rendering of what Prabhakaran said in Tamil. Balasingham actively embellished his leader's responses, adding content, detail and elaboration in a way that suggested the translator wanted to control the press conference and the message put out to the external world.³⁶⁸

Another factor which may compromise the veracity of Operational Code assessments is the intermediary role of speechwriters and handlers, though it is reasonable to conclude that Prabhakaran or other LTTE officials who used speechwriters were in agreement with the content of these prepared remarks. Because this analysis was concerned with the organization and not a particular individual it is unlikely that this variable affected the conclusions reached in this case.

It has been stated that terrorists practice 'unrestrained legitimation of all means used in the service of their cause'.³⁶⁹ Martha Crenshaw observes that terrorists' beliefs are highly moralistic and contain a strong justification for action.³⁷⁰ This is certainly true in the case of the Tigers, and is reflected in their propensity to criticize the moral character of their enemy while emphasizing the legitimacy of their cause and the necessity of their chosen tactics. This strong sense of justification must have contributed to the ascetic level of sacrifice and hardship which was embraced by Prabhakaran and the LTTE. In a 2002 interview Prabhakaran reiterated his enthusiasm for the guerrilla lifestyle: "If our underground life entails hardship, we are prepared to face it. We are fighting for our fundamental rights.... We are fighting for the welfare of our people, not to enjoy personal comforts.""

A significant shortcoming of the application of the operational code model to the statements of the LTTE was that some of the questions within the framework were significantly more relevant to the

³⁶⁸ T.S. Subramanian, "Prabhakaran in first person", *Frontline*, April 17 – May 10, 2002, accessed April 14, 2010, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1909/19090040.htm>,

³⁶⁹ Frederick J. Hacker, "Dialectic Interrelationships of Personal and Political Factors in Terrorism," in *Perspectives On Terrorism*, ed. Lawrence Zelic Freedman and Yonah Alexander (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1983), 19.

³⁷⁰ Martha Crenshaw, "The Subjective Reality of the Terrorist: Ideological and Psychological Factors in Terrorism," in *Current Perspectives on International Terrorism*, ed. Robert O. Slater and Michael Stohl (London: MacMillan, 1988), 17.

Tigers than were others. As a result, the information produced by the analysis is skewed in favour of the questions that were most pertinent to the organization, but this may not provide the most comprehensive understanding of the Tigers or of the actual 'code' by which the LTTE operated and made decisions. For example, the Tigers commented extremely rarely on matters of timing, but the model demands that this be an area of focus.

Conversely, the model did not easily facilitate examinations of other factors which made the LTTE unique, such as its use of women in combat roles and its reliance on suicide bombing as a military tactic. The review of LTTE quotations and statements yielded a tremendous amount of material, but some of that material did not have an obvious 'home' within the framework. The statements were also prone to repetition: there were endless assertions about the malevolence of the Tigers' opponents, but these statements were typically quite similar and not especially revealing.

The fact that this model was not especially well-tailored to the Tamil Tigers did present some advantages, however, in that some more peripheral aspects of the LTTE were subject to thorough analysis. To hear the Tigers tell it, for example, they were actually optimistic about achieving their aims through 'political life', and had faith that their goals would be met because their cause was just. The Tigers' narrative posits that extreme and unusual measures like suicide attacks were an indication of their determination, not of disdain for the norms of warfare or disregard for civilian casualties as one might assume. This conclusion was reached because the model required that the Tigers' statements be filtered through a rigid set of questions, and without that requirement it might have been tempting to reach an alternate conclusion.

An additional advantage of this model is that it provides a relatively structured way to measure analyses of politicians or organizations against each other. While there is great variation in the way this model is applied, it provides a transferrable and straightforward format for the processing of

information produced by individuals and groups. In my assessment, the weaknesses of the model were overcome by the unique perspective it afforded in analyzing the LTTE.

Slight modifications to the Operational Code model may be beneficial in future applications where terrorist groups or insurgencies are being assessed, as some of the underlying principles of the model are not especially applicable to organizations of this nature. For example, the assumption that organizations engaged in asymmetrical conflict will find it necessary or even possible to pontificate on matters of timing is potentially unrealistic. Organizations with this political reality perhaps place more emphasis on immediate concerns than maintaining long-term status. Unlike a political party or head of state, insurgent groups are arguably less likely to modify their actions or timing in order to take advantage of policy windows or to align with public opinion. If the Tigers are any indication, the selection of goals and objectives for political action will be more tactical than strategic because of the narrow mandate of the organization. Furthermore, it can probably be assumed that such organizations have a more limited range of options and tactics available to them than a 'legitimate' political organization. As a result, the Operational Code questions about the timing of action, the selection or goals, and preferred means for advancing interests seem to be less useful in this context than they would in, for example, the assessment of a world leader or conventional political party. Future assessments of terrorist groups or unconventional political entities may benefit from a decreased emphasis on these questions.

Given the truly enigmatic nature of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, it is difficult to know if this analysis has produced a fully comprehensive portrait of the Tigers. The norms of the organization were remarkably different than conventional political organizations and even other terrorist groups. Because of this, the majority of literature on the Tigers seems to have been understandably focused on the more sensationalist aspects of the organization, in particular suicide bombings, cyanide, and female and child

soldiers. Focusing on these characteristics has obscured more mundane but also significant aspects of the Tigers' organization which this analysis highlights: that they were persistent, highly organized, they were unlikely to reveal much about their military strategy, and that they expressed unwavering confidence and optimism about their chances for success.

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