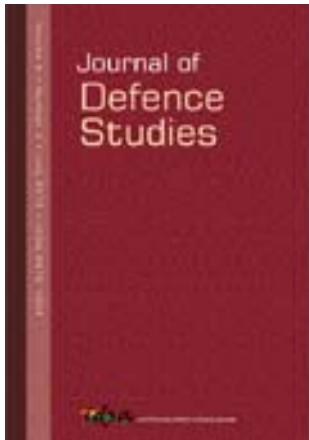# Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

No.1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg
Delhi Cantonment, New Delhi-110010

Journal of Defence Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.idsa.in/journalofdefencestudies

Major Lessons from Operation Pawan for Future Regional Stability Operations

S. Kalyanaraman

Please Scroll down for Article

Major Lessons from Operation Pawan for Future Regional Stability Operations[1]

*S. Kalyanaraman**

The Indian intervention in Sri Lanka throws up five major lessons for future regional stability operations. Firstly, it is imperative to define the mission unambiguously and establish a clear mandate. Secondly, there is need for a robust military contingency planning process as well as discussions at various levels within the system to refine plans and provide an adequate force to meet possible eventualities. Thirdly, clear command and control needs to be established at the outset and the appropriate field formation must be designated as the headquarters. Fourthly, intelligence planning and coordination need to be made comprehensive, and adequate expertise and capabilities must be built up in advance. Finally, the importance of engaging in civil affairs tasks must be factored into the planning process, for which purpose the requisite data must be collated and plans formulated.

INTRODUCTION

Defending national interest in an interconnected world cannot be confined to the national boundaries. Unhindered socio-economic progress within requires the structuring of a peaceful and stable environment without, particularly in the immediate and extended neighbourhoods.[2] This, however, does not mean that India should go abroad 'in search of monsters to destroy'.[3] Nevertheless, there are circumstances that may demand military intervention(s) beyond the country's borders not only for protecting the national interest but also for promoting regional security

---

* The author is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

and stability. The Indian intervention in Sri Lanka was undertaken with these national and regional security imperatives in mind. Considering that similar regional stability operations in the immediate and extended neighbourhoods may have to be undertaken in the future as well, it is essential to draw lessons from the Sri Lankan experience and suitably structure the military capabilities, and simultaneously put in place the structures that will enable better exploitation of these capabilities.

Given that it will be impossible to cover all the tactical and strategic lessons[4] that Operation Pawan has to offer in a study of this sort, this article limits itself to discussing five major lessons. In order to establish the context in which the Indian intervention came about, the article begins with a brief overview of India's role in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict prior to the signing of the India-Sri Lanka Accord in July 1987 before moving on to the lessons learnt.

A Brief Overview of India's Pre-Accord Role

While the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the other Tamil militant groups aspired, through a liberation war, to establish an independent Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan Government was determined not only to protect the country's territorial integrity but also to establish a unitary state without adequate constitutional safeguards for, and devolution of power in favour of, its minority Tamils. India straddled the middle ground, that is, devolution of power to Tamil-inhabited areas within the framework of a united Sri Lanka, in order to address the genuine grievances and aspirations of the Sri Lankan Tamils and thus forge a compromise between the contending positions of the two Sri Lankan parties to the ethnic conflict.

The Indian objective was dictated by three factors. Firstly, in the wake of the Sri Lankan Government's military collaboration with countries like Pakistan, China, Israel, the United States and the United Kingdom, India was keen to prevent these adversarial and external powers from acquiring a strategic presence in Sri Lanka. Secondly, there was a considerable degree of sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamil cause in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, which increased with every influx of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees into the state from mid-1983 onwards. Numbering 150,000 by the end of 1987, according to official statistics, these refugees also constituted an economic burden on India.[5] There were also latent fears about separatism in Tamil Nadu if India were to either do nothing to protect the Sri Lankan Tamils or allow them to achieve an independent

Tamil Eelam. LTTE articulations about 'Greater Tamil Eelam' further fanned these fears. Thirdly, India's internal security began to be adversely affected by the activities of Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups based out of Tamil Nadu. Not only was law and order affected by internecine conflicts between the various militant groups, even the Tamil Nadu underworld became active in trafficking arms and drugs ferried across by Sri Lankan refugees.[6]

It is as a result of this combination of factors that India sought to play a mediatory role in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and promote a compromise solution involving devolution of power to Tamil-inhabited areas within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. Such a solution would also have had the additional benefit of addressing India's security concerns by obviating the need for the Sri Lankan government to pursue military collaboration with other countries in order to deal with the challenge posed by the Tamil militant groups.

In pursuit of its objective, India at first evolved a two-pronged policy towards the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. The first prong consisted of encouraging the Sri Lankan Government to negotiate with Tamil political representatives at first (All Party Conference, 1984) and later with Tamil militant groups (Thimpu Talks, 1985), wherein various proposals for the devolution of power were evolved jointly by the Indian and the Sri Lankan Government representatives. At the same time, as part of the second prong of its policy, India engaged with various Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups. Further, military assistance was provided to these groups for two specific reasons. Firstly, India wanted to gain leverage over them and thus contain their demand for a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka. Gaining leverage became particularly important because some of these groups had begun to forge linkages with militant outfits, foreign governments and arms suppliers in other parts of the world. Such linkages, apart from increasing their autonomy, also had potential internal security consequences given that these groups were operating from within Indian territory. Secondly, and more importantly, a limited shoring up of the military capabilities of the Tamil militant groups was considered necessary for conveying to the Sri Lankan Government that its attempt to pursue a military solution to the ethnic conflict is bound to be futile as well as to exert pressure on Colombo into accommodating New Delhi's security concerns. Subsequently, however, after Rajiv Gandhi assumed the Prime Ministership, the Indian Government recalibrated its policy by cutting back support for the LTTE and other Tamil militant groups and

stepped up naval surveillance of the Palk Strait in coordination with the Sri Lankan Navy to curb militant traffic.[7]

India's balancing act, however, failed to move either party towards a compromise, and a frustrated Rajiv Gandhi government even suspended its mediatory role in early February 1987.[8] But unfolding developments in Sri Lanka during the course of the next few months pulled India into the quagmire. In January 1987, the LTTE had announced plans for a separate Tamil administration in Jaffna, which was seen as a prelude to a declaration of independence. In response, the Sri Lankan government imposed an embargo on Jaffna and began a major military offensive in May 1987, which notched up a worrying degree of success. The domestic ramifications of these developments appeared particularly grave. There was considerable uproar in Tamil Nadu and the Intelligence Bureau estimated that, if the situation in the state were to worsen, four to five Indian Army divisions would be needed to maintain peace there.[9] Consequently, the Indian Government felt compelled to respond to the unfolding situation in Sri Lanka.

With the Sri Lankan Army advancing determinedly and President Jayewardene stressing upon a 'fight to the finish',[10] the LTTE's military position appeared precarious. India's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), assessed that the LTTE would not be able to hold Jaffna against a determined assault by the Sri Lankan Army.[11] Enhanced Indian military assistance to the LTTE and other Tamil militant groups was considered unlikely to quickly reverse the military situation. Such a course of action would, moreover, provide the Sri Lankan Government the rationale for further mobilising international support and even intensifying its military collaboration with other countries. Under these circumstances, the Indian Government felt the need to send a forceful but calibrated message to Colombo to cease the military offensive and lift the embargo upon Jaffna. The underlying Indian calculation was that a successful initiative would demonstrate the LTTE's limitations while at the same time highlight India's greater capacity to protect and promote the interests of Sri Lankan Tamils.[12]

Such a forceful message was sent in early June 1987. At first, it assumed the form of Operation *Poomalai*—the despatch of a small naval flotilla under the flag of the Indian Red Cross for the purpose of delivering food aid to a besieged Jaffna. But when this mission was thwarted by the Sri Lankan Navy, India upped the ante with Operation Eagle under which Indian Air Force transport planes, accompanied by a fighter escort, air-

dropped food supplies over Jaffna. This assertive response to the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils also contained within it the message that New Delhi will not permit Colombo to enforce a military solution to the ethnic conflict, a message that was later openly articulated by the then High Commissioner J.N. Dixit to Sri Lanka's Minister of National Security Lalith Athulathmudali.[13] Although the positions of the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government continued to remain irreconcilable, India's assertive display of power did cause them to considerably lower the intensity of their military operations as well as ponder over their next moves.

In an attempt to overcome its adverse military position—caused partly by India's withdrawal of support but mainly by Sri Lanka's relatively successful military offensive—the LTTE leadership decided upon the 'interim tactical manoeuvre' of agreeing to a compromise solution.[14] That the LTTE's expressed willingness to give up its insistence on Eelam was only a tactical gambit became evident to Indian policy-makers only later. At that time they were not perspicacious enough and believed that the LTTE had decided to join the political process because of its military failure. Be that as it may, the LTTE also let it be known that New Delhi must serve as the guarantor of the interests of Sri Lankan Tamils by signing an agreement with Colombo that contained its proposals.

That such an Indian role was acceptable to the Sri Lankan Government as well had been evident from August 1986, when President J.R. Jayewardene had proposed that India sign an agreement with Sri Lanka for the purpose of establishing peace on the island, curbing 'terrorism' and helping conduct elections for the proposed Provincial Councils in Tamil areas.[15] A direct role for India in the resolution of the ethnic conflict was reiterated in a February 1987 message from Colombo to New Delhi, which noted that the Sri Lankan Government 'expects the Government of India to underwrite the implementation of any agreement reached.'[16] And again in early July 1987, the proposal conveyed by the Sri Lankan Government to the LTTE noted that India should 'guarantee whatever agreement emerges'.[17]

What both parties thereby sought was at best to draw India's power in their favour thus enhancing their leverage vis-à-vis the other and at worst force India to back off from undertaking such a fool's errand. But, by this time, the Indian Government, buoyed by the greater leverage that appeared to have accrued to it through its display of power, had begun to contemplate a more direct role for itself in bringing about a compromise solution for the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. Officials and political leaders

closely engaged in framing India's policy for Sri Lanka began to think of 'somehow bring[ing] about a compromise between Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalese government' (emphasis added).[18] It is their quest for that 'somehow' which sucked India into the quagmire of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. That 'somehow' assumed the form of India becoming a guarantor of and the signatory to an agreement that aimed at solving the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and in the process exercising a combination of compulsion and reassurance upon the two parties in order to push them towards a compromise. Thus was born the India-Sri Lanka Accord of 29 July 1987. An accompanying exchange of letters between the Indian Prime Minister and the Sri Lankan President identified reciprocal measures to be taken by each country to allay the other's security concerns, thus addressing Indian concerns about Sri Lanka's military collaboration with other powers.

LESSON 1: THE IMPERATIVE OF A CLEAR MANDATE

The most important lesson to be learnt from the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka is the imperative of defining the mission unambiguously. It is essential to understand that any country will have only limited resources and political will to expend beyond its shores, given that neither national survival nor loss of national territory is likely to be at stake in contingencies involving external intervention. Given this limitation, arriving at clearly defined and limited goals is essential for success. At the same time, a clear mandate is also necessary to avoid mission creep, that is, an expansion of the original goals either because of the initial success attained or due to an under-estimation of the power and determination of local actors to continue to uncompromisingly pursue their objectives.

But these caveats were at best inadequately appreciated and at worst ignored during the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka. At the same time, India also over-estimated its power to influence events and actors in Sri Lanka and concomitantly under-estimated the determination of the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government to hold fast to their respective objectives.[19] The limits of Indian influence on these two actors were clearly evident from New Delhi's failure to convince them into accepting the various compromise formulae that Indian interlocutors from G. Parthasarathy to Natwar Singh and P. Chidambaram helped evolve between 1983 and 1986. But this reality was overlooked in the wake of India's display of muscular assertion in early June 1987.

It wasn't as if no one in the Indian Government at that time recognized these limits and the importance of treading cautiously. The then Minister

for Human Resources Development, P.V. Narasimha Rao[20], counselled the then Indian High Commissioner to Colombo, J.N. Dixit, about the importance of keeping three points in mind during negotiations with his Sri Lankan interlocutors:

1. Not to rush into an agreement.
2. 'Carefully consider the wisdom' of India becoming a signatory to the agreement, which should ideally be signed by the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil militant groups.
3. Make a careful assessment about whether the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE genuinely desired peace and a durable settlement or were only engaging in 'an interim tactical move'.[21]

However, political wisdom was at a discount in those heady days when a dynamic but politically inexperienced Prime Minister not only frequently replaced his cabinet ministers, including those holding the portfolios of External Affairs and Defence[22], but also 'preferred to deal directly' with the Core Group of officials 'on most matters relating to Sri Lanka from the middle of 1986 onwards.'[23] The only ministers who played a role in India's Sri Lanka policy at that time were the then Minister of State for External Affairs, Natwar Singh, and the then Minister of State for Home Affairs, P. Chidambaram—the former was a recently retired diplomat and the latter a lawyer turned first-time Member of Parliament.

Notwithstanding their expressed interest in a direct Indian role to resolve the ethnic conflict, there was considerable resistance on this score from both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. This was clearly evident to the principal actors on the Indian side. When consulted, LTTE leader Prabhakaran refused to endorse the draft agreement and especially its provisions for the 'temporary' merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces as well as the holding of a referendum to endorse the merger. Prabhakaran even claimed that 'he was not aware that the Agreement was going to be signed directly between the Governments of India and Sri Lanka.'[24] However, he did relent and endorse the agreement, albeit without enthusiasm, in the face of the pressure that was brought to bear upon him at that time. Upon his return to Jaffna from New Delhi after the India-Sri Lanka Accord was signed, Prabhakaran emphasized the pointlessness of objecting to an agreement by which 'a great power has decided to determine our political fate in a manner that is essentially beyond our control.'[25]

For their part, Sri Lankan leaders and officials continued to balk at endorsing the provisions of the proposed agreement till the very end and there was also a great deal of resistance among President Jayewardene's cabinet colleagues to a direct Indian role. In an assessment of the thought process of Sri Lankan leaders he sent to New Delhi while the negotiations were on, High Commissioner Dixit noted:

> I did not see any political will or desire on the part of Jayewardene and his main advisers to discuss and resolve the ethnic problem in a straight-forward manner and in a spirit of compromise. The approach seems to be still one of gaining time and going ahead with military operations.[26]

Instead of rethinking the wisdom of assuming a direct role in the wake of such evidence of resistance, the Indian Government persisted in seeking to square the circle by doling out assurances to both parties. The LTTE was assured that: the 'problems and limitations of the proposed framework' will be resolved to the satisfaction of Tamils; a 'Tamil regional police service' will be set up; a dominant role will be given to the LTTE in the interim government; a monthly compensation until the formation of the interim government will be provided to the LTTE in return for the withdrawal of its taxation system in Jaffna; funds would be granted to the interim government for rehabilitation and resettlement of Tamil refugees; and, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) would assume responsibility for protecting Tamils until 'an adequate Tamil security system' was created.[27] At the same time, President Jayewardene was assured that India 'would guarantee his government's stability and his personal security' if he were to face extensive opposition within and if attempts were made to overthrow him.[28] Fulfilling these guarantees required the despatch of Indian military forces to Sri Lanka. Therein lay the origin of the IPKF.

The idea of an Indian peace keeping force was envisaged in the Accord only as a possible contingency to be deployed 'if so required' to 'guarantee and enforce the cessation of hostilities'.[29] In fact, India's initial idea during the negotiations on the Agreement was for the Sri Lankan forces themselves to enforce the ceasefire. The IPKF was to be brought into play only in case of resistance either by the LTTE or the Sri Lankan Army.[30] But the thought of Sri Lankan forces enforcing the ceasefire was anathema to the LTTE, which insisted on the need for the Indian forces to assume responsibility. At the same time, the Sri Lankan Government also wanted the IPKF to assume responsibility for the security situation in the Northern and the Eastern provinces so that its own forces could be

redeployed to deal with the challenge posed by the JVP (*Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna*) insurgency in the southern part of the island.[31] It was under these circumstances that the IPKF came to be deployed in Sri Lanka.

The directive issued by the Indian Government to the first Overall Force Commander (OFC) of the IPKF was 'delightfully vague', directing him as it did to 'implement the Accord'.[32] What he divined from this instruction was the need to separate the forces of the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE in particular as well as accept the surrender of arms and ammunition from all the Tamil militant groups, thus permitting the political process to start. In other words, the IPKF's original mandate was to act as a buffer between the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE in particular as well as to disarm all the Tamil militant groups. That was to serve as a prelude to the holding of elections for a merged North-Eastern Province and the devolution of power to the Tamil areas within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. Subsequently, however, it became apparent that the IPKF had to ensure that the camps established by the Sri Lankan forces after May 1987 were dismantled as well as help the people displaced by the conflict to return to their homes.[33]

At first, the principal parties to the ethnic conflict played along with the IPKF although they resented the Indian intervention. This was particularly so in the case of the LTTE, which continued to hold fast to its objective of a separate state of Tamil Eelam. Although the Tigers did begin to turn in their weapons, albeit older ones, they also unleashed a propaganda campaign against India and the IPKF. They also continued to target other Tamil militant groups in their quest to attain predominance. The internecine clashes between the militant groups led to another addition to the tasks of the IPKF, namely, the maintenance of law and order in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.[34] Soon, thereafter, the nature of the IPKF's mission underwent a radical change when a group of LTTE militants captured by the Sri Lankan Navy committed suicide and the LTTE retaliated by massacring Sinhala civilians. Even as the Indian Government decided upon the option of using force to coerce the LTTE into honouring the India-Sri Lanka agreement,[35] the latter launched their first direct military attack on the IPKF. The IPKF's role then became transformed from that of peace-keeping to one of combating the LTTE.

While much attention has been focused upon the resulting disenchant-ment in Tamil Nadu, the change in mandate led to an understandable confusion in the minds of IPKF officers and troops. Commanders and men who were 'emotionally attached, even sympathetic, to the LTTE'

and who had come to Sri Lanka to protect the Tamils were befuddled at being sent into battle against some of these very same Tamils. Even senior Army leaders were not immune to such feelings as is evident from the first OFC's account, which is peppered with expressions of positive sentiment towards the LTTE and its leader.[36] Further confusion was caused by the orders issued to IPKF units variously tasking them to 'weaken', 'isolate', or 'marginalize' the LTTE as well as 'loosen' or 'tighten' pressure on LTTE strongholds.[37] Even Indian political leaders were confused about how to deal with the LTTE. In late November 1987, Defence Minister K.C. Pant declared in the Parliament that India 'had no desire to hurt the LTTE'. Subsequently, in 1988, even though Operation *Vajra* was launched precisely to get the LTTE leadership including Prabhakaran 'dead or alive,' an Indian official in Colombo was reported to have said, 'We certainly do not want a dead leader. We want him alive. We want him at the conference table.'[38] These conflicting sentiments and the resulting confusion had an adverse impact upon the IPKF's ability to carry out its expanded mandate.

The lesson that emerges from this narrative is the imperative of developing a clear mandate for future regional stability operations. An integral part of such a mandate is the crafting of an exit strategy that provides for a pull-out once the mandate has been fulfilled. A fundamental prerequisite for charting such a clear mandate is political wisdom on what is practically achievable and recognition of the limits of military power.

Lesson 2: The Need for an Effective Military

Contingency Planning Process

As is the wont among General Staff everywhere, contingency planning for a possible intervention in Sri Lanka began in Indian Army Headquarters when Sri Lanka's internal situation began to deteriorate in the early months of 1987. Even as the ethnic conflict was intensifying, the rebellion by the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* began to gather force in the country's southern region. There were even reports of 'unrest' within the Sri Lankan armed forces. In addition, Sri Lanka's economy began to reel under the pressures of increasing military expenditure and decreasing tourist flows. These unfolding events in Sri Lanka led to the initiation of contingency planning in Indian Army Headquarters in April 1987. And when Sri Lanka's Operation Liberation began in late May 1987 to the accompaniment of talk about a 'fight to the finish', the Indian Army

Headquarters brought the Pune-based Southern Command into the contingency planning process. The scenarios for a military intervention envisaged by the Indian Army planners included:[39]

1. The 'worst case scenario' of a foreign country, whose interests were inimical to those of India, being invited by the Sri Lankan Government to intervene militarily. Two variations of this scenario were also envisaged: one involved such an invitation being extended with the consent of the Sri Lankan armed forces, and the other without the latter's consent.
2. A *coup d'etat* by factions of the Sri Lankan Army opposed to any compromise with the Tamils.
3. India intervening in the ethnic conflict upon receipt of a formal request from the Sri Lankan President. It is not clear from the written record whether a variation of this scenario was envisaged, namely, the Sri Lankan armed forces opposing such an invitation being extended to India and the consequences thereof.

Each of these contingencies could have involved Indian forces landing in Sri Lanka in the face of opposition. There was therefore not only the need for a robust force to deal with any of these contingencies but also to speedily induct it once a decision was made. Accordingly, a relatively strong force was earmarked and plans to induct it by air and sea were formulated. With respect to the Army, two infantry divisions (36th and 54th), one armoured brigade (2nd Armoured) and the 340 Independent Infantry Brigade Group (the only formation with experience in amphibious landings) were earmarked for the operation. The organization of a HQ OFC and the employment of HQ 1 Corps were also envisaged. On the naval front, five frigates, six LSTs (Landing Ship Tanks), two submarines, 12 patrol boats, two auxiliary ships and nine aircraft were earmarked. And the Air Force component earmarked for the plan included 24 Jaguars, six Canberras, four Il 76s, six AN 12s, 30 AN 32s, seven HS 748s and 22 Mi 8 and Mi 17 helicopters. In addition, aircraft from the Indian Airlines and Air India were to be requisitioned on an as-required basis, while the Railways were to provide the necessary rolling stock.[40]

The earmarking of these forces was made possible by a directive issued by the Chiefs of Staff Committee in early June 1987. This directive also appointed Lt. Gen. Depinder Singh, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC-in-C) of the Southern Command as the OFC of the envisaged operation and nominated the following component

commanders from the three services: GOC, 1 Corps in the case of the Army, Flag Officer Commanding (FOC), Eastern Fleet of the Navy, and the Chief of Staff of the Southern Air Command of the Air Force.

At the same time, to ensure that communications were available from the outset of such a mission, and considering that communication equipment and facilities cannot be rigged up overnight, an exercise was held in late June 1987 for this purpose and during the course of the next few weeks the necessary infrastructure was established. In addition, to provide the logistics for the contingency, plans were drawn up to create an Army Maintenance Area at Madras. In this regard, GOC Madras was designated as the Commander of this Area and tasked with the establishment of 'the necessary infrastructure including mounting bases and induction cells.'[41] Given the importance of maintaining secrecy with respect to all these preparations, except in the case of communications, there was no movement towards implementing any other parts of the plan. In the case of logistics, this meant that initial induction and maintenance had to be organized with existing resources that the Southern Command could spare after taking into account the requirements necessary for the Pakistan border.

Although one of the scenarios envisaged above involved the Sri Lankan President formally inviting India to intervene, the bias of the exercise was towards the possibility of an intervention being undertaken in the face of opposition. As a result, the possibility of a peace keeping contingent being sent to serve as a buffer between the Sri Lankan forces and the Tamil militant groups, that too with the (albeit reluctant) consent of both parties, was not foreseen. But this lacuna in the contingency planning process proved to be only an irritant when tables drawn up earlier for induction by air had to be hastily modified and communicated to the assigned forces, thus introducing minor hiccups.[42]

However, a more important lacuna in the contingency planning process was the failure to envisage the possibility of Indian forces having to eventually confront the LTTE. Because such a scenario was not foreseen, only a much smaller force than was originally considered necessary was actually inducted into Sri Lanka. Only one division, 54th Infantry Division, was inducted, and the others that had been earmarked were left behind. Thus, when the decision was made in early October 1987 to use force against the LTTE, instead of a minimum required force of seven to eight brigades the IPKF had only two in the Jaffna sector. Further, the initial composition of the IPKF was not suitable for this sudden

change from that of peacekeeping to a combat and counter-insurgency role. Since mobilization had not been ordered, most of the fighting units were deployed with strengths that stood at 50–55 per cent. Even more galling was the fact that the close quarter battle weaponry and equipment employed by Indian troops were inferior to that wielded by the LTTE.[43]

A much reduced force level was inducted into Sri Lanka although during the in-depth discussions held in mid-July 1987, the outgoing chief of RAW, S.E. Joshi, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, M.K. Narayanan, and all the diplomats present had expressed doubts about the LTTE abiding by an agreement signed between India and Sri Lanka. The only exception was the incoming RAW chief, A.K. Verma, who pointed out that the LTTE would endorse an agreement provided they were guaranteed an important role in the administration of the merged Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. The possibility of India having to confront the LTTE at a later stage was also raised at one of these meetings, to which General Sundarji, the then Chief of the Indian Army, responded thus:

> Once the LTTE endorsed the Agreement, they would not have the wherewithal to go back and confront India or the Sri Lankan Government…. [and] if the LTTE decided to take on India and Sri Lanka militarily, [the] Indian armed forces would be able to neutralize them militarily within two weeks.[44]

In the event, this assessment proved to be a gross under-estimation of the LTTE's determination and capability. Thus, the second lesson to be learnt from the IPKF experience is the imperative of ensuring that all possible contingencies are not only visualized but also catered for. At the same time, there is also a case for discussing these scenarios with other relevant agencies and departments of the government. This would help in fine-tuning the scenarios with inputs from multiple sources and debating how they will play out in the short, medium and long terms, thus generating more refined options. Unlike in previous decades, the institutional mechanisms to engage in such discussions have now been established, the chief among them being the National Security Council system.[45] There is thus greater scope for a more comprehensive contingency planning process. At the same time, to prevent group-think, it is necessary to institutionalize criticism by nominating at least one official or a group of officials to serve as Devil's Advocate(s), thus ensuring that the cons

of every scenario, plan and policy being debated are taken into account during the decision-making process.

LESSON 3: THE NEED FOR CLARITY ON COMMAND AND CONTROL

There was a great deal of confusion in official minds during the initial weeks and months about who exactly exercised supreme command over the IPKF. In order to make the presence of the IPKF palatable to Sri Lankan nationalist sensitivities, on 30 July 1987, Rajiv Gandhi acceded to Jayewardene's request to make a 'political announcement' naming the latter as the Supreme Commander of the Indian forces in Sri Lanka. But their private agreement was that the IPKF will operate under its own Indian commander and that Jayewardene will not 'interfere in operational matters'.[46] Yet, inexplicably, upon his return from Sri Lanka and while addressing the Indian Parliament on the same day, the Indian Prime Minister stated that Brigadier Gerry De Silva of the Sri Lankan Army will be the commander of the IPKF! Although overlooked at that time, controversy erupted when Gandhi repeated this statement on 22 October 1987. It was only thereafter that it was publicly confirmed that the IPKF is indeed operating under Indian command.[47] In practice, this confusion did not have a direct impact on the progress of the mission per se. But the fact remains that this issue must be clearly thought through and properly communicated to avoid needless controversy and ensure full domestic backing for the venture. In addition, a clear sense of the chain of command would also provide the enabling environment for military leaders to exercise command.

A second issue was the ad hoc manner in which the command and control structure of the IPKF came to be established. As pointed out earlier, when the first Overall Force Commander was nominated in early June 1987, GOC 1 Corps was identified as the component commander from the Army. What this also meant was that HQ 1 Corps, after its induction into Sri Lanka, would serve as the headquarters of the IPKF. However, HQ 1 Corps was not inducted because of three reasons:

1. it was not required for the limited role envisaged for the IPKF;
2. it was considered prudent not to disturb it given the need to maintain a balance along the border with Pakistan; and
3. its non-inclusion would help in gaining a corps-sized headquarters for the OFC.[48]

The need for a full-fledged headquarters came to be felt only after the initiation of operations against the LTTE and it became evident that Operation Pawan is likely to be a prolonged affair. While it is not clear when exactly the demand for raising a separate headquarters was raised, the formal government sanction for it came in April 1988.[49] In the interim, the command function was fulfilled by the Advance Headquarters of the Southern Command, which had been established in Madras (now Chennai) during the contingency planning process itself,[50] and which was now placed under a Deputy Overall Force Commander (Dy OFC). In practice, this arrangement led to a considerable degree of dissonance in the command structure. While the interim headquarters of the IPKF was a part of HQ Southern Command, its Directing Headquarters was the Army HQ in New Delhi and HQ IPKF had to deal with Army HQ on most matters relating to operations and intelligence. But at the same time, Southern Command was responsible for the IPKF's logistics needs, dealing with issues relating to discipline and welfare as well as writing confidential reports. In other words, while the GOC-in-C of Southern Command was the Overall Force Commander of the IPKF, responsibility for policy, planning and execution vested with the Deputy Overall Force Commander who took his directions directly from Army HQ.

The resulting dissonance played out thus: HQ OFC wanted HQ IPKF to move to Sri Lanka especially when things heated up in theatre. But HQ IPKF simply could not move in and out of the theatre due to its own reasons. Firstly, Army HQ had ruled out the idea of locating the IPKF HQ in Jaffna or Trincomalee, even though detailed plans had been drawn up to deploy it north of Trincomalee.[51] Secondly, inadequate staff strength meant that HQ IPKF could not be split even temporarily between Madras and Sri Lanka. In addition, there were other issues relating to communications, coordination with the Air Force and Navy, etc. The end result was that Southern Command HQ thought that HQ IPKF did not have any time for it, while IQ IPKF thought that Southern Command HQ was indulging in undue interference.[52]

Dissonance was, however, not limited to the Army alone, but it also permeated the inter-Service efforts at coordination. As noted earlier, the June 1987 Chiefs of Staff Committee directive appointing an OFC had also notified FOC, Eastern Fleet, and the Chief of Staff of Southern Air Command as the component commanders of the Navy and Air Force, respectively. Inexplicably, soon after the IPKF's initial induction, the Navy and Air Force began to withdraw the resources they had allotted.

At IPKF Headquarters, for instance, the numbers of staff allotted by the Navy and Air Force as well as the ranks of personnel posted were reduced. As a result, IPKF Headquarters was forced to get in touch with Southern Air Command if it needed an aircraft and the Eastern Naval Command if a naval craft was required.[53]

Notwithstanding the relative success of the eventual arrangement, it is imperative that command and control are clearly established at the outset before undertaking future regional stability operations. One issue to ponder over in this regard is that of Army Headquarters playing a role in the day-to-day conduct of overseas operations that are being actually handled by the headquarters of the field formation designated for the purpose.[54] Ideally, the role of Army Headquarters needs to be limited to issues relating to political direction of the campaign and course corrections that may have to be effected. The actual conduct of the operations would thus vest with the operational commander. However, an even more ideal arrangement would be the establishment of tri-service commands to enable seamless integration between the air, land and naval efforts during future regional stability operations or at the least a tri-service Rapid Reaction Force.[55]

LESSON 4: THE NEED FOR ROBUST INTELLIGENCE PLANNING AND COORDINATION

Given the security challenges posed by Pakistan in particular as well as by China, it is but natural that Military Intelligence has devoted a disproportionate amount of focus to these two countries. At the same time, because of the Indian Army's engagement in domestic counter-insurgency tasks and the cross-border linkages that insurgent groups maintain, Bangladesh and Myanmar also tended to receive attention. But India's other neighbours, in this case Sri Lanka, received no attention from Military Intelligence until May 1987 by when, as noted earlier, the contingency planning process was beginning to take shape. Playing catch-up to meet the suddenly emerged requirement meant that subsequent efforts to establish an intelligence set-up focused on Sri Lanka occurred in an ad hoc and uncoordinated fashion.

As part of contingency planning, a small intelligence team was moved to Madras in May/June 1987 and tasked with collecting intelligence about Sri Lanka. For its part, HQ Southern Command utilized its own (Counter-Intelligence) Liaison Unit based in Madras to serve as an

interface with state and central intelligence agencies located in that city. After the induction of 54 Division, a few Tamil speaking intelligence officers and NCOs were attached to HQ OFC at Madras and subsequently despatched to Sri Lanka but without any resources. But they were not placed under the command of 54 Division and were also only nominally under the command of HQ OFC that too because they were tasked to submit their reports directly to the DGMI. Later in September 1987, 57 Mountain Division moved its own Intelligence and Field Security Company to Sri Lanka. Because this unit came under the command of HQ OFC, HQ 54 Division, which had lead responsibility in the area, excluded it from all deliberations and operational planning, did not seek its assessments or task it to cater for intelligence requirements. Only after the structure of the Advance HQ of the OFC became formalized was 'an intelligence unit specifically structured for the IPKF operations as the Ad Hoc Liaison Unit was raised.'[56]

Four consequences flowed from the ad hoc manner in which the intelligence effort was organized. The first consequence was the absence of established intelligence assets in Sri Lanka, which meant that Indian forces deployed there were deprived of useful information before undertaking military operations against the LTTE. The second consequence was that most military intelligence officers had little background knowledge about Sri Lanka when they were inducted there. The third consequence was that the DGMI, which had only a small dedicated intelligence resource available to it in the form of the unit that was moved to Madras during the contingency planning process, could not provide useful assessments or inputs for operations. It was a similar story within the Southern Command. And the final consequence was that unlike during the 1971 War, Command Headquarters failed to provide short term training to officers and NCOs on handling prisoners, gathering intelligence from them, etc.[57]

Moreover, a below-par military intelligence set-up was only part of the problem. Intelligence sharing was minimal between the intelligence wings of the three Services partly because of lack of communication in this regard but also because of the lack of jointness in command and control. Further, civil intelligence agencies either refused to share information or failed to provide the kind of information required by the IPKF. Failing to understand the importance of political intelligence for military operations, the Intelligence Bureau refused to share information with the IPKF in this regard. For its part, RAW could neither provide specific military-

related information nor make an assessment of the LTTE's military capabilities. And to top it all, political considerations drove the Tamil Nadu Government to deny all access to information about the LTTE and its activities in the state available with it.[58]

Reforms during the last decade have gone some way to address issues relating to intelligence. In mid-2001, an Intelligence Coordination Group chaired by the National Security Advisor was formed to co-ordinate the work of the intelligence agencies as well as task them and evaluate their functioning. Subsequently, in March 2002, the Defence Intelligence Agency was established to serve as the principal military agency, thus integrating the intelligence efforts of the three Services.[59] And, in order to boost technical intelligence capabilities, the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) was created in 2004. Further, the National Security Council Secretariat developed a system of annual tasking and evaluation to bridge the gap between the producers and consumers of intelligence. However, it has been determined that after an initial burst of activity, enthusiasm for these institutions has waned within the Government.[60] A renewed effort to introduce and sustain further reforms in order to attain greater co-ordination as well as transform intelligence agencies into professional organizations is therefore necessary.[61] More specifically, from the perspective of this study, it is critical to assign civil and defence intelligence agencies the task of building up greater expertise in foreign languages, area studies and security issues in order to generate a constant stream of intelligence about countries in the immediate and extended neighbourhoods. Further, the system of intelligence operatives and defence attachés posted in Indian missions abroad also needs to be strengthened.

LESSON 5: THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL AFFAIRS

The Sri Lanka experience also highlights the importance of the Indian military being prepared to carry out administrative and civic tasks while engaging in regional stability operations. Because the contingency of militarily taking on the LTTE and the consequences thereof were not visualized in advance, the IPKF was suddenly forced to confront the task of administering Jaffna when the LTTE, which until then had exercised control over the peninsula, melted away into the Wanni jungles. The organizational structure that was created for this task was as follows: At the apex level in New Delhi, a Support Group was formed in the Cabinet

Secretariat comprising of representatives of all ministries and agencies involved. Its task was to assist the Core Group which was engaged in framing and guiding India's Sri Lanka policy. To interface with the Support Group, Army Headquarters established a cell in the Directorate General of Military Operations. At the cutting edge stood the office of Town Commandant Jaffna (TCJ), headed by a brigadier who was assisted by a few IAS officers and a small dedicated staff. HQ IPKF established its own Civil Affairs Cell, and Civil Affairs Cells were replicated at all the division and brigade headquarters as well. In addition, to facilitate coordination of all civil affairs activities in Sri Lanka, a Civil Affairs Cell was raised at Southern Command's Advance Headquarters in Madras. Its tasks included interfacing with Army Headquarters' Military Operations-Sri Lanka division, Indian High Commission in Colombo, Indian Red Cross, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, media, the Tamil Nadu Government, Indian Customs, etc.[62]

To its credit, the TCJ successfully carried out several tasks over the next two-plus years including: the restoration of civil administration, ensuring food supplies, medical facilities and other vital requirements, re-opening of educational institutions, re-establishing administrative linkages between Jaffna and Colombo, facilitating the return of refugees, establishing the election machinery and assisting in the successful conduct of three different elections, and raising the Citizen Volunteer Force to police the Tamil inhabited areas.[63]

Given the vast scope of the tasks that need to be carried out while undertaking regional stability operations, Civil Affairs must be accepted as a branch of general staff and staff must be created in formations on an as-required basis. At the same time, plans must be prepared and kept in stand-by for possible contingencies. This would require the prior collation of data on civic amenities, installations, government structure, etc., with respect to potential theatres wherein the Indian military may have to engage in the future.

<div align="center">

CONCLUSION

</div>

To sum up, the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka throws up five major lessons for future regional stability operations. Firstly, it is imperative to define the mission unambiguously and establish a clear mandate, for which political wisdom and acceptance of the limits of power are prerequisites. Secondly, there is need for a robust military contingency planning process

as well as discussions at various levels within the system to finesse plans and provide an adequate force to meet possible eventualities. Thirdly, clear command and control needs to be established at the outset, the appropriate field formation must be designated as the headquarters and efforts must be set in motion to establish tri-service joint commands to effectively undertake future regional stability operations. Fourthly, intelligence planning and coordination need to become comprehensive and adequate expertise and capabilities must be built up in advance. Finally, the importance of engaging in civil affairs tasks must be factored into the planning process, for which purpose the requisite data must be collated and plans formulated.

Acknowledgements

<div align="center">

NOTES

</div>

1. The term 'regional stability operations' has been used here with deliberation to denote what is widely referred to in the Indian defence forces as 'out of area contingencies', because the latter is an absurd term to characterize operations that may be carried out in India's immediate and extended neighbourhoods. That 'out of area contingencies' is widely used both within the military as well as in the Indian security studies community can be seen from the following representative references: HQ Integrated Defence Staff, 'Report on the First Year of Existence by the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee', available at http://ids.nic.in/reportfirst.htm, accessed on 30 May 2012; and, Rahul Bhonsle, 'India: An "Out of Area Contingency" in Libya', Centre for Land Warfare Studies, Article No. 1764, 1 March 2011, available at http://www.claws.in/index.php?action=master&task=765&u_id=79, accessed on 30 May 2012.

2. For a discussion on how and why the term 'extended neighbourhood' came to be used by Indian decision-makers, see David Scott, 'India's "Extended

Neighborhood" Concept: Power Projection for a Rising Power', *India Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, April–June 2009, pp. 107–43.

3. This evocative phrase was used by the US Secretary of State John Quincy Adams in a speech on US foreign policy that he delivered at the US House of Representatives to mark his country's Independence Day on 4 July 1821. In fact, 'she does not go abroad, in search of monsters to destroy' was one of the answers for the question that he himself posed at the beginning of the speech, namely, 'What has America done for the benefit of mankind?' The text of the speech is available at http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3484, accessed on 30 May 2012.

4. A report prepared in Army Headquarters at the end of Operation Pawan containing the lessons learnt has not only been classified as top secret but has probably not even been shared with Indian Army training institutions. Even the history of the Operation remains under the wraps.

5. Muni, S.D., *Pangs of Proximity: India and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis*, New Delhi/Oslo: Sage/PRIO, 1993, p. 63.

6. Ibid., pp. 51–64; and, J.N. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo*, New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2001, pp. 19–21, 69–70, 80–81.

7. On the evolution of India's policy, see Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, pp. 67–82.

8. Ibid., p. 82.

9. Cited in Rajesh Rajagopalan, *Fighting Like A Guerrilla: The Indian Army and Counterinsurgency*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2008, p. 88. However, it is not clear on what basis this estimate was made. In fact, senior military officials question the Intelligence Bureau's expertise to make such an estimate.

10. Cited in Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies*, Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict Research, 1993, p. 176.

11. Rajagopalan, *Fighting Like a Guerrilla*, pp. 87–88.

12. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, pp. 90–94.

13. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo*, p. 123.

14. Ibid., pp. 117–18.

15. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, p. 101.

16. Cited in Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka*, p. 172.

17. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo*, p. 122.

18. Ibid., p. 68.

19. This argument about India's over-estimation of its clout with the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE has also been made by K.P. Fabian, *Diplomacy: Indian Style*, New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2012, p. 203.

20. Dixit wrongly identifies Narasimha Rao as the then Minister of External Affairs.

21. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo*, pp. 119–20.

22. The period 1985 to 1989 saw a procession of External Affairs Ministers, Baliram Bhagat, P. Shiv Shankar, N.D. Tiwari, and Rajiv Gandhi himself assuming the position on 25 July 1987 on the eve of the signing of the India-Sri Lanka Accord. The post of Minister of State for External Affairs was also held by a succession of individuals—A.A. Rahim, R.N. Mirdha, Khursheed Alam Khan, K.R. Narayanan, Eduardo Faleiro, and Natwar Singh. The situation was similar in the Ministry of Defence as well: S.B. Chavan, P.V. Narasimha Rao, Rajiv Gandhi himself, V.P. Singh and K.C. Pant followed one after another as Ministers of Defence; while K.P. Singh Deo, Arun Singh, Sukh Ram, Shivraj Patil and Santosh Dev filled in the position of Minister of State for Defence. This list of Ministers and Ministers of State is drawn from Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka*, p. 112. For a brief analysis of Rajiv Gandhi's repeated cabinet reshuffles, see Bhabani Sen Gupta, 'Cabinet-Making and Unmaking', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 6, 6 February 1988, pp. 230–33.

23. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo*, p. 68.

24. Ibid., p. 147.

25. Prabhakaran's 'We Love India' speech; cited in Gunaratna, p. 215.

26. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo*, p. 128.

27. LTTE document cited by Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, pp. 102–03.

28. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo*, pp. 135–38.

29. See text of the Annexure to the Agreement, as reprinted in Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, p. 213.

30. According to Kuldeep Sahadev, the then Joint Secretary in-charge of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar in the Ministry of External Affairs, it was the then Indian Army Chief, General K. Sundarji, who was 'keen to have such a provision' in the India-Sri Lanka Agreement. See, *Proceedings of the Seminar on 'Indian Experience in Force Projection'*, New Delhi: CENJOWS, 2008, p. 24.

31. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, p. 115.

32. Singh, Depinder, *The IPKF in Sri Lanka*, NOIDA: Trishul Publications, 1992, p. ii.

33. Ibid., pp. 43–44.

34. Ibid., p. 44.

35. Mehta, Ashok K., 'India's Counterinsurgency Campaign in Sri Lanka', in Sumit Ganguly and David Fidler (eds.), *India and Counterinsurgency*, London/New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 158.

36. Singh, *IPKF in Sri Lanka*, pp. 112, 47–48.

37. Mehta, 'India's Counterinsurgency Campaign in Sri Lanka', p. 166.

38. The statements of K.C. Pant and the Indian official are cited in Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, p. 141.

39. Singh, *IPKF in Sri Lanka*, pp. 31–32

40. For the contingency planning process and earmarking of forces, see Ibid., pp. 31–40, 154.

41. Ibid., p. 37.

42. Pitre, S.G., 'Change from Peacekeeping to Peace Enforcement', in *Indian Experience in Force Projection*, p. 31.

43. Ibid., pp. 33, 35.

44. On this episode, see Dixit, *Assignment Colombo*, pp. 155–56; the quote is on p. 156.

45. For an informed exposition, see Satish Chandra, 'The National Security Set Up', *Agni: Studies in International Strategic Issues*, Vol. 10, No. 4, October–December 2007, pp. 4–20.

46. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo*, pp. 173–74.

47. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, p. 126.

48. Singh, *IPKF in Sri Lanka*, p. 35.

49. Kalkat, A.S., 'Opening Remarks: Session III: Operations of IPKF and Accord Enforcement,' in *Indian Experience in Force Projection*, p. 52.

50. Singh, *IPKF in Sri Lanka*, p. 34.

51. Bahri, N.K., 'Logistics in Support of IPKF', in *Indian Experience in Force Projection*, p. 109.

52. Sardeshpande, S.C., *Assignment Jaffna*, New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1993, pp. 142–43.

53. Singh, *IPKF in Sri Lanka*, pp. 35, 59.

54. Bahri, 'Logistics in Support of IPKF', p. 106.

55. On the imperative of creating such a capability, see Satish Nambiar, 'India and United Nations Peacekeeping: A 2020 Perspective', IDSA Working Paper, pp. 14–15, available at http://www.idsa.in/nationalstrategy/eventDec10/WP_Satish Nambiar.pdf, accessed on 20 May 2012.

56. Hariharan, R., 'Intelligence Operations', in *Indian Experience in Force Projection*, pp. 121–23; the quote is on p. 123.

57. Ibid., pp. 125–27.

58. Ibid., pp. 128–30.

59. For an early assessment of the challenges before the newly created DIA, see Priya Bellary, 'The Defense Intelligence Agency', *Bharat Rakshak Monitor*,

Vol. 4, No. 4, March–April 2002, available at http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/LAND-FORCES/Special/182-DIA.html, accessed on 30 May 2012.

60. Chandra, 'The National Security Set Up', pp. 11–12, 15.

61. For perceptive analyses on intelligence reforms, see Sood, Vikram, 'Intelligence Reform', *Indian Defence Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January–March 2009, available at http://www.indiandefencereview.com/interviews/intelligence-reform/0/, accessed on 30 May 2012; and Raman, B., 'What Ails Indian Intelligence?' South Asia Analysis Group Paper No. 3892, 27 June 2010, available at http://www. southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers39%5Cpaper3892.html, accessed on 30 May 2012.

62. Kapur, N.K., 'Civil Affairs', in *Indian Experience in Force Projection*, pp. 136–37.

63. Kahlon, R.I.S., 'Civil Affairs and Media Management', in *Indian Experience in Force Projection*, pp. 141–52.