Rebels, Soldiers, and Counterinsurgency Tactics:
Drawing Policy Prescriptions from the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009)

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Introduction

2009 marked the end of the 26-year Sinhalese-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka. This protracted insurgency has long served as the testing ground for arguments, which either explains protracted insurgencies from the perspective of rebel groups or from the perspective of the state engaging in counter-insurgent activities. Existing approaches have focused on the rebel side have stressed the tactical advantages of suicide terrorism,[1] the effectiveness of suicide terrorism when the target state is a democracy and the goal is secession and independence,[2] its efficiency as a signaling device in increasingly intractable conflicts,[3] the cultural reification of heroic sacrifice within Tamil culture,[4] and, most recently, intra-group, elite-level bidding wars for the hearts and minds of the rebellious ethnic group, as sources of Tamil unwillingness to negotiate a peaceful end to the protracted conflict.[5] Approaches that have focused on the responses of the Sri Lankan have sought to account for the duration of the conflict by causally stressing how the Sinhalese majority remained committed to the institutional marginalization of the Tamil minority.[6]

In this paper, by focusing on the dynamics of intra- and inter-ethnic interactions in Sri Lanka, I show that the protracted nature of this conflict occurs only when the majority

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[1] Scholars have stressed its efficiency and cost-effectiveness as a coercive tool as well. See Schweitzer (2002) and Ganor (2002).

[2] See Pape (2003).

[3] See Hoffman and McCormick (2004).

[4] See Roberts (2010), Hellmann-Rajanayagam (2005).

[5] See Bloom (2003).

[6] Institutional accounts have argued that Sri Lankan political leaders were unable to create durable institutional arrangements, capable of accommodating the historically-determined ethnic heterogeneity, and, as such, to manage inter-ethnic tensions. Consequently, institutionalists have argued that the collapse of Sri Lanka into violent ethnic conflict occurred because of the decaying nature of the institutions which had been established to manage the majoritarian demands of the Sinhalese and the protection that the minority Tamils demanded. See de Silva (1986), Bandaranayake (1984), Wilson (1988; 2000) and Devotta (2000; 2004). In a similar vein, economic discrimination arguments have sought to explain the onset of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka solely as the result of increased Tamil radicalization in the face of continuously increasing Sinhalese discrimination. See Kearney (1967), Bose (1994), Fernando (1999).

ethnic group is fractionalized and the minority ethnic group relies on its ethnic leadership for its economic well-being. Put differently, the greater intra-ethnic fractionalization is within the majority ethnic group, the greater the willingness of majority group leaders to placate their ethnic brethren at the expense of the minority ethnic group; and the greater the minority group members' reliance on their ethnic group leaders for economic resources and upward mobility, the greater their willingness to participate in radical forms of violence such as suicide terrorism and in a prolonged conflict.

In effect, my argument stresses a causal logic that connects intra-ethnic leader-follower dynamics with the onset of violent ethnic conflict at the inter-ethnic group level. As such, the greater the fractionalization within the majority ethnic group, the greater the reliance of rival ethnic leaders on a critical mass of ethnic group members; the greater the reliance on a critical mass, the more rigid their demands become; the more rigid their demands, the less the chances for compromise and negotiation and subsequently the greater the chances for the onset of violent ethnic conflict. Once violent ethnic conflict commences, the more reliant minority group members are on their leaders, the more they will follow them into violence. Moreover, the more consolidated the leadership of the minority ethnic group within a particular organization, the less options minority members have and, hence, the greater their loyalty will be to minority leaders who can act increasingly without constraints. As such, a successful minority political entrepreneur who has minimized his competition at the elite level can opt for the radicalization of violence, by using suicide terrorism, and increase his independence by generating an indiscriminate reaction by the state and further coalesce the ethnic group under his organization because of security needs. The more indiscriminate the state's attacks on the

rebellious ethnic group, the more rigid group boundaries will become and the greater the need for protection. The more often this process occurs, the greater the chances that leadership of the rebellious ethnic group will be accepted because of the needs of conflict. As such, without examining the trajectory of post-colonial, Sinhalese and Tamil alike, ethnic mobilization we cannot explain LTTE's decision to use suicide terrorism, even when it is no successful.

The Causal Argument

In order to understand the duration of the Sri Lankan conflict, one has to understand the causal dynamics behind ethnic mobilization. Unlike arguments that stress the primordial nature of ethnic mobilization, I stress that ethnic mobilization is another form of mass political mobilization. Consequently, it is important to conceptualize as another form of collective action replete with the usual concerns of free riders, the management and permeability of ethnic group boundaries, the requirements for organization. While the allocation of selective incentives and club goods can resolve these problems, as in other forms of collective action, ethnic mobilization is unique in its ability of use ethnicity as the basis for participation in and reward from the mobilization drive because ethnicity is the most optimal sharing rule: it cannot change in the short-term and it can very effectively distinguish between member and non-members, recipients and non-recipients, thus removing the inherent inconsistency between leaders and followers.

Successful ethnic mobilization drives lead to the formation of ethnic parties in democracies. While ethnic parties **can** act as great aggregators of information, providers of selective incentives through access to policy-makers and sources of mobilizational

efficiency, they also **need** to acquire and sustain access to selective incentives, maintain an organizational base, and provide informational cues to their voters. Consequently, they need to win elections and achieve control over the state and its resources, but majority ethnic groups have an advantage over minority ethnic groups and first movers over late movers. In effect, electoral dynamics in multi-ethnic polities are not about representation, but about **effective representation**, meaning delivering selective incentives to ethnic voters.

Yet, the relative size of majority and minority ethnic groups matters. While winning elections increases the control of political entrepreneurs over the ethnic group and losing increases intra-ethnic competition for leadership within the ethnic group, in both instances intra-ethnic elite-level competitors will emerge, thus increasing intra-ethnic **fractionalization.** While majority ethnic group leaders can outbid each other by offering more selective incentives to their ethnic brethren, minority ethnic group leaders can do so only if they get access to the majority ethnic group resource allocation (selective cooptation). Yet, the asset-based of the minority group voters matter. While economically-independent minority voters can ignore the resource allocation consequences (segmentation), economically-dependent minority voters cannot afford to do so and they will become increasingly concerned about their ability to sustain themselves financially without access to the state.

Either way, given a finite amount of resources, intra-ethnic fractionalization will increase the concentration of selective incentives upon critical masses of the majority-group supporters and neglecting everyone else (discrimination). Consequently, those left out of the winning coalition cannot **credibly** promise any selective incentives to their

supporters in the context of the multi-ethnic state and, faced with intra-ethnic competition, will radicalize their demands and push for exit and violent action. Violent ethnic conflict starts when the majority-group ethnic parties cannot make any compromises because of intra-ethnic fractionalization and when minority-group voters are economically-dependent. In effect, my argument stresses a causal logic that connects intra-ethnic leader-follower dynamics with the onset of violent ethnic conflict at the inter-ethnic group level.

Figure 1

	Low Minority Group Dependence on the State	High Minority Group Dependence on the State
Low Majority Group Elite Fractionalization	**Segmentation**	**Selective Cooptation**
High Majority Group Elite Fractionalization	**Discrimination**	**Violent Ethnic Conflict**

This focus on the interaction between majority group intra-ethnic fractionalization and minority group member reliance on their leaders can effectively explain the duration of the conflict. Hence, the greater the fractionalization within the majority ethnic group, the greater the reliance of rival ethnic leaders on a critical mass of ethnic group members; the greater the reliance on a critical mass, the more rigid their demands become; the more rigid their demands, the less the chances for compromise and negotiation and subsequently the greater the chances for the onset of violent ethnic conflict. Once violent ethnic conflict commences, the more reliant minority group members are on their leaders, the more they will follow them into violence. Moreover, the more consolidated the leadership of the minority ethnic group within a particular organization, the less options

minority members have and, hence, the greater their loyalty will be to minority leaders who can act increasingly without constraints. As such, a successful minority political entrepreneur who has minimized his competition at the elite level can opt for the radicalization of violence, by using suicide terrorism, and increase his independence by generating an indiscriminate reaction by the state and further coalesce the ethnic group under his organization because of security needs. Thus, the more unwilling to compromise he will become and the more willing to prolong the conflict. The more indiscriminate the state's attacks on the rebellious ethnic group, the more rigid group boundaries will become and the greater the need for protection. The more often this process occurs, the greater the chances that leadership of the rebellious ethnic group will be accepted because of the needs of conflict. As such, without examining the trajectory of post-colonial, Sinhalese and Tamil alike, ethnic mobilization we cannot explain LTTE's decision to use suicide terrorism, even when it is not successful in forcing the Sinhalese to negotiate a compromise that would shorten the duration of the conflict.

Figure 2

	Low Minority Group Dependence on Leaders	High Minority Group Dependence on Leaders
Low Majority Group Elite Fractionalization	**Peaceful Protest and Uncoordinated Action**	**Peaceful Protest and Coordinated Action**
High Majority Group Elite Fractionalization	**Violent Protest and Uncoordinated Action**	**Radical Violence and Coordinated Action**

Evidence from Sri Lanka

Ethnic Mobilization, Critical Masses and Intra-Ethnic Fractionalization

While the British colonial experience led to the development of an ethnic division of labor in Sri Lanka, with the minority Tamils over-represented within the civil service, and the white-collar professions, it did not immediately lead to the politicization of ethnicity. Rather, because of the British insistence upon a liberal market economy, it was caste that initially emerged as the basis for political action because of its ability to capture differences in asset bases and occupational segmentation.[7] Even the advent of universal suffrage did not lead to the use of ethnicity for mass political mobilization and inter-ethnic coalitions continued to dominate colonial politics. Decreases in economic liberalization, in order to deal with the effects of the Great Depression, led to the enlargement of the colonial state and the politicization of ethnicity because of the ability of competing political entrepreneurs to fashion ethnic mobilization drives in order to allocate selective incentives to their members.[8] Successful political entrepreneurs, minority Tamils and majority Sinhalese alike, realized the ability of ethnic parties to dominate the partisan dynamics of mass politics once they could use ethnicity as the sharing rule that bonded leaders and followers together in the exchange of votes for material benefits.

While the British colonial period bequeathed post-colonial Sri Lanka with a politicized ethnicity, it was partisan competition within the Sinhalese parties for government control that institutionalized an ethnically-driven party system. Intra-Sinhalese, elite-level competition for control over the electoral process led the Sinhalese

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[7] See Roberts (1982, 133), Jayawardena (1984, 79), C. R. de Silva (1997a, 190), Moore (1997b, 339), Bush (2003, 48), Arasatnam (1994, 50), Pfaffenberger (1982, 92-93)

[8] These selective incentives ranged from food subsidies, access to irrigation systems, access to land settlements plots for landless farmers, and social welfare services. See Jennings (1951, 111; 177), Nithiyanandam (1999, 57).

political entrepreneurs to engage in a series of bidding wars the provision of selective incentives.[9] While these Sinhalese political leaders could build winning coalitions within the majority ethnic group by allocating benefits to their ethnic clienteles, their Tamil counterparts had to build and consolidate their respective ethnic parties as junior partners in these winning coalitions.[10] Partisan competition within the majority group transformed the Sri Lankan party system from one that had politicized ethnicity to one in which ethnicity operated as the key cleavage.

Yet, this intra-ethnic partisan competition within the majority group continued because of the increasing levels of fractionalization. The institutionalization and consolidation of at least two Sinhalese parties led to the systematic provision of selective incentives by the Sinhalese political entrepreneurs to their ethnic voters.[11] While the increased intra-Sinhalese bidding wars for political support increased the chances for electoral victory, they also increased the chances that this critical mass of supporters would become instrumental in terms of electoral competence. Realizing their increased relevance, these critical masses increased their demands for the continued asymmetric concentration of benefits upon them. By the early 1970s, these intra-Sinhalese biddings for the affection of the Sinhalese critical masses had led to the imposition of discriminatory economic policies upon the Tamil minority.

While economically-dependent Tamil voters had already become already radicalized, it was not until the discriminatory economic policies had pushed the majority of Tamils to rely upon access to the Sinhalese-controlled state for their economic well-being that

[9] See Kearney (1967, 80).
[10] See Wilson (2000, 4), Ponnambalam (1983, 84).

[11] See Kearney (1973, 125), Jupp (1978, 94).

the onset of violent ethnic conflict became a distinct possibility. Continued high levels of Sinhalese fractionalization meant that they were increasingly unwilling to share benefits with their mainstream Tamil counterparts in the TULF party.[12] Such an inability of the traditional Tamil political entrepreneurs to generate benefits from the Sinhalese to their Tamil supporters played in the hands of younger Tamil leaders who advocated secession, implemented violence and were sanguine about the possibility of violent ethnic conflict.

Nowhere was this process more palpable than in the coastline area of the Northern Province and especially among the lower-caste *karaiyar* Tamils. Long shut out of the Tamil elite, because of the dominance of the *vellalar* caste within the Jaffna and economically marginalized by the Sinhalese-dominated state, because of their occupational segmentation in the fishing and water-transportation sectors, the young *karaiyar* Tamils grabbed this opportunity and formed their own Tamil political organization in 1974. Unlike their Jaffna ethnic brethren, who operated within the FP organizations, and led by Veluppillai Prabhakharan, the Tamil New Tigers (TNT), were action-oriented. By 1976, the TNT had morphed into the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or the LTTE.

Veluppillai Prabhakharan, who was slowly solidifying his control over the LTTE, realized the need for the pursuit of actions outside the realm of parliamentary politics.[13] Given his bidding strategies vis-à-vis the TULF political entrepreneurs, the only way that he could entice the Tamil critical mass into supporting violent inter-ethnic conflict was

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[12] See Tiruchelvam (1984a, 188), Manogaran (1987, 163-64), Wilson (1988, 167).
[13] Prabhakharan, born into a lower middle-class family in the outskirts of Jaffna, joined the TYF in 1972. He co-founded the TNT in 1974, later renaming it the LTTE. He briefly allowed for *vellala* leadership for the LTTE in 1977, but realizing the potential for intra-LTTE competition, he resumed exclusive control over the organization's leadership in 1982. See Hellmann-Rajanayagam (1994, 37-38). Since then, he has insisted absolute loyalty in an increasingly centralized ethnic organization. See P. de Silva (1999, 95).

through the elimination of all other options. Having already engaged in a series of localized, small-scale acts of violence, Prabhakharan used the LTTE for a campaign of intimidation and violence targeted at moderate and older Tamil political leaders, especially in Jaffna.[14] While these actions increased intra-Tamil uncertainty, forcing otherwise moderate Tamils to switch sides, they did not spark a large-scale inter-ethnic conflict. Prabhakharan needed to force Tamils into a situation where large-scale inter-ethnic conflict would be their only option. However, he also realized that he would need to push the UNP-controlled state to violent extremes as well.[15] Hence, between 1981 and April 1983, the LTTE assassinated five leading, Northern-Province-based UNP officials and political entrepreneurs.[16]

Onset of Conflict, Intra-Ethnic Consolidation and Inter-Ethnic Escalation

A LTTE terrorist group attack on an army convoy in July 1983 served this strategic need perfectly.[17] Given the brazenness of the action and the possibility for a bidding war among Sinhalese politicians in terms of a response, any use of indiscriminate violence would lead Tamils into the arms of the LTTE. Not only would this attack rapidly increase

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[14] Starting with the assassination of the SLFP Mayor of Jaffna, Alfred Duraiyappa, in August 1975, the LTTE targeted local Tamil political entrepreneurs. See Kearney (1978, 530), P. de Silva (1999, 98), Swamy (2002, 45-46).

[15] Commenting on the immediate pre-conflict period, Tambiah has correctly argued that "the awful existential fact in society that has become totally polarized is that its minority of activists, populists, and terrorists on both sides holds the entire society as its hostage." See Tambiah (1986, 120). Moreover, the violent reaction by the UNP-controlled state would increase the Tamil ethnic group boundaries. See Hennayake (1992, 544).

[16] Starting with the 1978 assassination of the Jaffna Inspector General of the Police, the 1981 armed bank robberies, the January 1983 Point Pedro attacks on the Sinhalese policemen, and the May 1983 attacks on the Sri Lankan Air Force personnel in Vannuniya, the LTTE increased the pressure on the Sri Lankan state for a response. By July 1983, the LTTE had assassinated 50 police officers and Sri Lankan army servicemen, 11 Tamil politicians, 13 police informants and 16 civilians. Moreover, the LTTE was responsible for 265 bombings, robberies and other criminal acts. See Dissanayaka (1983, 30-42), Kearney (1985, 906), Hoole et al. (1990, 56). Sivathamby (1995, 123-126), Samaranayake (2002, 159).

[17] Even by then, the LTTE had approximately 30 operational military wing members in Jaffna. However, by July 1987, these numbers had increased to approximately 4,000 and by March 1990, the LTTE could claim over 10,000 military wing members. See Bose (1994, 87).

the ranks of LTTE fighters, but also it would marginalize all other organized Tamil political parties.[18] Moreover, this attack was the first palpable indication to the Sinhalese of the strength and organizational capacity of the LTTE: until then its Tamil victims had outnumbered its Sinhalese victims.[19]

The Sinhalese response to news of this attack sparked the emergence of the twenty-year ethnic conflict. Soon after the attack, coordinated, systematic and strategic Sinhalese attacks on the Tamils occurred in Colombo.[20] Using voter registration lists, the Sinhalese groups attacked Tamils in Colombo, often using their occupational situation and economic background as a selection mechanism.[21] Led by either local UNP political entrepreneurs or by mid-level Sinhalese bureaucrats, the Sinhalese groups utilized state resources, often in the form of transportation, to attack the targeted Tamils.[22]

Yet, these attacks did not resemble the random acts of violence that occurred in the 1958 riots. As such, they were not the spontaneous outbursts of ancient hatreds, of a primordially-determined form of long-standing inter-ethnic tensions that were finally coming to fruition. They were actively organized and implemented on the basis of attacking the Tamils' economic resources. Rank-and-file JSS members, coordinated by the UNP Minister of Industry Cyril Matthew, often targeting the properties of Colombo-

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[19] See Swamy (2002, 95).

[20] For detailed ethnographic accounts of the riots see Spencer (1984, 189) and Kanapathipillai (1990). For a detailed account of the July 1983 riots, see Dissanayaka (1995, 32-54).

[21] What appeared as mob-based riots, quickly became obvious as a coordinated and targeted destruction of property, especially in the retail and small-scale, labor-intensive industries. See Dissanayaka (1983, 77-81).

[22] See Hoole et al. (1990, 64).

area Tamil merchants, implemented these attacks.[23] Utilizing the threat of more LTTE attacks, the UNP political entrepreneurs inflamed their rank-and-file supporters with an acutely uncertain, but potentially disastrous, ethnic security dilemma.[24]

The intra-UNP bidding wars for the succession of Jawayardene as party leader, which had involved a variety of UNP leaders, predetermined the strategic nature of the Sinhalese response.[25] The intra-UNP political entrepreneurs with their support base among the Kandyan Sinhalese farmers and the urban small-scale entrepreneurs were dominating their more liberal-oriented intra-UNP competitors.[26] Additionally, the increased intra-Sinhalese bidding wars, illustrated by the SLFP's insistence for even more violent measures against the Tamils, prevented Jawayardene from reacting in an autonomous fashion.[27] The high level of intra-Sinhalese fractionalization prevented the use of restraint by the Sinhalese-controlled state.

The need to placate these twin forms of Sinhalese political entrepreneur competition, meant the rapid spread of the Sinhalese attacks on the Tamils throughout the country: by July 27th, the ethnic attacks had spread from Colombo to Kandy and Trincomalee and by

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[23] By 1983, Cyril Mathew had emerged as a strong contender for the succession of Jawayardene in any possible UNP leadership change. Utilizing his mobilization of the Colombo Sinhalese economically-disadvantaged lower *vahumpura* caste and of the small-scale Sinhalese retailers and entrepreneurs, he had built a powerful and organized base throughout Colombo. The LTTE terrorist attack enabled him to not only demonstrate his mobilizational capacity, but also to reward his supporters with the spoils from the Colombo riots. See Rogers (1987, 597), Gunasinghe (1994), Deshapriya (2001, 150), Bush (2003, 50), Devotta (2004, 152).

[24] As Posen has argues, in the context of declining intra-state security, ethnic group members realize that "ethnicity comes to the fore as a logical basis for forming self-protection groups in the face of a general security dilemma." See Posen (1993).

[25] Given the acute intra-Sinhalese bidding on this matter between the SLFP and the UNP, it was apparent that it would flow over to intra-UNP party politics as well. See Meyer (1984, 143), Arasaratnam (1986, 77)..

[26] This intra-UNP competition continued throughout the 1980s with the more interventionist wing of the UNP political entrepreneurs winning. See Hoole et al. (1990, 373-374).

[27] See Wilson (2000, 143).

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July 29th there were over 64,000 Tamils in Colombo-area refugee centers.[28] Again on that

night, under the spreading of rumors about an imminent Tamil attack, there was another

round of attacks.[29]

Yet, what distinguished these riots from any other kind of inter-ethnic strife, which

had occurred in the past, was, not only their ferocity, but also the role of the armed forces

and of the police. Unlike in the 1958 riots, the armed forces and the police declined to

intervene on the behalf of the Tamils, allowing the Sinhalese to engage in violent ethnic

conflict.[30] Indeed, the official state reaction to these attacks, as voiced by Jayawardene

himself on July 28th, referred with sympathy to the Sinhalese actions, almost supporting

them.[31] This acute ethnic security dilemma increased the rapid migration of Tamils from

Colombo and other ethnically-mixed areas to Tamil-majority areas.[32]

The July 1983 riots led the Tamils to believe that the path towards ethnic conflict was

paved with Sinhalese intentions.[33] The riots led to massive Tamil migration from

Colombo and from the rural areas.[34] Subsequent to the movement of the Tamils into the

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[28] See Dissanayaka (1983, 90). Moreover, the attacks outside of Colombo followed the same pattern: Tamil businesses were targeted for looting and arson before attacks on persons were initiated. See Hollup (1992, 325-327).

[29] For the diffusion of these rumors see Rogers (1990c, 618-619).

[30] See Tambiah (1986, 24-25), de Silva (1988, 191; 338).

[31] In his televised address to the nation Jawayardene followed his intra-UNP Sinhalese rival political entrepreneurs in laying the blame for the riots upon the Tamils. It was becoming apparent that the greater the intransigence that the UNP political entrepreneurs exhibited vis-à-vis the Tamils, the greater their chances in winning supporters within the UNP and among the Sinhalese. See Nissan (1984, 178), Devotta (2000, 65). These comments echoed earlier comments on July 11th when Jayawardene had stressed how the opinions of the Tamil did not matter to him as long as the LTTE attacks persisted. As he vividly stated, "we [the UNP] cannot think of them [the Tamils]. Not about their lives or of their opinion about us. Nothing will happen in our favor until the terrorists are wiped out…You cannot cure an appendix patient until you remove the appendix." Cited in Leary (1983, 102).

[32] Nearly 100,000 out of the 162,000 Tamils living in Colombo became internally-displaced refugees by the end of August 1983. See O'Ballance (1989, 26).

[33] By August 1st the attacks had culminated in 471 deaths, nearly 8,000 cases of arson, and nearly 3,900 cases of looting with Colombo accounting for nearly half of all deaths, a third of all arson instances, and a third of all cases of looting. See Dissanayaka (1983, 93).

[34] Overall, by mid-August 1983, nearly 175,000 Tamils became refugees. See Bastian (1990, 302).

refugee camps of the Eastern and Northern Provinces, the number of LTTE recruits increased sharply.[35] Aided by the territorial concentration of the refugee Tamils and supported by their extensive mobilizational resources in those areas, the LTTE political entrepreneurs quickly tied any opportunity for upward economic mobility to LTTE membership, incessantly campaigning for the affections of the displaced and impoverished Tamils.[36]

Yet, its rivals within the Tamil movement gained support as well. Even before its success in challenging the traditional Tamil political elites, the LTTE had spawned a variety of competing radical organizations. By 1983 it found itself competing not only with the TULF but also with the Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Peoples' Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS).[37] Led by better-educated and higher-caste Tamils, these competing organizations mixed revolutionary Marxist beliefs with a commitment to violence against the Sinhalese state. For the LTTE, they presented a problem to its left-wing with their commitment to radical income and land redistribution and a commitment to the use of violence in order to achieve their goals. Prabhakharan embarked on a series of decisions to deal with these problems.

In order to deal with the TULF and the other traditional Tamil elites, he actively transformed the LTTE from a politico-military organization into an increasingly military

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[35] See Hellman-Rajanayagam (1994, 175), Swamy (2002, 185).
[36] See Hoole et al. (1990, 77-78), Bose (1994, 96).
[37] See Hellman-Rajanayagam (1988, 606-607)

organization.[38] In effect, Prabhakharan transformed the LTTE from a small band of personal friends from similar lower-caste backgrounds into an increasingly organized, professional guerilla force. Unlike the TULF, the LTTE was committed to the use of violence and to its regularization. He instituted training camps and imposed gender equality within the LTTE fighting force.[39] He made the LTTE fighters commit to the infamous cyanide oath, but he also forbade them from having any other occupation, thus treating them as professional warriors. He subsidized this professional force through taxation on the local residents, Tamil and Sinhalese alike, illegal activities, and the financial support of the Tamil diaspora.[40] As the LTTE expanded its reach in the 1983-1987 period and increased its potential revenue base, so did its military capacity. In essence, Prabhakharan was creating a proto-state so he could control the Tamils' economic activities.

In order to deal with the EPRLF, the PLOTE, and the TELO he developed a passionate commitment to secession and Tamil independence that rejected all other options as inherently traitorous, which deserved to be dealt with in the most violent way possible.[41] While all these groups were committed in the violent conflict against the Sinhalese state, they were not as committed to secession and as such they represented a different perspective on what constituted a resolution to the ethnic conflict. Instead of negotiating, the LTTE preferred the use of violence. Accordingly, Prabhakharan targeted the leadership of the competing revolutionary groups and used violence to force their

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[38] In Jayatilleka's apt conceptualization, Prabhakharan was attempting to create a "Tamil Sparta." See Jayatilleka (2001, 214).

[39] This training was more arduous for all the Black Tigers and all the Birds of Freedom, the male and female respectively, LTTE suicide terrorists. See Swamy (2002, 65).

[40] See Gunaratna (1998), Peiris (2001) and Van de Voorde (2005).

[41] See Nadarajah and Sriskandarajah (2005).

members into submission. In the 1983-87 period, the LTTE targeted and killed the leader

of PLOTE in May 1986 and pursued and killed 280 TELO cadres in May-June 1986 and

forced the rest into the Eastern Province. It had forced EROS effectively in the sidelines

of the armed struggle and was increasingly pushing the EPRLF and TELO into the

Eastern Province.[42]

Finally, in order to deal with his critical mass of lower-caste, under-educated, un-

skilled and young supporters, he made their commitment to the cause and its corollary

use of violence their only option for upward social and economic mobility. After the

onset of violent ethnic conflict with the Sinhalese state and the other Tamil organizations,

the LTTE rank-and-file realized that only through the successful culmination of the

secessionist conflict would be able to achieve what they had originally signed up for:

social equality with the higher-caste Jaffna Tamils and access to economic opportunities

within a Tamil-majority state, which meant control over the Eastern Province within an

independent Tamil state.[43] As such, they followed him into conflict with the Sri Lankan

state, never questioning his methods. By 1987 Prabhakharan had been successful enough

that under the July 1987 Indo-Lankan Accord the Tamils were offered more than they

had been offered before: extensive autonomy in their home areas in the Northern and

Eastern Provinces, parity between Sinhala and Tamil on the language front and a

referendum on a merger between the Northern and Eastern Provinces. In sharp contrast to

what everyone was expecting, Prabhakharan and the LTTE rejected this offer.[44]

Yet, and unlike the expectations of the "suicide terror as resolve," the LTTE did

not attack the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) with suicide attacks. They used

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[42] See

[43] See Hellman-Rajanayagam (1988, 617-618).

[44] See Swamy (2003, 160) for Prabhakharan's thinking behind this decision.

traditional insurgent approaches that focused on ambushes and hit-and-runs and preferred

the use of the urban terrain with its civilian shields to entice the IPKF to attack Tamils

indiscriminately. In addition, they repeatedly targeted Sinhalese civilians with raids on

Sinhalese villages and bombing attacks in major urban areas. The LTTE was able to

achieve both goals quickly and effectively: the IPKF, which had been welcomed by the

Tamil civilian population, was quickly using indiscriminate shelling of urban areas as its

preferred counter-insurgency approach, thus losing the support of the Tamil civilian

population. The Sri Lankan forces used force in such an indiscriminate way as to increase

the population flows from the South to the North as to increase the Tamil population

ratios in the Northern Province, which only led to more recruiting potential for the LTTE.

While confounding both the Indian and Sri Lankan state officials,[45] Prabhakharan

remained committed to secession and full independence and unrivaled leadership of the

Tamil ethnic group. To accelerate the latter part of his goals, between July 1987 and July

1990, i.e. between the first and second suicide attacks, the LTTE assassinated the

following leaders:

T. Ganeshalingam	Minister, North East Provincial Council	28 June 1990
K. Padmanabha	General Secretary, Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF)	19 June 1990
V. Yogasankari	MP, Jaffna	19 June 1990
P. Kirubakaran	Finance Minister, North East Provincial Council	19 June 1990
Sam Tambimuttu	MP, Batticaloa	7 May 1990
Uma Maheswaran	PLOTE Leader	July 16, 1989
A. Amrithalingam	General Secretary, TULF	13 July 1989
V. Yogeswaran	Former MP, Jaffna	13 July 1989

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[45] The Indian officials, both at New Delhi and at Tamil Nadu, had assumed that Prabhakharan would be convinced to lay down his weapons and accept some form of sub-national autonomy. The Sinhalese had assumed that he would honor his commitments to them for accepting non-secession when they effectively armed him in order to accelerate the departure of the IPKF from Sri Lanka in the fall of 1988.

Indeed, by June 1990 Prabhakharan has eliminated all the Tamil leaders, either from the revolutionary left or the accomodationist center. While these assassinations did create a leadership vacuum in the Tamil ethnic mobilization drive, the expanded use of the suicide bombings solidified Prabhakharan's control over the Tamil ethnic movement.

This control happened in stages and followed a path of escalation and de-escalation that never veered off the need for control over the Tamil ethnic mobilization process and the demand for secession and sovereignty. Indeed, between July 1990 and March 2009 with a gap between November 2001 and July 2004 when the ceasefire was in operation, LTTE suicide attacks achieved these goals.[46]

The attacks demonstrated the resolve of LTTE, and by definition the Tamil ethnic movement, because they were willing to throw way all the gains that they had made by because of their commitment to secession and independence. Starting with the departure of the IPKF in 1990, by the late 1990s the LTTE was operating a "de facto" state in the Northern and parts of the Eastern Province, confining the Sri Lankan state in garrison areas.[47] Regardless of costs, in blood and treasure, it was continuously willing to throw it all away by inviting retaliation by the Sri Lankan state when it used suicide attacks in order to demonstrate its resolve. In a cycle of violence that commenced with a LTTE suicide attack which then led to a rampant, indiscriminate and disproportional attack by the Sri Lankan Army on Tamil areas and their civilian populations and continued with more suicide attacks and more civilian deaths, the LTTE was willing to jeopardize its

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[46] See Appendices I and II for a list of suicide attacks and targets.
[47] The LTTE was levying taxes, maintaining law and order, had established a judiciary and police force and controlled the education and health care systems.

successes in order to achieve its maximalist goals, even tolerating high levels of collateral damage. Every single suicide attack signaled the LTTE's willingness to challenge the Sri Lankan state in a war of attrition.

Moreover, Prabhakharan used the attacks to decimate the strategic and political leadership of the Sinhalese-controlled Sri Lankan state. Nearly every major figure of the Sinhalese side, politically and militarily was attacked, often using suicide attacks. More importantly, these suicide attacks targeted both moderate and hardliner Sinhalese leaders,[48] thus indicating to the Sinhalese that not only no one was safe, but for the LTTE they represented a monolithic and coherent enemy. Consequently, Prabhakharan's ensured that the Sinhalese would remain at a high level of fractionalization that would preclude any form of compromise and restraint that would otherwise increase the chances for a sustainable cease-fire.

This high level of radical violence effectively ended India's intervention in the Sri Lankan conflict and eliminated the chance of an external competitor for leadership over the Tamil group. The 1991 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the LTTE's only suicide attack outside Sri Lankan borders, effectively ended Indian support for the Tamil cause. Not only was such an outcome detrimental for political reasons, since Indian elites in Ned Delhi has pressured Sinhalese elites for compromise and accommodation and Tamil elites in Tamil Nadu had financed and supported the Tamil extremist groups, but it was particularly damaging for operational and logistical reasons. By the mid-1990s, the LTTE could no longer rely on support bases in India for arms trans-shipments, logistical support

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[48] They included both moderate leaders such as Premadasa, who had negotiated with the LTTE and Prabhakharan, as well as hardliners such as Dissanayake. The LTTE even went as far to tacitly support the electoral fortunes of a hardliner such as Mahinda Rajapaksa over the dovish candidacy of Ranil Wickremerinsghe in the 2005 presidential election. See Smith (2007, 76).

and operational safe-havens. Yet Prabhakharan has been adamant about the need to illustrate how the Tamil cause would not be controlled by India, regardless of cost.

They eliminated any pockets of intra-Tamil leadership questions, thus enabling Prabhakharan to monopolize leadership over the Tamils. Not only did they do that physically by killing all proto-contenders, but they also did that organizationally by forcing the label of traitor on anyone who did not agree with the methods and goals of the LTTE. As the cycle of violence demonstrated, those who did not support the LTTE were, by definition, supporting the Sinhalese and were opposed to the safety and freedom of the Tamil people. By strategically using suicide terror, Prabhakharan was able to achieve effective control over the Tamil ethnic mobilization process by eliminating the viability of an intra-ethnic leadership challenge. This lack of challengers only increased the Tamils' exclusive dependence on their leader.

The attacks also rendered Prabhakharan's critical mass of Tamil supporters entirely dependent upon him for their economic well-being and their safety. The LTTE members were committed to Prabhakharan not because they had signed a loyalty oath, but because it was only through the LTTE that loyalty made any sense. The near-constant use of violence combined with the calculated use of suicide attacks meant that Tamils were under constant danger in Sri Lanka between 1983 and 2009. Their only source of effective protection was the LTTE and even that protection was provided, first and foremost, to the most passionate and intense LTTE members. In a brilliant move, Prabhakharan had made the protection of LTTE members the primary goal of the Tamil population even though he was constantly adamant about how he was protecting the Tamils with the LTTE forces. Indeed, more often than not, when the Tamils could choose,

they would not choose rule by the LTTE. Yet, unlike previous Tamil political entrepreneurs, Prabhakharan was able to reduce his reliance upon his supporters and increase their reliance upon him.

Last, but not least, the suicide attacks enabled Prabhakharan to reject any and all reconciliation efforts by the Sinhalese, such as a federal state, and strengthened their resolve in return. By engendering such a high level of resolve within the Sinhalese and forcing them to continue the conflict, Prabhakharan was able to continue the need for the LTTE and its extremist violence. Prabhakharan effectively reversed the logic of extremist violence: he prevented the institutionalization of moderate Sinhalese leaders within the Sri Lankan state, thus guaranteeing the continuation of an extremely violent conflict that would increase the chances for an equally violent Tamil response for which the LTTE had achieved a virtual monopoly.

Intra-Sinhalese Leadership Outbidding and Violent Conflict Resolution

Partisan competition for leadership within the Sinhalese voting bloc made accommodation inherently difficult. When the Sinhalese political leaders made devolution proposals that would effectively create some form of a federal structure feasible, they were rebuffed very effectively by LTTE violence. More importantly, the LTTE rejection was followed by electoral defeat by an intra-ethnic competitor for power who promised harder and more militarized reactions to the Tamil actions. Hence, when the 2002 ceasefire agreement was negotiated by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and which granted near total autonomy within the Northern and Eastern provinces to LTTE leaders, there was strong opposition by Sinhalese leaders who opposed it, on partisan grounds, such as President Kumaratunga. Similarly, when intra-LTTE leadership battles

led to the defection of Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, known as Colonel Karuna, he was quickly supported by Sinhalese leaders, who perceived him as someone who could be used to attack Prabhakharan from within the Tamil group.

Indeed when Mahinda Rajapaksa succeeded Chandrika Kumaratunga as leader of the SLFP in 2005 this process of intra-Sinhalese outbidding was coming to a critical juncture. Raised outside of the dynastic milieus of Colombo, Rajapaksa had already built a reputation as a strong Sinhalese nationalist because of his alliance with the Sinhalese nationalist parties of the JVP and the JHU. Utilizing their grassroots networks, much like S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in the 1950s, Rajapaksa was committed to rejecting further devolution schemes with the Tamils and was adamant about the need to maintain the unitary nature of the Sri Lankan state. In effect, Rajapaksa, like so many Sinhalese political leaders, had outbid the existing Sinhalese leader in power, in this case Kumaratunga, and had campaigned against her legacy of devolution.

This commitment to a hardened and more militaristic approach manifested itself in the last phase of the conflict. Set off by a series of suicide attacks by the LTTE in the summer and early fall of 2006, the Sri Lankan state, under the control of Rajakapsa, responded with a military campaign that sought to eradicate terrorism and their support bases in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Using massive artillery and aerial bombings, in an attempt to weaken the civilian support bases of the LTTE in order to push sustained ground attacks, the Rajakapsa government used this military strategy to accomplish a gradual, but irreversible, wrestling of territorial control away from the LTTE. They accompanied these military tactics with a series of civilian control measures that further increased the human rights violations that affected the Tamil populations in those areas.

While Prabhakharan could have used this opportunity to recast his position on Tamil independence, he became even more radicalized. Confronted with an increasingly weakened supply base and an increasingly smaller base of operations, he used Tamil civilians as human shields during the Sinhalese bombings. While this strategy could have worked and further increased the legitimacy of the LTTE within the targeted Tamil population, it was accompanied with other forms of violence that actually decreased Tamil support for the LTTE. When Prabhakharan increasingly out of options and subject to increased Sinhalese pressure began killing Tamil civilians who were fleeing LTTE-controlled areas, started forcing the use of child soldiers, and required forced labor, the LTTE was quickly losing the support of the Tamil civilians. Regardless of the government's systemic targeting of hospitals, the implicit ethnic cleansing of certain areas, and the strategic use of shelling for civilian control purposes, Prabhakharan's actions illustrated the trap that he had set for himself: his success as the leader of the Tamil group, cemented as it was by the strategic use of radicalized violence, had only tied him to actions that were costing him the support of Tamils not within his core group of supporters.

Conclusion

The onset of violent ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka in the summer of 1983 unleashed a nearly 30-year protracted conflict. Driven by political economy causes, this conflict quickly demonstrated the causal dynamic between intra-ethnic fractionalization and inter-ethnic violence. Only when the Sinhalese majority leaders relied on the fulfillment of the demands of the Sinhalese critical masses at the expense of the Tamil minority to such a

great extent could they become so committed to demonstrating resolve in the face of suicide terrorism and to prolong the conflict. Similarly, only when individual Tamils relied exclusively on a single Tamil political entrepreneur for their economic well-being could they commit to enabling, participating and accepting suicide terrorism, and by extension a protracted conflict. Unlike other explanations of suicide terrorism, which have sought to account for it in terms of Tamil fractionalization or in terms of desperation in the face of continued marginalization, my argument stresses how it could have happened earlier if the two aforementioned conditions applied.

Additionally, it is important to note that this process of radical violence flowed from a previous process of electorally-driven, intra-ethnic majority fractionalization that combined with a high level of minority group economic dependence. Prabhakharan could not have started a violent ethnic conflict if he was dealing with a much fractionalized Sinhalese elite, which had to deal with the vicissitudes of partisan competition, electoral pressures and ethnically-based clientelism. Similarly, Prabhakharan could not have achieved what he achieved previous generations of Tamil political entrepreneurs had not failed to generate an ethnic mobilization drive that could deliver the increasingly needed access to the material resources of the Sri Lankan state.

Last, but not least, it is important to note the powerful incentives that prevented leaders and ethnic group members from compromising. Unlike institutional approaches that stress how all this conflict could have been avoided if only the Sinhalese had granted the Tamils enough autonomy at different critical junctures, I have attempted to show how individual-level incentives would have rendered institutional solutions ineffective. For instance, the creation of the District Development Councils in 1981 was not going to

prevent Sinhalese political entrepreneurs from refusing to endow them with adequate financial resources even when they knew that the moderate TULF political entrepreneurs would be thoroughly disadvantaged in their intra-ethnic competition with LTTE political entrepreneurs. Similarly, the 1987 Indian Accord's emphasis on the creation of a popularly-elected Northern and Eastern Provincial Council would not be enough to overcome the LTTE's willingness to use force to attack any Tamil that politically supported the Northern and Eastern Provincial Council. Similarly, no amount of institutional guarantee of Tamil self-determination would prevent Prabhakharan from using extremist violence if that meant that the LTTE would not command the Tamil ethnic group.

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