



There is no credible war crimes case against Sri Lanka

Professor Rohan Gunaratna is Head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and the author of several books on the Sri Lankan conflict reiterates that the LTTE international itself is under mounting pressure, which should be capitalized by the government and the opposition coming together to dismantling the outfit completely. He also notes however that while pragmatic LTTE leaders overseas are keen to handover the LTTE assets to the Sri Lankan government, the faction led by Nediyanwan are fighting to continue subversion, destabilization, and terrorism. "It is paramount for the Sri Lankan government and the people to work closely with LTTE leaders willing to reject violence and embrace co-existence. In the larger interest of reconciliation, the Sri Lankan government should provide immunity to those leaders willing to help Sri Lanka to recover from three decades of conflict."

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- What did the UN do when LTTE ethnically cleansed tens of thousands of Muslims, repeatedly massacred thousands of poor Sinhala and Muslim villagers?
- The process of mapping LTTE assets by the international intelligence community is nearing completion and the process of acquisition will continue in the next few years.
- Merchant Vessel (MV) Princess Christanta was acquired from an Asian country by a special team dispatched by Secretary Defence Gotabhaya Rajapaksa.
- The government and the parliamentary opposition must unite to dismantle the LTTE international network.
- To sustain peace in Sri Lanka, Ponniah Anadarajah, a double accountant needs to be tracked and detained.

Q:UNP MP Palitha Range Bandara last week challenged the government to provide proof about the vessel "Princess Christanta," to confirm whether it was really an LTTE vessel or belonged to a private company. He claims that he had information about the vessel as one that had been purchased in Jakarta, Indonesia, through the mediation of a Sri Lankan Naval Officer. How do you compare these allegations with information available to you?

Merchant Vessel (MV) Princess Christanta was acquired from an Asian country by a special team dispatched by Secretary Defence Gotabhaya Rajapaksa. Owned, managed and operated by the LTTE, Princess Chrisanta transports arms, ammunition, explosives and other dual user technologies from North Korea to the equator South of Sri Lanka for use by the LTTE.. MV Princess Christanta was the sister ship of MV Princess Easwary, now detained in Canada. MV Princess Christanta was not purchased by the Sri Lankan government but acquired in a brilliant intelligence operation.

Today, LTTE international itself is under mounting pressure. While pragmatic LTTE leaders overseas are keen to handover the LTTE assets to the Sri Lankan government, the faction led by Nediyanan are fighting to continue subversion, destabilization, and terrorism. It is paramount for the Sri Lankan government and the people to work closely with LTTE leaders willing to reject violence and embrace co-existence. In the larger interest of reconciliation, the Sri Lankan government should provide immunity to those leaders willing to help Sri Lanka to recover from three decades of conflict.

Unfortunately, the government had no media strategy to accurately portray the acquisition of Princess Christanta. If it had a proper strategy, such misunderstandings as the comment made by a parliamentarian would not have arisen. For every single issue of national importance or international significance, government must develop a communications strategy well ahead of the event. Government should have issued a press release the day before the ship arrived without leaving this issue to the whims and fancies of those who had no idea of the ship's acquisition.

Some bankrupt individuals in the political opposition have attempted to politicize this major achievement against the LTTE international network. Behind the allegation of UNP parliamentarian claiming that MV Christanta is not an LTTE ship, there is a larger challenge confronting Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka as a nation must develop a bipartisan policy when it comes to national security and foreign policy. If our misinformed leaders in parliament play politics for narrow political gain, Sri Lanka will be ruined once again but this time from the south. There must be ethics, codes and protocols to govern the public especially the conduct of ministers, parliamentarians and officials.

Q: MP Bandara questions the present beneficiaries who receive the revenues now. He called on the government to disclose details about the revenues received in the past and those that are receivable from the 300 odd Fuel Filling Stations the LTTE had, and the several Bank Accounts in different countries and whether such revenues were credited to the Sri Lankan Government Account or to any other company.

The ship is the first asset to be acquired by the Sri Lankan government. It is a collaborative process involving several governments working together. The process of mapping LTTE assets by the international intelligence community is nearing completion and the process of acquisition will continue in the next few years. It is a long process. If the process is properly managed, guided and directed, LTTE international is likely to die a natural death. Without assets and funds, no terrorist group can subsist.

The acquisition of assets has not been easy. It involved working with a number of other governments, both law enforcement and intelligence services. As Sri Lanka's counter terrorist finance capability was rudimentary, the government had to depend on their foreign counterparts. After the LTTE was dismantled, many governments have readily shared intelligence on LTTE assets on their soil. Going after the money trail has enabled governments to map the donors upstream and operational cells downstream.. Most of the LTTE funds used in the past to buy weapons is now used both in political lobbying and in

bolstering the human rights campaign against the government. From Australia to Europe and to Canada, LTTE is paying former diplomats, lawyers and politicians.

Sri Lanka has been independent for 60 years but for 30 years, it has been at war. The north and the east was the most affected. The wise use of the assets to develop Sri Lanka will help the country to recover from 30 years of conflict. The government is keen to use these assets and the revenue from these assets to develop the north and east. Economic growth will bring political stability and a secure climate. Such a bold decision and strategic move should be supported by all Sri Lankans and praised irrespective of personal and party politics.

Q:One of the main allegations against the government from the Opposition campaign stage is that it was using KP's funds for its own purposes. Is this a valid allegation?

The then LTTE leader Prabhakaran replaced Tharmalingam Shanmugam Kumaran alias KP, the then head of LTTE's international network in 2003. KP was succeeded by Ponniah Anandarajah, a US citizen of Sri Lankan heritage. Except personal funds to look after his family, KP was not well off at the time of his detention. As such, the allegation by the political opposition has no foundation.

To sustain peace in Sri Lanka, Ponniah Anandarajah, a double accountant needs to be tracked and detained. As the LTTE international network still owns a number of ships and other land assets, his detention will help the discovery of concealed assets. Although the LTTE domestic organization has been dismantled by the government, the LTTE international network is still a capable entity. The government and the parliamentary opposition must unite to dismantle the LTTE international network. Its main focus is to damage Sri Lanka's reputation and tarnish its image. Already it has succeeded in influencing Western capitals against aid and trade against Sri Lanka and it is determined to bring about human rights and war crimes charges against the current leadership. Today, the political opposition must have sufficient foresight to team up with government on national security and foreign policy matters.

Q:The government says it has identified up to three former Tamil Tigers seeking asylum in Australia on a boat intercepted after a personal request from Australian Premier Kevin Rudd to Indonesia's President. This means that the movement of LTTE cadres outside of the country was still on. How well do you see the government handling it?

The LTTE international presents a significant and a growing threat because government especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs failed to build the new national security structures and platforms to counter LTTE overseas. When there are new threats, both imminent and horizon, government must build brand new capabilities and reorient existing capabilities to engage, interlock and neutralize those threats. This includes not only LTTE-led and influenced propaganda but also clandestine and overt fund raising that is still continuing in some of the countries. In this environment, Sri Lanka must think, plan and adopt far reaching national policies and strategies to counter LTTE's vicious ideology. By building bridges between the Sinhalese and Tamils, co-opting and

empowering mainstream Tamil leaders and engaging the Tamil public, the diminishing support for the LTTE will die a permanent death. Otherwise, Prabhakaran's dream will return to haunt all of us again.

Q:Pro-LTTE Tamils in Boston protested in front of Senator John F. Kerry's office, Monday, against a report that Kerry's Senate Foreign Relations Committee released earlier this month that calls for friendlier relations between the United States and Sri Lanka. They have been encouraging Kerry and other US officials to open a war crimes investigation, charging that the Sri Lankan army shelled hospitals and killed civilians in their effort to defeat the rebels. Evidence shows that the LTTE activities outside have not subsided. How serious is this situation according to your information?

It is increasingly apparent that the US, EU and UN reports and statements by the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton were not based on facts on the ground but by LTTE lobbying. The Sri Lankan government lacks the sophistication to understand the complexity of how the US operates. The US political system is vulnerable to lobbying through public relations firms and campaign contributions.

With the LTTE diverting its funds away from terrorism to a campaign of anti-Sri Lanka and anti-government propaganda, government must build a capacity and a will to respond decisively. In parallel, government must build a robust legal response capacity to file cases against LTTE activists, both financiers and propagandists. The need of the hour is to counter the malicious and false propaganda constantly repeated by the LTTE and pro LTTE lobby groups of genocide, ethnocide and pogroms. These were the very same concepts that Prabhakaran instilled to create a mono-ethnic Tamil state. The LTTE's intolerance of other communities -ethnic cleansing of the Muslims from the north and the massacres of Sinhalese and Muslims in the border villages in the east - is exceptionally well documented. Government needs to build a robust capability to counter the vicious and sustained propaganda. It is not too late for the Foreign ministry to go back to an earlier model spearheaded by Lakshman Kadiragamar, the LTTE assassinated Sri Lankan foreign minister, to integrate highly skilled and motivated media personnel to work side by side with the professional diplomats.

Q:The UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Summary or Arbitrary Executions, has asked the government to provide an explanation with regard to the circumstances of the death of 3 senior LTTE cadres and their families during the last stages of the military operations. The government claims that it was now being forced to be examined once again on the International stage as a result of Gen. Fonseka's comments to the media where he had alleged that three senior LTTE officials were shot dead by the army on the orders of the government despite surrendering. How serious are these maneuverings in your opinion?

As the Secretary of Defence of Sri Lanka Gotabhaya Rajapaksa formulated both policy and strategy related to neutralizing threats to Sri Lanka. As Chief of Army, General Fonseka was responsible for executing that policy. More than anyone else General Fonseka was aware that the Sri Lankan military did not deliberately target or kill any

civilian. The comment about Secretary Defence Gotabhaya Rajapaksa by General Fonseka was made by him without thinking of the wider national and global implications.. After General Fonseka made that politically motivated comment, he realized the damage he has caused and tried desperately to correct it. The comment has gravely damaged General Fonseka and his political party appreciably damaged Sri Lanka and Sri Lankans.

The information used to inform several UN, human rights watch and amnesty international reports is largely based on LTTE misinformation and disinformation and politically motivated information. As such, there is no credible war crimes case against Sri Lanka or Sri Lankan leaders – both Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the Secretary Defence or General Sarath Fonseka, former Army Chief.

The Sri Lankan government has made a huge mistake by ignoring and not responding to allegations by human rights bodies and a few Western governments. Human rights have become a highly politicized weapon – Western countries tend to use it against their political adversaries! Some of these Western governments are concerned about Sri Lanka's growing relationship with China, Russia and Iran.

Sri Lanka needs to respond to each one of these allegations as most of them were taken from TamilNet, the LTTE mouthpiece and other unsubstantiated press reporting. While responding to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Summary or Arbitrary Executions, the government must ask what the Rapporteur, his office and likeminded bodies did when the LTTE ethnically cleansed tens of thousands of Muslims, repeatedly massacred thousands of poor Sinhala and Muslim villagers, and set off bombs in the South including in the capital killing innocent Sinhalese, Muslims and Tamils.

Q:Foreign news agencies again came out with information that the channel 4 news piece was authentic. How credible are these investigations?

Sri Lankan government should file a court case against foreign news agencies that seek to spread LTTE propaganda.

Q: A recent referendum in Canada saw 15 % of the Canadian expatriates voting and still subscribing to the notion of an independent Tamil Eelam, a position seen as being important because it shows existing potential support for the revival of LTTE. Is this your understanding of the referendum as well?

After the Government of India invited Sikhs to join mainstream Indian politics, the cry for an independent Khalistan died a natural death. Today, Punjab is one of the most prosperous states in India. The only way to kill Prabhakaran's day dream about "Tamil Eelam" is to ensure that a Sri Lankan Tamil becomes a Prime Minister, a Vice President or even a President in the next decade. This will involve educating the Sri Lankan masses and building a Sri Lankan identity. Right now in Sri Lanka, there are Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers and Veddhas but only a few Sri Lankans.

Step one in creating a Sri Lankan identity is to have one single stream of education where everyone learns English, Sinhalese and Tamil. When Sinhalese study with Tamils, and when Tamils study with Muslims, they see them as friends. To remove suspicions, government must think and build an ethnic integration policy to produce Sri Lankans in the next generation. The war did not permit it. Today, we have a golden opportunity that must not be wasted.

Q:A recent report of The Times, London, about a new Tamil militant outfit - the Makkal Viduthalai Ranuvam (People's Liberation Army) has raised some concern. A commander Kones of the group claimed the PLA comprised mostly of ex-militants with a Marxist ideology and opposed the LTTE brand of militancy. At present it was 300-strong and it hoped to raise a force of 5000. What are your concerns in this regard?

There is no group called Makkal Viduthalai Ranuvam. The Sri Lankan military, police and intelligences services are so powerful today that no such group can ever emerge in the next decade. The LTTE was behind creating this fictitious group and the Times of London was fooled into publishing this story.

Q:The government moves on the belief that the revival of the LTTE was possible. From the navy's recent seizure of MV Christina, to recovering caches of arms and military equipment and arresting cadres with 12,000 LTTE cadres of various kinds reported to be in custody, it looks like the LTTE's defeat in the country still has some way to go.

The LTTE has been militarily defeated. The LTTE overseas network seeks to revive the LTTE in Sri Lanka and bring about another cycle of violence. The Government must deal with the 12,000 detainees with a large heart. As LTTE recruitment was nearly 50% forced conscription, it is paramount to rehabilitate and release a significant proportion of the detainees in 2010. The Commissioner General of Rehabilitation Major General Daya Ratnayake, the Minister of Justice Milinda Moragoda and the Attorney General Mohan Pieris are working towards this goal.

For peace to sustain in Sri Lanka, the LTTE network overseas should be dismantled. It is paramount for both government and the political opposition to work together to remove this threat. The new battle cannot be fought with guns, tanks and aircrafts, but with public relations, diplomacy and largely on the internet.