

End of an armed conflict with the death of a terrorist leader: analysing the absence of terrorist attacks in the post-war context

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Abstract— *The military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009 is significant not only as it marks the end of the prolonged armed struggle. More importantly, the island nation has not witnessed a single terrorist attack since the demise of the LTTE chieftain Velupillai Prabhakaran. While Sri Lanka tends to associate the military victory with a complete halt in terrorist attacks, the global counter-terrorism experience dictates otherwise. Often times, terrorist outfits continue to execute attacks following the decapitation of its leader. The Sri Lankan case thus defies the conventional developments of terrorist groups. What are the factors that contributed to the complete termination of terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka since May 2009? Was the death of Prabhakaran an absolute precursor to the end of LTTE attacks? This paper seeks to empirically analyse the factors which contributed to the successful termination in terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka since the death of Prabhakaran.*

The analysis is made in light of the 'adversary threat matrix' in terrorism studies. The research reveals that while Prabhakaran's death was symbolic and instrumental in catalysing the military defeat of the Tigers, it was not the sole factor in bringing an end to terrorism in Sri Lanka. Several conditions (internal and external) have prevailed which have disabled the LTTE from re-organising and launching attacks following the removal of the leader.

Keywords— LTTE, Post-war, Terrorist attacks

I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka marked the end of a 26-year armed confrontation against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on May 18th, 2009. This is a significant day in the history of Sri Lanka not only because it marks the decimation of one of the world's most ruthless terrorist outfit. More importantly, the island nation has not witnessed a single terrorist attack since the demise of the LTTE chieftain Velupillai Prabhakaran. While Sri Lanka tends to associate military victory with a complete halt in terrorist attacks, the global counter-terrorism experience dictate otherwise. Military operations and decapitation of terrorist leaders do not necessarily prompt nor guarantee an end to terrorist campaigns. Often times, terrorist outfits re-group and execute terrorist attacks following the death of a

leader. The Sri Lankan case thus defies the conventional developments of terrorist groups around the world. In this regard, what were the factors that contributed to the complete termination of terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka since May 2009? Was the death of Prabhakaran an absolute precursor to the end of LTTE attacks?

Four years on since the end of the Eelam War, series of literature have been produced to explicate the victory of the Sri Lankan security forces in crushing the LTTE. However, less research has focused beyond the demise of the Prabhakaran and why the country has not witnessed a single terrorist attack since the end of the conflict. Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to empirically analyse the factors which contributed to the successful termination of terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka since Prabhakaran's demise.

The article starts by providing the theoretical assumptions and the experiences of other terrorist groups following the demise of their leader. This will illustrate where the Sri Lankan case stands within the global perspective. Thereafter, a theoretical framework of the research is presented. Based on this, the paper goes to analyse the absence of terrorist attacks in the aftermath of the war by assessing the following: 1) past trends in the LTTE attacks and campaign history; 2) whether the post-Prabhakaran LTTE elements possess the necessary conditions to conduct terrorist attacks; and 3) whether Sri Lanka's security environment is vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Lastly, it draws some conclusion about the overall research finding and offers future threat assessment. Lessons learned from the Sri Lankan case may offer some points to consider for other nations that engage in counter terrorism. This study relies on an amalgamation of both qualitative and quantitative data extrapolated from open source secondary sources.

II. LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION: THEORY AND GLOBAL EXPERIENCE

Historically, military approach has been both a crucial component and a common response in countering terrorism. As part of a larger military operation in crushing terrorist groups, targeting its leaders has been one of the most prominent counter-terrorism strategies adopted around the world. Countries such as Israel and the United

States have extensively relied on this method as a means to undermine the terrorist groups and eventually bring an end to their campaign. Several studies have been conducted over the years to assess the impact of leadership decapitation on the terrorist campaign trajectory. To date, there is a lack of academic consensus regarding whether or not the death of a leader prompts an end to terrorist outfits and their lethal activities. While some advocate that the removal of terrorist leaders is ineffectual and counter-productive (Jordan, 2009; Pape, 2003; Hafez and Hatfield, 2006), others conclude that leadership removal catalyses the demise of a terrorist group-conditional upon an amalgamation of various factors (Byman, 2006; Frankel, 2010).

Among several studies that purport the success of leadership decapitation in crushing terrorism, Johnston's study demonstrates that removing the leader (a) increases the chance of war termination; (b) increases the probability of government victory; (c) reduces the intensity of militant violence, and; (d) reduces the frequency of terrorist attacks (2012). Removing key leaders may have significant effects, such as degrading the militants' pool of skilled commanders, strategists and operatives; disruption of planning, training, and execution of operation and attacks; and, by putting remaining militants on the defensive, assisting government forces in seizing or maintaining the tactical and operational initiative (Johnston, 2012). Jordan explicates that killing top leaders is more frequently associated with successful counterterrorism as opposed to arresting them (2009).

On the other hand, the decapitation or a capture of a terrorist leader has proved counter-productive in many cases. Several scholars have purported their own assumptions to underscore this claim. Jordan argues that capturing the leader lead to 'martyrdom' effects' and invite further terrorist attacks rather than undermining the group's morale. This includes the greater radicalisation and strengthening the resolve of the remaining members, increase in reprisal attacks or more lethal attacks, increase in the movement's popular legitimacy (Jordan, 2009). Following Israel's strike against the Hezbollah during the 1980s, the militants replaced its leaders and accelerated its suicide attacks against Israel. The 1992 and 1994 bombings of Jewish and Israeli targets in Argentina was considered to be a retaliation against its founder Abbas al-Musawi's death and Israel's kidnapping of another Hezbollah leader, Mustafa Dirani (Byman, 2006). Furthermore, Musawi has been venerated as an iconic figure to rally further support and commitment to fighting Israel.

Cronin contends that leadership decapitation makes defeating terrorist groups more difficult because the structure of the organisation becomes more decentralised. As outfits become less hierarchical, the assumption is that they evolve into localised cells that are resilient to removal

of terrorist leaders (Cronin, 2006). Byman observes that killing of Fathi Shaqaqi of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) was initially successful in weakening the organisation as back then the group composition was small, and Shaqaqi had no obvious successor. However, many Palestinian groups have since adapted to Israel's counter-terrorism tactics and today's PIJ organisational structure is loose. This in turn undermines the effect of leadership decapitation (2006).

Both Crenshaw and Jordan's studies suggest that the removal of terrorist leaders to defeat terrorism is particularly ineffective against older organisations. She claims that the older the outfit exists, the more resilient they are to the loss of leaders as compared to younger organisations that experience decapitation of their chieftain (Jordan, 2009).¹ Similarly, Price contends that the timing of decapitation is also critical, as the magnitude of this effect decreases over time. After twenty years, leadership decapitation may have no effect on the group's survival. Furthermore, his study revealed that religiously motivated terrorist groups are five times more likely to end than ethno-nationalist groups following the demise of the leader (Price, 2012).

Given the existing academic theories and global experiences, the LTTE could have seemingly continued its terrorist campaign following the demise of Prabhakaran. However, the Sri Lankan experience defied several existing theories that claim military action and removal of terrorist leaders as ineffective and counterproductive. The LTTE was in existence since 1976. Despite its durability in decades of battle and its extraordinary levels of tactical and technological innovation, the terrorist campaign met with its end in May 2009. Furthermore, Prabhakaran's death was synonymous to the end of the LTTE terrorist campaign because the country has not witnessed a single terrorist attack on her soil since then. As scholars like Johnson assert, can the end of terrorism in the country be attributed to the death of key leaders? The following section will assess the core research question and the absence of attacks in the post-Prabhakaran Sri Lanka.

III. ADVERSARY THREAT MATRIX

Terrorist attacks certainly do not appear in a vacuum. Certain conditions need to converge for terrorist groups to carry out attacks, and other elements are necessary to ensure that the attacks are executed successfully. In assessing the potential threat of non-state actors, Gunaratna offers the "Adversary Threat Matrix". The matrix considers the militants' intentions, operational capabilities, and opportunities in carrying out potential attacks (Gunaratna et al., 2006). A terrorist group must exhibit all of these elements to be classified as a true heart.

¹ For more on this hypothesis, see Martha Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (March 1991), p. 79

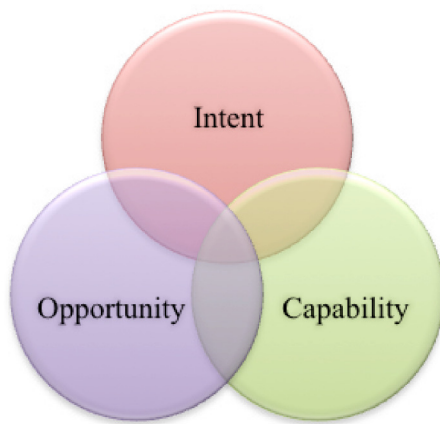


Fig 1. Adversary Threat Matrix

Intent relates to the purpose and the will to conduct violence and attacks. This is often associated with the level of ideological conviction among members, group cohesion and recruitment, and public support (both active and passive) to the cause. Capability is a very broad concept, and indicates the operational tools and activities required by terrorists to sustain a series of successful attacks. These include command and control; weaponry; operational space; training, intelligence; technical expertise and specialists; external weapon sources; sanctuary; funding; espionage and deception skills (Cragin and Daly, 2004). Opportunity can be understood as environment or circumstances that are conducive to launching terrorist attacks.

According to Cragin and Daly, most terrorist risk assessments in the past have considered the capability and intentions in independent terms, and rarely combined the two elements across the range of potential threats (2004). However, if all three elements from the threat matrix are considered, it provides a clearer picture of the terrorist movement and the possible risk that they may pose. It is pertinent to note that many of the components within the 'intention' and 'capability' are not quantifiable for empirical examination. While noting this caveat, this study relies on the threat matrix as an analytical framework to analyse the absence of terrorist attacks in the post-war period.

IV. POST-PRABHAKARAN THREAT ANALYSIS

This section will combine an assessment of LTTE's intention with their capability and opportunity for terrorist attacks following Prabhakaran's death. This will help to conduct a comprehensive risk analysis.

A. Intent

As mentioned earlier, intent is characterised by ideological commitment, membership, and public support. In order to evaluate the intent of the Eelamists in the post-Prabhakaran period, it is pertinent to examine the developments that prevailed prior to the defeat of the Tigers. Since the Black July of 1983, the LTTE enjoyed steady popular support

until 2002 (both coerced and voluntary). However, several circumstances in post-2002 prevailed, which gradually led to the erosion of the popular support of the LTTE and the ideological commitment between the members. The numbers of forcible recruitment of children and adults skyrocketed especially after 2002 due to lack of voluntary recruitment (a stark contrast from the 1980s and 1990s). This translated to an overall decline in voluntary recruitment and erosion of ideological conviction of both the new and existing members. As if to add insult to injury, the breakaway of Karuna in 2004 was a huge blow to the legitimacy, manpower, public support, and the organisational cohesion of the LTTE.

In terms of support, the group witnessed a gradual decline in local support since 2002. As the group's reliance on the local population for funding, arms procurement and campaign legitimacy decreased, it instead turned towards the Diaspora community for logistical and moral support. The outfit's detachment from the local constituents further contributed to the erosion of domestic public support. After the militants hit their peak of strength towards the end of Eelam War III, their strategic objectives disregarded the support from the local constituents, and focused on military recuperation. This further induced coercive recruitment of members to replenish manpower, which triggered a vicious cycle. From 2008 onwards, the organisation relied heavily on the use of suicide attacks, targeting Tamil refugees in their control zone and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. From February to April 2009, the group intentionally targeted their own constituency which they claimed to represent - whom they forcibly trapped to employ as a human buffer against the Sri Lankan army. This certainly reinforced the constituents' distrust towards the LTTE as a legitimate organisation. The amalgamation of the aforesaid factors produced a synergetic effect which destabilised the separatist movement both externally and internally on a massive scale.

In this manner, the LTTE had already lost the ideological commitment of most of the members, and robust local support in the final years of the conflict. The LTTE's 'intent' had been significantly undermined prior to its demise - not solely due to the military operations but because of other external and internal circumstances which prevailed over time. In this regard, it was not Prabhakaran's death per se which diminished the 'intent' component of the LTTE. In the final phases of the humanitarian operation, 11,664 LTTE cadres voluntarily surrendered to the armed forces (Hettiarachchi, 2013). This was a clear reflection that the will to continue the terrorist campaign was largely diminished among the masses.

The significance of diluting the terrorist 'intent' in was fully acknowledged by the Sri Lankan government and the security forces in the post-war phase. The rehabilitation programme undertaken by the security forces largely

focused on the de-radicalisation of the individuals to disengage from violence, and to re-engage themselves in harmonious living. Because the LTTE relied heavily on radicalisation and indoctrination to sustain its membership, the Sri Lankan establishment orchestrated a multi-faceted rehabilitation programme to facilitate the de-radicalisation process (Hettiaracchi, 2013). The rehabilitation programme served to suppress the resurgence of the terrorist 'intent' to a large extent, thus eliminating the potential of a terrorist attack in the country by domestic elements alone.

B. Capability

As mentioned earlier, the 'capability' component consists of the logistical and operational tools required to conduct successful attacks. For the purpose of this study, the following elements will be examined: operational space, funding, and weaponry.

Operational space is vital for militants to conduct training and experiments in preparation of pending attacks. In terms of operational space, the LTTE projects a straightforward case. Especially for an organisation that conducted guerrilla and conventional warfare, possession of territory was paramount in strengthening their military capability. Although the LTTE expanded their area of control since 1990 until the 2002 period, it gradually lost territory with the onset of the military operations in the Eastern theatre in July 2007. Without a territory in the aftermath of the war, the LTTE is deprived of an operational space to recuperate into a formidable force as it was before.

Funding is a critical component to build/acquire weapons, provide logistical and financial support for members, and influence the terrorist group's choice of strategy and modus operandi. The LTTE established a formidable fundraising mechanism both locally and internationally during the course of the conflict. There are no records of figures claiming that the outfit ever faced a lack of funding during the final stages of the war. Even if the local fundraising mechanism had been paralysed due to the loss of LTTE's territorial control since 2007, the international fundraising efforts would not have been directly affected by the developments in Sri Lankan soil. Following the end of the humanitarian operations, the Sri Lankan government strived to retrieve the LTTE assets dispersed worldwide (OneIndia News, 2009), and certain elements within the Diaspora communities were in dispute over the remaining assets (Ethirajan, 2009). Indeed, reports indicate that the Nedyawan's Tamil Coordinating Committee (TCC) based in Norway has control over most of the assets of the LTTE's international front organisations, including the *Thamilchola*i schools and media networks such as *TamilNet* (Ministry of Defence Sri Lanka, 2013). The activities of the TCC suggest that numerous income-generating activities in the West which were set up during the wartime continue to date. This includes the management of *Thamilchola*i schools, business ventures and commercial holdings,

charitable organisations, management of Hindu temples, and subscription satellite televisions (Jayasekara, 2007). The celebration of annual *Maaveerar Naal* (Heroes' Day) continues to take place in the Western countries in the post-Prabhakaran era (Colombo Telegraph, 2012), which also serves as a platform to collect funds and even to revive the Tamil separatist ideology among the Diaspora communities.

Due to the intricate and covert nature of this variable and due to the lack of reliable data, the exact figures are difficult to obtain for the purpose of this study. Having said that, there are no records claiming that the LTTE faced a lack of funding during the war, and the post-war activities suggest that the pro-LTTE elements continue to generate income through various methods. Despite the worldwide proscription of the Tigers and several arrests of individuals like Raj Rajaratnam since 2009 (Rose, 2011), the outfit's fundraising mechanism is far too complex to disrupt their revenue altogether. In this regard, the LTTE's funding is ample to sustain terrorist activities following the conclusion of the war.

In terms of weaponry, LTTE is known to have acquired a wide range of weapons including artillery, missiles, mortars, and armoured vehicles. They were successfully employed against the security forces in conventional warfare and in terrorist attacks against the civilians. While the Tigers relied on several methods to procure weaponry such as raiding army camps and engaging in sea piracy, it was also notorious for the intricate international network headed by Kumaran Pathmanathan. Arms were mostly smuggled into the island by sea routes (Ministry of Defence, 2013). Since 2006 the Sri Lankan naval forces reinforced and revamped its strategy and operational tactics, which led to the effective inhibition of the arms procurement network (Wijetilleke, 2012). Nonetheless, the militants continued to execute attacks against the security forces and civilians until the final days of the war. Since the conclusion of the war, the security forces have recovered large hauls of LTTE weapons. Recent examples include the recovery of artillery guns and an engine boat in Vellamullivaikkal beach in Mullaitivu (Daily Mirror, 2012), mortar bullets, RPG bullets and side bombs buried in Mulliyaweli (Lankapuwath, 2013). In July, a former LTTE operative revealed that a high explosive bomb weighing one tonne was still buried in Avisawella along with Rs. 10 million cash and other ammunition (Kumari, 2013). Given the level of the Tigers' weapons procurement activities over the years, it is likely that more arms are yet to be recovered from different parts of the island. The large hauls of weapons recovered in the last four years suggest that the remaining LTTE cadres could have conducted reprisal attacks following the demise of the leader.

The LTTE possessed more than adequate funding and weaponry to conduct terrorist attacks following the

leaders' death. While operational space and technical expertise is important, it is not an absolute pre-requisite in launching attacks. This is supported by several cases of home-grown terrorists in the West that manage to conduct attacks without a defined operational space and advanced technological expertise. However, the operational capability of the outfit has been hindered altogether due to the uniqueness of the LTTE's organisational structure. The rigid hierarchy based on top-down decision-making has made the Tigers extremely susceptible to demise. Most of the other senior leaders including Pottu Amman, Soosai, Nadesan, Pulidevan, Ilango were eliminated during the final offensive (South Asian Terrorism Portal). The Tigers were significantly crippled, not only due to Prabhakaran's death, but also because all the other senior leaders of the group were eliminated simultaneously. The remaining foot soldiers alone could not have possibly executed any successful attacks on their own given that the centre of command laid in the senior leadership. All the LTTE attacks were perpetrated under the command of the senior chiefs of the respective wings, who masterminded the plot and provided necessary logistics to conduct the attacks. Consequently, senior leadership cannot be easily replaced in a group like the LTTE, and the mass elimination cripples the chain of command and the organisational capability altogether.

The remaining LTTE cadres may still be able to conduct a low intensity attack as lone-wolf terrorists, but will not pose the same kind of threat. The only realistically available operational space for the LTTE at the moment is cyber-space, which will enable the cadres to conduct cyber attacks against the state forces.

C. Opportunity

The opportunity to conduct terrorist attacks in the country was significantly eliminated with the conclusion of humanitarian operations. Any terror attack is a result of an intelligence failure and security lapse (Gunaratna cited in Rappler, 2013). Based on this logic, it is possible to assume that the Sri Lankan security forces have been able to prevent attacks thus far by denying the terrorists of an opportunity to strike. Prior to the onset of the humanitarian operations in 2006, the reconnaissance techniques were drastically improved through the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, and through the use of more reliable and real-time information through human intelligence. The security forces also improved the joint command system to effectively coordinate between the tri-forces, and increased the training of the Home Guards (Wijetilleke, 2012). These improvements in internal security and espionage were effective in foiling potential terrorist attacks and ultimately crushing the terrorist group.

In the post-May 2009 setting, the Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse has articulated the importance of strengthening the internal security as part of a larger

National Security Strategy (Ministry of Defence Sri Lanka, 2013). He asserted the need to enhance the capabilities, resources and coordination between the different intelligence agencies that operate in the country. Moreover, he has given primacy to an unobtrusive military presence in the strategic locations throughout Sri Lanka, particularly in the North and East to maintain vigilance at all times. This move is paramount to ward off the efforts of external elements to reorganise the pro-LTTE entities in the North. The immigration and national identity card system is being revamped to suit the security needs of the present threat landscape. The aforesaid countermeasures implemented in the post-war setting demonstrate that the death of Prabhakaran alone does not serve as an absolute end of a potential terror threat. Given that the maintenance of internal security is given primacy as part of a national security strategy, it is highly unlikely that the terrorists would be able to find an opportunity to conduct terrorist attacks in the current setting. Successful terrorist attacks would only occur when the militants are able to circumvent and exploit existing loopholes within the national security framework.

V. PRABHAKARAN'S DEATH: AN ANALYSIS

Historical experiences of other groups around the world demonstrate that the decapitation of the leader merely triggers the decline of a terrorist campaign, or if not prove to be counterproductive. The Sri Lankan case is unique, because the military defeat of the LTTE was synonymous to the demise of Prabhakaran. Because the organisation maintained a rigid hierarchy where no real power-sharing structure existed under absolute dictatorship of Prabhakaran, the removal of the leader immediately crippled the survival of the campaign. To a certain extent, the complete halt of terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka can be attributed to the chieftain's demise.

The reality however is more complex. In hindsight, the decline of the LTTE's operational capability and intent had already occurred prior to the decimation of the leader. Prabhakaran's death merely marked a symbolic end to the LTTE campaign. By the time the Tigers entered into Eelam War IV, they lacked several crucial elements required to sustain a terrorist campaign: voluntary recruitment, local support (funding, material and moral), and ideological and moral conviction of the cadres. Although the LTTE was left with substantial operational capability to conduct reprisal attacks, most of the other senior leaders were also eliminated during the final offensive, which further hindered the organisational capabilities to regroup, revive, and continue the struggle. In essence, Prabhakaran's death was symbolic, but was not the sole precursor to the absence of terrorist attacks in the post-war setting.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND WAY FORWARD

This study investigated two pertinent themes: whether the absence of terrorist attacks in post-war Sri Lanka can be

attributed to Prabhakaran's death, and what other factors have contributed to the end of terrorism in the island nation. Global experiences suggest that the decapitation of a leader in many occasions subsequently invites backlash of violence and more terrorist attacks. However, the LTTE proved otherwise, which portrays the unique nature of the Sri Lankan counter-terrorism case. Prabhakaran's demise was not the absolute precursor to the complete halt in terrorist violence. While his death was symbolic and instrumental in catalysing the military defeat of the Tigers, it is not the sole factor in bringing an end to terrorism in Sri Lanka. Several conditions (internal and external) have prevailed which have disabled the LTTE from re-organising and reviving itself following the removal of the leader.

Based on the relevant theories in terrorism studies, this study examined LTTE through the 'adversary threat matrix' to analyse the conditions which disabled the Tigers from conducting attacks in the post-war setting. The findings revealed that both the intent and opportunity are minimal. On the contrary, the group exhibited an alarming level of operational capability (funding and weaponry). Nonetheless, this does not pose a significant terror threat due to the lack of organisational capability to capitalise on the existing assets. In essence, the intent, capability and opportunity do not converge in the post-Prabhakaran LTTE setting, and thus vindicates the absence of terrorist attacks in the country.

Although it is a challenge to identify the single most powerful component within the matrix, the 'intent' presents the immediate threat to the Sri Lankan context. The military defeat of the LTTE has marked an end to the terrorist violence in the country, but has not fully neutralised the ideological front. In the post war context, there has been an increasing trend in pro-LTTE political activism in the West. In a way, the operational space of Tamil separatism has shifted outside of the Sri Lankan soil, and the small segment of the Tamil Diaspora communities is persistent on continuing the legacy and the ideology of the LTTE in different manifestations. While the pro-LTTE rump possesses the ideology and funding, it is highly unlikely that they would form a movement as potent, violent, and well-organised as Prabhakaran's LTTE.

First of all they lack the opportunity, as well as the operational and organisational capability to conduct attacks in Sri Lankan soil. Second, to a certain extent the intent and operational capability is limited because the radicalised Diasporas themselves would not be able to execute formidable attacks like the LTTE. At most, we can expect lone-wolf type terrorists to conduct isolated low-intensity attacks, but once again, the opportunity is limited due to the robust internal security mechanism. This has partly contributed to the Diaspora's concentrated political activities in the international realm.

Whatever the case may be, the potency of the intent cannot be undermined. As the old English saying goes "where there is a will, there is a way". As long as the intent remains intact, the possibility of resurgence of terrorism cannot be entirely ignored. The security forces have successfully targeted the operational capabilities of the LTTE and denied the opportunity for terrorist attacks. Minimising the intent domestically and redressing the intent abroad requires time and a comprehensive long-term strategy. Indeed, the government and the security forces have been dedicating its resources to tackle this front from various perspectives. To this end, Sri Lanka should continue to pursue a comprehensive national security strategy to prevent the convergence of the three elements in the matrix in the long run.

The Sri Lankan case offers a successful and a clear cut case in recent history, where terrorism was extinguished since the military defeat of a terrorist group. While this does not provide a one-size fits-all answer, some pertinent counter-terrorism lessons can be drawn. In countering terrorism, strategic emphasis is placed on reducing the operational capabilities of the terrorist groups to deter them from conducting attacks. Indeed, targeting the leadership as a means to cripple organisational capability is an effective method, especially against hierarchical groups.

At the same time however, this often times invites an increase in the militants' intent and a further backlash of violence. The intent to continue attacks drives outfits to continuously adapt and innovate to circumvent the enhanced security. For that reason, intent holds a greater significance because whether or not terrorist outfits possess the capability to conduct attacks becomes irrelevant once the will to engage in violence is eliminated (Betts, 2010). Thus, it is paramount for states fighting against terrorism to place emphasis on the non-kinetic counter-terrorism method to address the intent, as well as cripple all the three elements in the threat matrix simultaneously to ensure both a sustained end to terrorism and to prevent the resurgence of violence.

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