

## Spot Report

### **Air attacks against the Thalladi Military Camp and the Kelanitissa Power Station, Sri Lanka.**

#### **Overview**

Date: 28 October 2008

Targets: Thalladi military camp in Mannar and the Kelanitissa power station, Kelaniya

Locations: 1<sup>st</sup> target - Thalladi, Mannar (250km north of Colombo), Sri Lanka.

2<sup>nd</sup> target – Kelyaniya, (outskirts of Colombo), Sri Lanka

Tactic: bombs dropped from an LTTE air craft

Group: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

Impact: 1<sup>st</sup> target – three soldiers injured

2<sup>nd</sup> target – one civilian dead

#### **The Incident**

On 28 October 2008, air craft of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) carried out two air raids against targets in Mannar and Colombo. According to military spokesperson Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara, the LTTE aircraft first entered Mannar air space around 10.30pm. Two bombs were dropped near the Thalladi military camp where a soldier was injured. The second attack took place around 11.30pm where the Kelanitissa power plant was bombed. The air craft were detected on radar prior to the second attack, which resulted in the air defence systems being activated in Colombo and also placing the city in a blackout. The Thalladi attack left three soldiers wounded. One civilian who was injured in the Kelanitissa attack, died after being admitted hospital.<sup>1</sup> According to the Ministry of Defence the civilian was an employee of Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) who had arrived at the scene immediately after the attack.<sup>2</sup>

According to preliminary reports on the Ministry of Defence website, the blast at Kelanitissa caused “minor damages” to the premises. A cooler connected to the gas turbine power generator had caught fire which was immediately extinguished by the Colombo fire brigade.<sup>3</sup> However according to a report on the Sri Lanka Army website the bomb missed the target and instead damaged an administrative building which caught fire. Although the power supply was cut as precautionary measure, the plant remains in tact and is functioning.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Power Plant Intact & Functions as Usual” *Sri Lanka Army* 29 October 2008.

<http://www.army.lk/morenews.php?id=17572>

<sup>2</sup> “Terrorists drops bombs at Kelani-Tissa power station [Update 1]” *Sri Lanka Ministry of Defence* 29 October 2008. [http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20081029\\_01](http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20081029_01)

<sup>3</sup> “Terrorists drops bombs at Kelani-Tissa power station [Update 1]” *Sri Lanka Ministry of Defence* 29 October 2008. [http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20081029\\_01](http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20081029_01)

<sup>4</sup> “Power Plant Intact & Functions as Usual” *Sri Lanka Army* 29 October 2008.

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## Location

The first attack took place in Thalladi, Mannar, which is located in north-western Sri Lanka about 250km north of the capital of Colombo. The target of the attack, the Thalladi military camp is an artillery base of the Sri Lankan Army. The second target, the Kelanitissa power station is located in the Capital of Colombo.

## Modus Operandi

The attack was carried out by the LTTE's air wing which is known as *Vaanpuligal*. The last attack by the air wing was on 9 September 2008, where a military base in Vavuniya was bombed. According to the military spokesperson, two bombs were dropped on the Thalladi military camp while one bomb was dropped on the Kelanitissa power station.<sup>5</sup> However according to a report on the Ministry of Defence website there were two improvised bombs dropped on the Kelanitissa power plant while three bombs were dropped on the Thalladi military camp.<sup>6</sup> Also, the exact number of craft used in the attacks remains unclear.<sup>7</sup> Although the attacks may seem amateurish, it is likely that the LTTE pilots have undergone a significant amount of training as it is difficult to learn to fly at night.

## Analysis

This is the fourth air attack to be carried out in 2008 with two attacks being carried out over the past two months. On 26 August the LTTE aircraft carried out an attack against the Trincomalee naval base while on 9 September the Vavuniya military camp was bombed. Following the September attack, the Sri Lankan Air Force claimed that it had shot down one LTTE air craft; however this was denied by the LTTE. In the most recent attacks, the air craft were detected on radar and thus the air defence systems were activated. However the air craft could not be intercepted or shot down. The electricity supply to Colombo was cut just prior to the attack against the Kelanitissa power plant. According to the Sri Lanka Army and Ministry of Defence websites, the damage was minimal or the planes missed the targets as the bombs were dropped near the targets and not on the targets themselves. For example, according to the Sri Lanka Army website, the bomb that was dropped on the power plant fell on an administrative building which led to the fire, and not on the power plant itself.<sup>8</sup> However it is still difficult to confirm the effectiveness of the security measures in having an impact on the LTTE pilot's ability to strike the targets with precision. Furthermore, inconsistencies in reports have made it difficult to ascertain the exact damage to the targets and hence the success or failure of the attacks.

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<sup>5</sup>“LTTE aircraft attack Colombo, Mannar” *Indo-Asian News Service* 29 October 2008.

[http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/south-asia/ltte-aircraft-attack-colombo-mannar\\_100112521.html](http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/south-asia/ltte-aircraft-attack-colombo-mannar_100112521.html)

<sup>6</sup>“Terrorists drops bombs at Kelani-Tissa power station [Update 1]” *Sri Lanka Ministry of Defence* 29 October 2008. [http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20081029\\_01](http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20081029_01)

<sup>7</sup>“LTTE air raid in Colombo” *The Times of India* 29 October 2008.

[http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/LTTE\\_air\\_raid\\_in\\_Colombo/articleshow/3649557.cms](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/LTTE_air_raid_in_Colombo/articleshow/3649557.cms)

<sup>8</sup>“Power Plant Intact & Functions as Usual” *Sri Lanka Army* 29 October 2008.

<http://www.army.lk/morenews.php?id=17572>

## **Implications**

The effectiveness of the Sri Lankan state's air defence systems are probably limited to denying the LTTE craft the opportunity to conduct more elaborate attacks which require the planes to be in the air for a longer period of time. Even though one craft is believed to have been shot down in the previous attack, there is still no fully effective system to neutralize the LTTE's air threat. Given that the Sri Lankan military has stepped up its offensives in the north, air attacks against military installations in and out side of the conflict zone appear to be an attractive option for the LTTE although the group might face some limitations in this regard.

## Update

On 31 October 2008, a series of photographs were released on TamilNet.com showing LTTE leader Prabhakaran presenting medals to the pilots involved in the attack. Four pilots of the Tamil Eelam Air Force (TAF) involved in the three latest air attacks were awarded medals.<sup>9</sup> According to TamilNet the airmen who carried out five consecutive air raids were awarded the "Blue Tiger Award" (*Neelap Puli Viruthu*).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>"Prabhakaran surfaces, decorates Air Tigers" *India Today* 2 November 2008.

[http://indiatoday.digitaltoday.in/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=19193&sectionid=4&issueid=78&Itemid=1](http://indiatoday.digitaltoday.in/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19193&sectionid=4&issueid=78&Itemid=1)

<sup>10</sup> B. Muralidhar Reddy "Fierce battle between Sri Lanka Navy, LTTE" *The Hindu* 2 November 2008.

<http://www.hindu.com/2008/11/02/stories/2008110255470900.htm>