

# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



## CENJOWS

<b>INDIA'S LANKA ODYSSEY</b>		<b>Lt Gen Amarjit Singh Kalkat, SYSM, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)</b> is one of the highest decorated officers of the Defence Forces. His experiences include combat in the critical operations of Indo-Pak Wars 1965 and 1971, controlling CRPF Rebellion in 1978, command of the Indian Peace Keeping Force, Sri Lanka (Op Pawan) and Army Commander of both ARTRAC and the Southern Command.
<b>INDIAN PEACE KEEPING FORCE IN SRI LANKA</b>		

British India comprised the present countries of Pakistan, Burma & Sri Lanka (Ceylon). Before granting Independence to India, a few days prior, it gave Independence to the three countries so that the New Independent India could not lay claim to them. While Pakistan, on religious grounds, and Burma ethnically, were different from India, Sri Lanka had very much in common with India; its inhabitant were of Indian origin. Subsequently a minuscule population of West Asian Muslims (Moors) had also migrated and settled in South-East Sri Lanka. Ultimately, the population (21 million) demographically was Sinhala 73.9%, Tamils 12.7%, Moors 7.1% & few others.

In 1987, after having commanded an Infantry Division, I was a Maj General interned at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London (IISS) for a year on a Sabbatical from the Army. Prior to that I was on the Faculty of Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses, New Delhi (IDSA). The head of IDSA was K Subramanyam, the doyen of Indian Security thinking. Incidentally, his son is the current Indian Foreign Minister, Dr Jai Shankar. K Subramanyam had liked my writings and discussions on the subject, and he

had sponsored me for a one-year Fellowship at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London (IISS). He became my Mentor. I accordingly took a one-year sabbatical from the Army and proceeded to London in Oct 1986. When at the IISS I used to regularly visit our Military Attaché (MA) at the Indian High Commission which was walking distance from the IISS. One day in Aug 1987 I got a call from the MA that Army HQ at New Delhi wanted to speak to me.

I walked up and made the call from the MA's phone. At the other end of the telephone, I was told to hold; the Army Chief wanted to talk to me. The Army Chief came on the line and asked me how long was left to finish my Fellowship as he needed me. I told him three months and asked by when he wanted me to return? he replied, 'like yesterday'. I told him I will terminate my Fellowship and be there in three days. On arrival I found that the Indian Army was in a conflict state in Sri Lanka, the Army Chief Gen K Sunderji wanted me to oversee this conflict. 'Ours is not to question why, ours is to do or die'. The Indian Prime Minister had decided to intervene in the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka against atrocities being committed by Sri Lankan Army against the Tamil Lankans. At that time India had the brightest and the best of its Foreign Service manning the High Commission; Mr J N Dixit, the High Commissioner, was to later become India's NSA, Mr Hardeep Puri the Counsellor Political is today Minister for Civil Aviation and Dr Jai Shankar the First Secretary is our Foreign Minister.

In 1987 the Indian Political scene was in turbulence. There was an anti-Hindi imposition agitation in the South and turmoil in Tamil Nadu on the discrimination of Tamils of Sri Lanka by the Sri Lanka Government and atrocities being committed against them by the Sri Lankan military. This had brought about hue and cry in Tamil Nadu, and they demanded intervention by India to ensure the safety & security of the Tamils there; India had to act. Sri Lanka had a population of 14.8 million; 75% Sinhalese, 11% Tamils & 14% other communities. The General Elections in India were due in 1988 and the Prime Minister was concerned about the Tamil Nadu vote with a population of nearly 49 million. The East Pakistan-Bangladesh syndrome was being played out.

For this he resorted to coercive diplomacy by using India's military forces to coerce the President of Sri Lanka into signing the Indo Sri Lanka Accord in 1987, it was almost at gunpoint. The Accord committed India to support the unity & territorial integrity of Sri Lanka & gave the President of Sri Lanka the right to seek India's military assistance for maintaining peace & security in the Northern & Eastern Provinces. It also required the Indian Military Force to assist in the conduct of elections in the two Provinces after which the two Provinces would be merged into a single North-Eastern Province (NEP)

resulting in a Tamil majority Province. Thereafter, the Constitution of Sri Lanka would be Amended by the 13'th Amendment to create Sri Lanka as a Federal Political State which would give the Provincial Governments greater autonomy in governance; it was currently based on the British Westminster System which gave very little authority to the provinces.

The Northern Province consisted of 80% Tamil population mainly concentrated around Jaffna City which was the Provincial Capital. Tamils constituted one third of the population of Eastern Province along with one third Sinhala & one third Muslims (Moors). This was an anathema for Prabhakaran, the leader of the most violent & well-armed Tamil group called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) who wanted to settle for nothing less than an independent Tamil State in Sri Lanka. This was cause for concern to the Indian Government as they feared similar pressures in Tamil Nadu who were agitating against the imposition of Hindi as the National Language. The Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi discussed this matter with the Indian Army Chief, Gen K Sunderji who was himself a Tamil. Gen Sunderji had started his military career in the Travancore State Army and on merger of the State with India he became member of the Indian Army. Sunderji belonged to a Princely family of Travancore State and had been made an officer at a very young age. On the State's merger with India its Army was merged with the Indian Army and he retained his original seniority and thus became lined up to become Indian Army Chief at a later stage. After joining the Indian Army, he was assigned to the Mahar Regiment, which then consisted of Medium Machine Gun battalions armed with Medium Machine Guns (.50 Caliber). These are used to support the infantry in battle from a distance with their fire power. When the Prime Minister asked his advice, he replied that it was NO problem, the Thembis (Tamils) will run away with the lungi (dhoti) in their hands, and he would round them up in a matter of weeks. The PM gave him the go-ahead. Sunderji was a very ambitious person and wanted to be promoted to Field Marshal rank. Ironically, it took the Indian Army three years with over 1,200 killed and almost 7,000 wounded to achieve it.

Sri Lanka is an Island State separated from India in the South-East by a narrow strip of water appx 55 km called Palk Straits. The International Boundary (IBL) between India & Sri Lanka runs along the centre of Palk Straits. In the middle of the Palk Straits runs a crevice which has abundance of crabs. These crabs hide deep at the bottom of the crevice and are attracted by light. There were boats from India and Sri Lanka intermingling with lanterns hunting for the crabs. Sri Lanka has an area of 65610 Sq. km with a population of 21 million consisting of the majority 74% Sinhalese, the principal minority 18% Tamils (12% Sri Lankan Tamils and 6% Plantation Tamils) & 7% Tamil speaking Muslims (Moors). The Tamils were mainly

located in the Northern & Eastern Provinces except the Plantation Tamils who are concentrated in the highlands in the Central Provinces. Since it has no land threat, its Army's role is confined to Internal Security duties.

LTTE in Sri Lanka is an example of a civil unrest & militancy transiting to insurgency and ultimately morphing into a terrorist organization, which came to be listed by the US as the world's most dangerous terrorist organization at that time. The genesis of the movement lay in the grievances of the minority Tamils of deprivation and discrimination by the majority Sinhala State in Sri Lanka. The Tamils were seeking protection of their identity, language and areas of their inhabitation from the spread of massive Sinhala influx since 1956. The Tamil movement, starting with civil unrest, gradually escalated to open confrontation with the civil administration. The Sri Lanka response to this was to seek a military solution by launching military operation designated "War of Liberation" against the militant Tamil Groups. The Tamil parties upped their demand to independence & a separate Tamil State (Tamil Elam). The main militant Tamil Groups were Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), Tamil Elam Liberation Organisation, National Democratic Liberation Front (NDLF), Elam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF). Amongst the militant groups the LTTE led by Prabhakaran achieved dominance. His ruthless military action to isolate and starve out the Tamil areas in the Northern & Eastern Provinces led to large scale uprooting of Tamils (IDPs) and over a hundred thousand fled to India in fishing boats and were housed in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu. LTTE leader Prabhakaran was highly ambitious & ruthless and dreamt of becoming the sole arbiter of Tamil destiny. As a result he systematically eliminated leaders of other insurgency groups and used this to strengthen his cult and the LTTE. The large influx and presence of Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu which had a population of 45 million Tamils had serious implications for India. India decided to engage with Sri Lanka for a political resolution of the issue which culminated in the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord (ISLA). At the time of signing of the Accord, LTTE, PLOT, TELO, ENDLF and EPRLF were the prominent insurgency groups. PLOT, TELO, ENDLF and EPRLF accepted the Accord and surrendered their weapons however LTTE refused to do so and resisted their disarming by resorting to firing.

### LTTE Organisational Structure

The LTTE group leaders were under Area Commanders and it was also effective in harnessing the seafaring traditions to form what was to become Women Sea Tigers. Women cadres came up formally in ground operations around 1988 onwards.

Prabhakaran was the Supreme leader. He was assisted by Anton Balasingham, political commissar, and a military council comprising of Mahendra Raja a.k.a. Mahathiya the second in command, Sathasivam Krishnakumar a.k.a. Kittu, Kumarappa in Jaffna, Pulendran (later Karuna) in the East and Pottu Amman(intelligence wing). The military council was assisted by Yogaratnam Yogi (political wing), Sornalingam (Air Wing) a.k.a. Shankar, Sivanesan a.k.a. Soosai (Sea Tigers). The LTTE strength was assessed as 7,000 hard core, 3,000 helpers (Pandiyan) and indeterminate number of sympathizers.

### Motivational Factors Contributing to the Radicalisation of LTTE.

Early in its competitive insurgency, LTTE realised terrorist methods i.e. summary execution, burning alive, and death sentence for ordinary offences terrorised other groups and the civilian population. This gave it confidence to use terrorist methods effectively to rise to the top. Inability of other groups to challenge the LTTE due to absence of matching charismatic leader & internal power struggles among them. The resort by Sri Lanka to use of military force without a matching political strategy increased support for LTTE and its methods.

### Source of Finances

- Extortion of the shopkeepers & taxation of the Tamil population.
- Looting banks & government treasuries.
- Smuggling & trafficking of arms, people and drugs.
- Hijacking of maritime traffic easily possible due to Sri Lanka's strategic location on the international maritime routes.
- Contribution by Overseas Tamil Diaspora sympathetic to their cause.
- Outside support & media management.

Beginning from 1983 to 1897 almost all major extremist groups including LTTE had established overseas cells among Sri Lanka Tamil Diaspora particularly in London. They became a major source of support. It used the expertise among the diaspora for media management and providing real time information. It cultivated many other media persons for propaganda. It also cultivated low level govt officials and political leaders overseas sympathetic to them by spending money.

## The Beginning

### Indo Sri Lanka Accord (ISLA)

India's direct involvement in the civil war in Sri Lanka came about in Jul 1987 as a result of an agreement for a political resolution within the ambit of the Constitution of Sri Lanka called the Indo Sri Lanka Accord of 27 Jul 1987 in consultation with the Tamil groups to resolve the problem politically. It envisaged cease-fire between the belligerent parties, surrender of weapons by the armed Tamil militant parties, amendment of the Constitution of the Unitary State to create a Federal structure thereby ensuring provincial autonomy for the Tamil majority Northern & Eastern Provinces. The Accord also envisaged India providing a peace keeping force if asked by Sri Lanka Govt for accepting the surrender of weapons by the Tamil militants & for ensuring security in the two Provinces. The Sri Lanka Army was to confine to barracks in the Northern & Eastern Provinces.

### Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)

Consequently, on the request of the Sri Lanka Govt, India sent an infantry division to Sri Lanka in last week of Jul for overseeing the arms surrenders process by the militants. While most militant groups complied with handing over their weapons, the LTTE refused to do so. The Division Commander was ordered by Delhi to use force to disarm them. The LTTE resorted to attacking the peace keepers. Taken by surprise the IPKF suffered large casualties and open fighting broke out between the IPKF and LTTE.

By the time India got involved terrorist attacks by LTTE had been on the rise. Initially these attacks had been against the Sinhala population however early in 1987 LTTE leader Prabhakaran resorted to attacks on the other Tamil parties to wrest leadership of all Tamils in Sri Lanka. The ruthless methods of LTTE also instilled fear amongst the civilian Tamil population for obedience to the dictates of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran. After assessing the situation the Indian Govt, in consultation with the Sri Lankan Govt decided that the LTTE would have to be forcibly disarmed and while doing so the safety of the vast innocent civilians would also need to be protected against the murderous attacks on them by LTTE. Consequently a force of five divisions (15 brigades & three Para Commando Battalions (Special Forces) was built up in North & East Sri Lanka under a headquarter designated as HQ IPKF. In addition, Para-military forces comprising one Assam Rifles Battalion, two CRPF battalions, one CRPF Mahila (Women) Company, one TA Battalion were also included. Ad-hoc complements of Indian Air Force & Indian Navy were also part of IPKF. I was appointed the Commander of IPKF. This entailed a Politico Military task. IPKF was

involved in Joint Forces Operation an in essence was a Joint Forces Command without being designated so. This anomaly did create some problems in its operations which fortunately were overcome by personal interaction with the concerned Air Force and Naval Commands.

Prior to induction of IPKF a Civil War had been raging in Northern & Eastern Provinces. Many Tamil insurgent parties had sprung up, LTTE, EPRLF, TELO, EROS, NDLF etc. Of these the leader of LTTE Velupillai Prabhakaran was the most cunning & ruthless. He proposed to the other Tamil Party Leaders to meet at Batticloa in the Eastern Province to discuss their future plans. Most leaders complied; others sent their senior representative. Once they had assembled there Prabhakaran had all of them killed in cold blood by his LTTE cadres. From this time onwards Prabhakaran became the undisputed leader of the Tamil Insurgency movement.

The Indian Peace Force (IPKF) was inducted into Sri Lanka on 30 Jul 1987, initially in Jaffna, which had almost 90% Tamils and was the strong-hold of the LTTE. They reacted violently and soon fighting broke out between the IPKF & LTTE. Initially an Infantry Division had been inducted and the Division Commander planned a surgical strike against LTTE leadership who were reported to be meeting at their tactical headquarters in Jaffna University. The area around Jaffna University was crowded and there were only two open fields where heliborne troops could be landed in a night operation, a football field and a smaller playground; both surrounded by residential buildings. The Division Commander planned to land 120 para commandos of 10 Para Commando Battalion and 360 soldiers of 13 Sikh LI. On the night of 11 Oct, the first flight of two helicopters landed 40 para commandos on the football field. Almost immediately they came under fire from surrounding buildings and even from treetops. The LTTE had sophisticated radio equipment and they had broken into the IPKF frequencies and knew the attack was coming. That night the helicopters could not land the entire assault force and a total of 80 para commandos and 30 personnel of 13 Sikh LI managed to land. The troops on all sides were surrounded by the enemy and had to wait for morning before reinforcements could come in. The Sikh LI radioman was killed immediately on landing and contact with the Division HQ was lost. In the fog of battle the Sikh LI got separated from the Para Commandos. Throughout the night they fought with depleting manpower and ammunition. By morning of 12 Oct there were three soldiers left and had completely run out of ammunition. They fixed their bayonets and decided on one last charge against the enemy; only one injured man, Sepoy Gora Singh, survived and he was taken prisoner by the LTTE.

The 40 men of 10 Para Commando had spread-out and gone after their original target – the LTTE leadership. Unable to locate the LTTE HQ and outnumbered, they took up defensive positions in two single story buildings and for 18 hours they kept the numerically stronger at bay by their ammunition and picking their targets judiciously. On the morning of 12 Oct, the CO of 10 Para Commando Lt Col Dalbir Singh himself led the rescue mission with his remaining men and three T-72 tanks. However, all the roads leading to the University had been mined and boobytrapped by the LTTE and the tanks found it difficult to advance. The tank commander Maj Anil Kaul did something that LTTE were least expecting; he took his tanks on to the railway line that ran behind the University and drove on the rail track right up to the scene of battle. A little later the rest of 13 Sikh LI along with 4/5 Gorkha Rifles broke through and took control of the area. The LTTE leader Prabhakaran was injured in the leg but fled moments before the IPKF troops burst into their University Headquarters. In this battle 13 Sikh LI lost 29 brave soldiers. Maj Kaul was wounded in the battle and lost an eye. He was awarded the VrC (Vir Chakra) for his gallant action.

There were rumblings of this debacle in the Parliament, and they were informed that a new Overall Commander, Lt General Kalkat (I was promoted to Lt Gen) had been appointed to command the operations. The Indian PM was away at Vancouver to attend the CHOGAM (Commonwealth Heads of Govt) meet & thereafter he was proceeding to Washington to address the US Congress. I was told that it would be a shame if when he addresses the US Congress as leader of a major Asian Power with the third largest Army in the world could not capture Jaffna held by some militants. Thus, my priority became capture of Jaffna.

After the Jaffna University debacle, the Army HQ did a re-check and realized that the IPKF was undermanned, under equipped and over stretched. It needed more Infantry, T-72 tanks and Amphibious armoured fighting vehicles (BMPs). Therefore, another airlift began with IL 76 & AN 12 aircraft; so heavy was the air traffic at Thambaram Airbase in Madras (Chennai) that the runway cracked. By end Oct the IAF had flown 2200 transport and 800 helicopter sorties to ferry material and men for IPKF. I received three more Divisions and I now had a strength equaling five Divisions (15 brigades). IPKF resumed operations in early Nov, it was a hard and dogged fight for control of Jaffna. For the Indian soldiers trying to bring peace in a foreign country where it was impossible to distinguish between LTTE cadres and Tamil civilians, the LTTE would often hide their weapon under the lungi (dhoti) and fire at the IPKF soldiers in crowded areas and then hiding their guns, melt away among the people when the soldiers were looking for them. Anyone over the age of 10, male or female, could be an armed and deadly adversary.

I observed that all previous attempts to capture Jaffna had been by frontal attacks which involved fighting in highly built-up areas and having to clear house to house incurring heavy casualties to our troops. In order to avoid incurring heavy casualties I decided to launch only a feint frontal attack employing tanks and carryout a double envelopment with the infantry and attack Jaffna from the rear. The western force of the envelopment faced fierce opposition, but ably led by Brig Manjit Singh, they succeeded. In this action Maj Ramasamy Parameshwaran bravely fought his way and was killed in action. He was awarded the Param Vir Chakra (PVC) posthumously, India's highest award for conspicuous bravery above & beyond the call of duty. Brig Manjit Singh was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra (MVC); second highest award for gallantry. We captured Jaffna incurring much lesser casualties than would have resulted by the frontal approach. Ronen Sen, who was the PM's advisor on political affairs in the PMO, had asked me to inform him the result and on 26 Oct I informed him at Vancouver by a satellite phone.

After the capture of Jaffna Town, the IPKF was assigned a new mission of conducting operations in the Northern & Eastern Provinces to bring them under IPKF control and to bring about normalcy so that elections could be conducted. The LTTE comprised appx 7,000 hard core cadres with large number of sympathizers who were antagonistic against the Sri Lanka Government because of the atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan Security Forces against the Tamils. Each Cadre had a helper from the civil population called a Podyan. This person carried spare ammunition, sometimes spare weapon and food etc. for the LTTE fighters. The LTTE did not hesitate from using women and children in their front for protection while opening fire from behind them. They had also trained and created women fighter cadres and called them Sea Tigers; they were as ruthless as the LTTE men. For purpose of my operations, I divided the area into four Sectors, each under a infantry division. The sectors were designated Northern (Jaffna Peninsula) Sector, Eastern Sector (Trincomalee District), Southern Sector (Batticaloa District), Central Sector (Vavuniya District). The Sectors conforming with the Sri Lanka administrative Districts helped coordination with the Sri Lankan Government. Language was a barrier between my soldiers and the civil population, Indian soldiers speak Hindi and do not understand Tamil which is a difficult language. I therefore milked soldiers from the Madras Regiment battalions in IPKF and distributed them to the other battalions.

At this stage the IPKF strength was: -

**Military (Army)**

Divisional HQs 4 (54, 4, 36 & 57)  
 Infantry Brigades 15 (45 x Inf Battalions)  
 Para Commandobattalions 3  
 Mechanised Infantry Battalions 2  
 Armoured Regiment 1

**Military (Navy)**

Naval Liaison Officer (Captain Rank)  
 Troops & Tanks Landing Ship 1; rest on as required basis  
 Civil shipping chartered by Indian Navy

**Military (Air Force)**

MI 8 Helicopter Squadron (1)  
 HIND Attack Helicopter detachment  
 AN-32 Sqn (1). Medium Carriage capacity  
 IL-76 Det. Heavy Lift capacity

**Para Military**

Assam Rifles bn (1)  
 TA Bn (1)  
 CRPF Battalions (2)  
 Mahila (Women) Company, CRPF. (1)

**DRDO** Communication Team

**MEA** Political Advisor (1)

**MHA** Political Advisors (2)

**I & B Ministry** Doordarshan (Indian TV) & AIR Team

**P & T Dept** Telecom Det

**Indian Railways Team**

**Tamil Nadu State Electricity Board Team**

**Indian Red Cross Team**

(At this stage total strength of IPKF comprised appx 80,000 personnel).

Maintenance of such a large force overseas was a gigantic problem. However, it was handled by the IPKF Brigadier in charge of Logistics, Brig N K Bahri outstandingly.

The two Provinces consisted of nearly 30% (18,000 sq km) of the total area of Sri Lanka (65,000 km) and population of 2.47 million out of the total 14.8 million population of Sri Lanka. It became clear to me that due to the difficulty of identifying LTTE fighters from ordinary Tamils we would have to clear the area in a manner that the LTTE did not filter back. I was fighting with the caveat that innocent civilians, women & children must not be harmed. For this the cleared areas would have to be kept sterile by sealing it with cordons. I therefore decided to operate from both flanks of each Province inwards clearing and sealing cleared areas step by step. By following this method, we were able to drive the LTTE into the center of each Province. The LTTE, finding themselves hedged in, broke south-west into a dense jungle (forest) called Wani Jungles. It was a huge primary forest with tall trees and lot of foliage. The IPKF surrounded the Wani Jungle and isolated the LTTE from the rest of the population in the Northern & Eastern Province.

After hard fighting the IPKF was able to wrest control of the Northern & Eastern Provinces. I found myself in the unenviable position of having to administer these Provinces comprising one-third of Sri Lanka. This meant catering for the daily life of the population. I appointed Town Commandants of Brigadier rank; for Jaffna & Trincomalee. Police Service was non-existent to look after criminal activity and I asked the Indian Government for assistance. Two Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Battalions and much later a Mahila (women's) Company on my request were sent from India. To cater for electricity, staff from Tamil Nadu State Electricity was provided. For running the railway, Tamil Nadu Railway TA Company was sent. For the medical service the Indian Red Cross sent a detachment. I found myself involved in the political affairs in the two states for which the Indian Army is neither trained nor expected to do so. I asked for Indian Administrative Service (IAS) & Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers. The IAS officers (2) were placed with the two Town Commandants and I located the IFS officer with me as political advisor. The IFS officer fell ill due to the difficult environment and had to be evacuated to India; the IFS officers were not accustomed to living in harsh conditions and there were no takers for the job. On my persistence, I was intimated that the First Secretary of the Indian High Commission in Colombo, Dr Jai Shankar, would act as my Political Advisor.

I was also keen to get the Political & Administrative role off my hands and consequently, I formally intimated the Governments of India and Sri Lanka, that the conditions for conduct of election have been created and the elections may be ordered. A problem arose; there had been no census conducted for many years due to the prevailing insurgency situation prior to the arrival of IPKF and the electoral rolls had to be prepared for the Election. I undertook to get it done along with the Sri Lanka Chief Election Commissioner and their Attorney General. With the help of the Sri Lanka Election Staff and my officers, transport including helicopters we were able get the electoral rolls prepared. I had to visit Colombo often for this where I also met Mr Lalith Athulathmudali the Sri Lanka Foreign Minister. A brilliant person, he was also a Privy Counselor of UK. He was a great help and guide.

The IPKF assisted the Sri Lanka Govt in the conduct of elections in the two Provinces without the LTTE being able to disrupt them. In many cases IPKF secured the routes for voters from their home areas to the polling booths and guarding of the booths and transportation of the Ballot Boxes and Polling Staff by air and road transport. The elections were held successfully with 60% voting and consequently the Northern & Eastern Provinces were merged as one North Eastern Province (NEP Province) by the enactment of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Sri Lanka Constitution. A Tamilian Chief Minister Vardaraj Perumal of the EPRLF Party was sworn-in by President J Jayawardene of Sri Lanka. I signaled to Delhi "Mission Accomplished; await further orders". The response from Delhi was 'IPFK to continue to assist the Provincial Govt to establish firm roots.' Indian Prime Minister wanted to meet the newly elected Chief Minister, so I had him flown to Delhi in IPKF aircraft. The Sri Lanka Government was not happy with this, as they felt that India would control the North-Eastern Province (one-third of Sri Lanka) by proxy. I feel this was a mistake on our part.

At this stage a high level Sri Lanka delegation, led by Gamini Dissanayake, a senior Cabinet Minister, came to India and met Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. I had also been called to attend it. Dissanayake conveyed satisfaction with the IPKF operations. He wanted the Sri Lankan Army to also participate with IPKF in the Eastern Province. Prime Minister Gandhi asked my view on this request; I opposed it as it could end up in IPKF & Sri Lankan soldiers shooting at each other in the confusion of battle. Prime Minister Gandhi upheld my view. It later transpired that the Lankan interest in the Eastern Sector was that Trincomalee Coast sands had precious stones including their famous emeralds and they wanted to harvest them through their Army.

The elections had also enabled Sri Lanka to conduct its General Election and the result was that Mr Premadasa was elected the President of Sri Lanka, President Jayawardene having opted out. Sri Lanka has an Executive Presidency and the President has all the powers. At this stage, India's High Commissioner J N Dixit, had a problem. He had been a very effective High Commissioner and had played a major role in drafting of the Indo Sri Lanka Accord; he was jokingly referred to by his colleagues in the Foreign Ministry as India's Pro-Consul in Colombo. The new President would not give time for him to present his Credentials which is necessary for a Country accept the envoy, until then he remains just an ambassador or High Commissioner in waiting; it was a polite message to India that President Premadasa did not want him as India's High Commissioner. Delhi got the message and Dixit was replaced by L N Mehrotra as High Commissioner. His credentials were promptly accepted by the Sri Lankan President. Mehrotra was a recognized linguist and well versed in Oriya language which is the grammar for Sinhala language.

### At the Brink of War

President Premadasa had always been antagonistic to the Indo Sri Lanka Accord and as Prime Minister at that time had absented himself from Sri Lanka at the time of signing of the Accord by planning a visit to Japan. President Premadasa was against the presence of Indian Forces in Sri Lanka and one of his election manifestos had been expelling the IPKF from Sri Lanka. Immediately after the election I got a call at my HQ in Trincomalee from the President's Office that the President was sending a letter for me by a special messenger & would I be there to receive it. I responded that I will be at the airport to receive him.

Meanwhile LN Mehrotra had got a whiff of the contents of the letter. He called me and said that the letter was full of officialese like 'whereby, thereby, hereby' and in essence ordering IPKF out of Sri Lanka. If I did not vacate all my forces from the territory of Sri Lanka within 48 hours, he would declare IPKF an Army of Occupation and order his military to attack the IPKF. Mehrotra could not offer me any advice & I called Ronen Sen at the PMO which was my usual communication channel with Delhi on political matters and apprised him of this and asked for advice. Ronen said 'Boss-man is away campaigning, and he couldn't advice anything regarding this matter. I told him "In that case I will do what I have to do". I do not know whether Mehrotra informed the Foreign Ministry regarding this though I think he must have done so, in any case they were 'mum'. It was like telling me 'Stew in your own Soup'.

I went to the airport to receive the President's representative and as the plane from Colombo landed, out stepped the Sri Lanka Army Commander Lt Gen Hamilton Wanasinghe. The SL Army Chief had the rank of Lt General as the rank of full General was held by the Chairman Joint Chiefs, Gen Cecil Ranatunga. Gen Wanasinghe who was a good friend, since we had been operating together, said 'Amar, can we take a walk on the tarmac' so we walked together on the airfield. He said he was in a quandary; 'his President had ordered him to serve me ultimatum for IPKF to leave the shores of Sri Lanka within 72 hours and if we did not do so he will declare IPKF an Army of Occupation and order his forces to attack it.' He asked me what should he do? I replied if I were him, I would obey the orders of his President. He then turned said if he did so 'what will you do?'. I replied, 'I will do what I must do; fight to defend my mandate, and it can have unpredictable consequences'. He said nothing more and left for Colombo without handing me the letter from the President. Mark Tully the BBC Correspondent for South Asia had got a whiff of what was happening from his contacts in Colombo and chartered a special plane and flew to Trincomalee. When I got back to my HQ I saw Mark Tully there, inquisitive as ever. I had decided to take the threat head-on. I called my Chief of Staff and told him in the hearing about all what had transpired and asked him to take down my orders. I dictated that in case we are attacked by the Sri Lankan Forces, we will not only fight them but also target the source of their origin. I ordered 57 Division in the North to be prepared to attack south wards and to capture Anuradhapura which was close to Colombo; 36 Division in Trincomalee to attack West wards across the Provincial boundary and join up with 57 Division at Anuradhpura. Further objectives and orders later. The inference was clear; Colombo would be the obvious next objective. The Sri Lanka Army Liaison Officer who was attached with my HQ as per protocol was also present and soon after I finished, he quietly slipped out of my HQ and ran to the nearest telephone. As a precautionary measure I had ordered a Combat Command (a combination of tanks, Armored Personnel Carriers (APC's) and infantry brigade sized force to take positions at the entry of the road leading to the Eastern Province from Sri Lankan controlled territory. Our T 52 tanks make a frightening sight; Sri Lanka responding likewise lining up their armored cars which of course were no match for the T-72 tanks.

Consequently, President Premadasa changed his strategy for getting rid of the IPKF. He secretly contacted the LTTE leadership and asked Prabhakaran to send his representative to Colombo to meet him. Prabhakaran sent his ideologue Anton Balasingham who was based in London and Mahatya his military commander. President Premadasa made-up with the LTTE leaders and commenced giving them arms & ammunition to fight the IPKF. The LTTE happily joined in. President Premadasa thought

that after the IPKF left, his Army could then take on a considerably weakened LTTE as a result of IPKF operations; while Prabhakaran thought that LTTE could take on the Sri Lanka Army if the IPKF was not present. I came to know of these goings on as a result of an IPKF patrol intercepting a LTTE cadre. The LTTE had the practice of getting everything on record and they had secretly video-taped the meeting with President Premadasa; this LTTE cadre was carrying the video tape towards the coastline for conveying it to Prabhakaran hiding in the Wani Jungle. I immediately sent the video tape to Delhi. I had also had reports of Sri Lankan helicopter landings in the Vavuniya Area in Central Sri Lanka where arms & ammunition had been delivered to the LTTE. In fact, a Sri Lanka officer Brigadier Kobe Koduwa had been seen present. He appears to have been appointed the liaison officer for the LTTE.

At this stage India's Prime Minister intervened and sent his Principal Advisor Mr Deshmukh to meet the Sri Lankan President. I was also present at this meeting. It was decided that India would withdraw the IPKF from Sri Lanka. President Premadasa made full use of this meeting by leaking to the media that this meeting was regarding the withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka. He ensured that all newspapers & its sole TV Channel carried it in headlines. In fact, he got the news papers in Colombo carry the headline "Gen Kalkat in Colombo to finalize IPKF withdrawal"; 'at least I made the headlines in some Country'. Mindful of the US & Russian withdrawals from Viet Nam & Afghanistan respectively, I insisted that with a force of nearly 80,000 I will do so on my time frame and in phases. This was agreed to by all parties. I set the time frame as by 30 Sept 1990; IPKF completed its withdrawal on 23 Sep 1990, one week before the deadline I had set for myself. I was the last IPKF person leave the shores of Sri Lanka. I was given a ceremonial sendoff by Sri Lanka Government with a 'guard of honour' and Sri Lanka Defence Secretary was present to me off. Many quipped that he had been sent by President Premadasa to confirm that I have really left. During the last Phase of my withdrawal as a precautionary measure I had our Carrier Forces standing by, in case Sri Lanka reneged on its agreement.

## Lessons

- In securing the Accord, the MEA had had overlooked the first principle of Intervention in Civil unrests – that most conflicts have a political dynamic and ultimately require a political resolution. It is only the government of a country can give political dispensation to its citizens not an Outside Power.

- Before intervening in such conflicts, the intervening country must ensure that the commitments are guaranteed by the host government. If the host government thereafter reneges its commitments, the only alternative left would be to resort to 'regime change'.
- Managing domestic public opinion is critical. This was very well managed by the Indian Government and it ensured that there was NO spill over of the separatist tendencies amongst India's Tamils to follow the LTTE example.
- The Exit Plan must be in place before you intervene in another Country.

### Epilogue

Some years later, after Prabhakaran and the LTTE leadership had been eliminated by Sri Lankan Forces a Sri Lanka delegation led by President Premadasa came to India. A reception was held by him at the Sri Lanka High Commission in his honour and India's Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh was an invitee. I also had been invited. During the Reception President Premadasa indicated to me that he wanted an aside. I walked up to him, and he told me that Sri Lanka was in grave economic situation, and he had requested our PM for joint venture in development of the Hambantota Port in South Sri Lanka. This lies in the middle of the Indian Ocean and was used for victualling by most ships operating in the Indian Ocean. I told our Prime Minister a minutes later and he said it appears a good idea and he will look into it. I accordingly conveyed this to the Sri Lankan President and I myself was very optimistic. However, nothing happened and on an occasion at an Army Commander's reception where he was present, I confronted him about it. He said: Compulsions of a Coalition; he could not get it through the Coordination Committee Chaired by the Congress President, as their Southern Party allies were against it. We had a coalition Government and he was forced to follow to the 'Coalition Dharma'. We can learn a lesson; a Country with over a billion multi-religious, multilingual and multi-ethnic population needs a strong Centre; Coalitions won't work.

Some years later Sri Lanka gave the same option to China who promptly accepted it .This led to heavy debt owed by Sri Lanka to China and as a result China ended up owning Hambantota and the Colombo Port City through a Chinese Corporation to repay the debt.

On an occasion I happened to meet the Army Chief and I asked him why you chose me to lead the IPKF; he replied 'I looked at the dossiers of all the eligible officers and found you to be the biggest SOB. He explained that I had seen battle the most, having fought in the 1965 & 1971 Wars and decorated.

Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a LTTE suicide bomber. The story is aptly captured in the Netflix Docuseries 'Madras Cafe'.

Indian Officers & Soldiers had fought heroically.

The Author Lt Gen A S Kalkat was awarded the Sarvottam Yudh Medal (SYSM); the Country's highest award for Leadership in War & Conflict; it was the first ever to be awarded. Only two more have been awarded since then, in the Kargil Operations.

(The IPKF Operations is a Prescribed Case Study Subject at the US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, USA).

'This Monograph is dedicated to the fallen IPKF Heroes and the Veterans of IPKF.'

Disclaimer: Views expressed are of the author and do not reflect the views of CENJOWS.