

Transforming "Terrorist": Lessons for Sri Lanka

Speech

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Panel, Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Introduction

In my thirty five years of political career, I had been a militant for the first fifteen years, and a leader of a democratic political party, the EPDP, there after. I am faced with a higher risk of security threat during my carrier as a democrat than a militant. I am in the top hit list of the LTTE, for the only fault of being a Tamil democratic leader. My deliberations today, before this distinguished audience, will be out of what I have experienced during my political carrier with terrorism and not in my capacity as a Cabinet Minister.

I was one of the pioneers of the Tamil militant movement and fought for the establishment of a sovereign independent State comprising the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. I went for military training under AL Fatah of the Palestinian Liberation organization when I was young, 20years old. For the second time I went for advanced training, under the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) leading a group of members of EPRLF, male and female in 1984. I had fought against the Sri Lankan State from mid seventies to later part of eighties. Prison was part of my Life. But I have always been against the killings of unarmed civilians and child conscription.

Indo Lanka Accord & the LTTE

I am one of the many Tamil militants, who, after the signing of the Indo Sri Lanka Agreement on the 29th July 1987, was convinced that our armed struggle had proved the point that the Sri Lankan State could not continue to deny the legitimate rights of the Tamil people, and that it would henceforth be possible for the Tamil people to live as equals with the Sinhalese and the Muslims within a united Sri Lanka, if substantial devolution of powers to the Provinces could be guaranteed by the Constitution.

The LTTE which initially accepted the agreement reneged on it, and began fighting the Indian Peace Keeping Force – the IPKF which was in our island to oversee the implementation of the Accord. As a result, the Tamils of Sri Lanka lost the benefits that flowed from the Indo Sri Lanka Agreement.

Had the LTTE not sabotaged the proper functioning of the North and East Provincial council, which was the outcome of the Accord and the ensuing 13th amendment to the Constitution, today, we would have reached the stage of strengthening the Provincial Councils with wider powers. We cannot brush aside this action of the LTTE as an incident of the past. I cite this to show the real nature of the LTTE.

LTTE has a track record of betrayals of promises, undertakings and agreements. It has done so, with the other Tamil militant groups and political parties, governments in power and International Community. Dishonouring of the Indo-Lanka agreement is one amongst them.

LTTE Terrorism

The LTTE has done more damages to the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils than any other player. The LTTE has sabotaged every attempt to a reasonable political solution to the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka. The sole aim of the LTTE is the establishment of a one-party fascist regime by the name 'Tamil Eelam' in the North-East of Sri Lanka.

LTTE has hijacked the Tamil cause with its gun totting terror tactics. It is an organization with fascist tendency. Its only aim is to establish a fascist regime in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Due to its fascist leaning, it has made a self-proclamation as the sole representative of the Tamils. To maintain the status-quo of the sole representation, it has eliminated all the democratic Tamil leaders or subjugated their parties through their terror tactics.

To name a few Tamil leaders, brutally murdered by the LTTE are, A. Amirthalingam MP and Tamil National Leader, V. Yogeswaran MP, A. Thangathurai MP, Mrs. Sarojini Yogeswaran Mayor Jaffna, Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam MP and S. Sivapalan of Tamil United Liberation Front the TULF Mayor Jaffna, Kumar Ponnambalam of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress the ACTC, Sri Sabaratnam Leader of the TELO, K. Padmanabha Leader of EPRLF, Sam Tambimuttu MP and his wife Kala Tambimuttu of the EPRLF. The leaders who succeeded them were cowed down and compelled to be subservient to LTTE. To place on record, in the four decades of confrontation, not a single Tamil leader has been murdered by the Sri Lankan security forces.

There are only a handful of democratic Tamil leaders who have still escaped the LTTE death trap, I am one amongst them. The LTTE made several attempts on my life. In October 1995, the LTTE attempted to kill me by attacking my residence in which 4 of my members paid the supreme sacrifice. During another attempt on my life at the Kalutara prison in June 1998, I lost the sight in one of my eyes. In July 2004, I survived another suicide attempt on my life when a LTTE female suicide bomber tried to walk into my Ministry Office, which resulted in the death of four police personnel and injuring many.

LTTE's reign of terror extended its tentacles to our neighbouring Indian soil and globally as well. In the Indian soil, they killed former Prime Minister of India Shri Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan Tamil leaders. They murdered those who opposed them in the European countries. For example, T. Sabalingam, one of the founder member of the Tamil militant movement in Sri Lanka, was murdered in France. They extort money from the expatriate Tamils by threatening that their kith and kin, living in Sri Lanka will have to face the consequences, if they do not meet their demand.

They also assassinated President Premadasa and attempted on the life of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, who as a result, lost her sight in one eye. With both of them, the LTTE previously had peace deals.

MoU and Intransigence of the LTTE

With a lot of enthusiasm from the international community, in February 2002, the LTTE entered into a peace agreement with the then Government, brokered by the Norwegian Government.

Since signing this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the LTTE has not shown any interest to negotiate a political solution to the ethnic problem. Instead they used this opportunity to strengthen it militarily and to eliminate democratic Tamil politicians and civilians who did not fall in line with them. Hundreds of democratic Tamil politicians and activists were murdered during this period. There are several hundred incidents of abductions, torture and attempted murder causing injuries.

The fact that the MoU permitted free movement of LTTE carders into State controlled areas, and, that the weapons given by the State, to members of ex-militant organizations, who had become democratic political parties after the Indo-Lanka accord, for their self defense were withdrawn in terms of the agreement, gave undue advantage for the LTTE to carry out this carnage.

I have lost many prominent members of my party, the EPDP, during this period. I have a list of members of my party, killed, wounded & maimed and abducted and their whereabouts not known. Anybody interested can take a copy.

Have you ever heard of an incident where a father was shot dead in front of a five year old child and the child told by the LTTE murderers to go and tell her mother that her father was shot dead? This happened to one of my party members, Sivakumaran, in Puttalam.

This is the extent of LTTE cruelty. Further, child conscription, extortion, and intimidation by the LTTE reached alarming proportions since signing the MoU. I consider it as a cowardly act of cruelty. Murdering is not an act of bravery or heroism. It is a cowardly act; it flows from the fascist-fever and fear-psychosis. We have been the only consistent organization that had openly said and resisted that the LTTE can not claim to be the sole representative of the Tamils which claim itself is against all democratic norms. We said this initially when we took to arms, we continue to say so, and resist the LTTE even today after having sacrifice of the worthy lives of many dear members of my party. Upholding the principles of Democratic Centralism has been the guide line of the armed organization then and the Democratic Party today. We were the first to contest the General election to Parliament in 1994 where 9 members including me were elected to Parliament which paved the way for even the LTTE to send its proxies by massive scale of rigging in 2004 Parliamentary Election.

Survival Mechanism of the LTTE

As I pointed out earlier, the LTTE thrives on the Tamil cause. It has stood in the way of negotiated settlement within the frame work of united Sri Lanka, fearing, such arrangement would not give room for their fascist rule of law. They aspire for a separate piece of land 'Tamil Eelam' to impose their fascist rule. As a result, the Tamils' aspiration for a power sharing arrangement in the areas of their habitation, remain unfulfilled to date. This is a vicious circle which the LTTE cleverly manipulates and thrives upon.

Further, the LTTE survives on the frustration of the Tamil people caused by the after effects of the war they initiate. In an environment of war, people undergo a lot of hardships such as; large scale displacements, non-availability of essential goods and services, black marketing, non-availability of proper educational, health and infrastructure facilities. The LTTE capitalizes on this situation to win over the support of the Tamil people locally as well as internationally. This is also another vicious circle, the LTTE rides on.

The Way Ahead of Us

Having delved into the nature of LTTE terrorism, with which I am directly confronted with, let me now look into how the LTTE terrorism can be tackled.

The fundamental concept of tackling terrorism is that we should not do what the terrorists expect us to do; in other words we should not fall prey to their maneuvers. LTTE terrorism too has to be tackled keeping that notion in mind.

It has to be clearly understood that the problem of the Tamil Speaking People is distinctively different from that of the LTTE. Concerted efforts need to be taken to ease the burden cast on the Tamil speaking people as a result of the conflict. We should provide them with the necessary

support to restart their lives. Restoration of the education, health and infrastructure facilities to the pre-war situation coupled with large scale rehabilitation and reconstruction have to be undertaken.

Above all, these processes need to be done through the participation of the people of the area. It should be done in a manner that would instill hope and confidence in the minds of the people, and make them feel that they are capable of handling their own affairs and are not alienated.

It is the demand of the Tamil Speaking people for a political arrangement that would give them devolution of power in those areas in which they predominantly live, that lead to the ethnic conflict. Today the ethnic conflict has been blow up to the point of ethnic divide.

The wounds of the past could heal and the people could be drawn away from the grip of the LTTE only by providing a mechanism in which people feel confident, that there is a willingness to accommodate their aspirations. Only through such pragmatic approaches the vicious circles created by the LTTE can be broken and the LTTE itself be weakened.

We could achieve a contented and prosperous future, only if we approach our problems with a pragmatic and a clear vision. Our President, His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa is keen to bring an end to this problem. He is taking every step necessary to bring back normalcy to the war torn areas.

In the meantime, for the first time in the history of Sri Lanka, on the initiative of His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa, all major political parties have come forward to find a solution to the political problem of the Tamil people. He appointed two committees for this purpose, one committee consisting of party representatives, known as APRC and the other consisting of experts. The committee of experts has already come out with their proposal, while the APRC is still in the process of presenting a final document.

Role of the International Community

We appreciate the enthusiasm of the international community to bring an end to the conflict and bring peace to our nation. The International Community could contribute a great deal towards this mission.

The LTTE terrorists are well established in the Western countries. Although they are banned officially in some of these countries, their activities go on unabated. They operate under a number of pseudo names. Combined efforts are needed to put an end to the covert activities of the LTTE in those countries.

At the same time, the Government of Sri Lanka is in need of a lot of assistance to bring back normalcy in the war affected areas. This is a massive undertaking, and the Sri Lankan Government needs the assistance and the full support of the International Community.

Conclusion

As said by President Nelson Mandela "Peace is a Long March". We have to go step by step to achieve this. LTTE terrorism is an obstacle in this journey in our country. We have to march forward cautiously, without being trapped.

With this I Conclude, Thank you.