

Sri Lanka

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Much as I appreciate Partha Ghose's assessment of the Sri Lankan situation (['Battle for Jaffna: The Indian Dilemma'](#), May 13) I still have a few points to add.

(a) It is true that Colombo's writ never fully extended to Jaffna; nevertheless, LTTE's ouster from the area in 1995 greatly boosted Colombo's morale. Also, the fact that Kumaratunga's government announced a package of political devolution, which in many respects went far beyond anything visualised by the Rajiv-Jayewardene accord, made one feebly optimistic about a final solution of the Sri Lankan crisis. If, therefore, Colombo fails to retain Jaffna, it would surely have a very adverse effect on Sri Lankan politics. It may even lead to demoralisation or displacement of Kumaratunga government by a combination of opposition parties. More particularly, it can freeze for good all avenues for a negotiated settlement. Ghose gives extra importance to the military aspect, and thereby overlooks the political dimension.

(b) Ghose is right of course in saying that a return of LTTE to Jaffna may not aggravate secessionist pulls in Tamil Nadu. "A greater Tamil state", he says, "composed of Tamil Nadu and 'eelam' is a figment of imagination never to be realised". Just so; and I would go even further to suggest that those who float such canards have different axes to grind.

My fears stem though from a different direction and for opposite reasons. During the 1990-95 phase, when Tigers controlled Jaffna, they literally overran the state of Tamil Nadu. They cornered seats in select schools as well as direct admission to medical and engineering colleges. They bought and bribed personnel in strategic services such as police, customs, telecommunications, etc. They extended a network of arms and drug trafficking across the states of south India. And, they killed important personalities and rivals as and when their 'chief' willed. Is it now much of a secret that during this period Tigers established links with other terrorist groups in India and abroad? Here, I should like to draw attention to the timely warning Inder Malhotra gives in a syndicated article (*Herald*, Panjim, May 30). I quote:

No Indian should forget that LTTE has close links with practically all insurgent and terrorist groups in India from Assam to Andhra. It is also engaged in massive smuggling of narcotics. Its cadres know only warfare and plunder. Should Eelam become a reality, the LTTE ruled Tamil country would become a flourishing centre for spreading narco-terrorism and mayhem in areas far and near.

(c) I do not think that LTTE's war aims at establishing an independent eelam. If anything, it acts as a cover to win support from domestic and external sources. What good would it serve indeed if Velupillai Prabhakaran became either president or prime minister of a breakaway state comprising only a few hundred square miles of marshy beach, thick forest and a famished population? With revenues raised from such a land, can Prabhakaran meet the costs of his suicide squads let alone daily needs of his people? Not likely; on the other hand, if LTTE continues and expands its nefarious trade in arms and drugs thereby involving a larger number of Indians, would it not threaten India's security? So would it Sri Lanka's too if LTTE carries on its war of depredation in the eastern province. The Tigers have been known to have butchered poor Muslims and driven them out of their villages (may be to win favour with extremist Hindu outfits in India). Yet, they have reportedly maintained active links with Pakistan's ISI. With such aims and activities, LTTE can certainly destabilise the whole of south Asia.

(d) It is not my case here to argue what New Delhi could do in the circumstances. But I can certainly point out what it should never have done in the first place. One, it had no compulsion to announce that it ruled out action even if Jaffna fell into the hands of LTTE. What sort of diplomacy was this? Or, was it meant to be an encouragement to the secessionists? In 1965, prime minister Harold Wilson assured the world that Britain would not 'militarily intervene' even if Rodhesian whites seized independence. This was precisely the signal Ian Smith needed to proclaim UDI (November 11, 1965).

Second, it is strange that a government that pledges to combat narco-terrorism worldwide, should suggest that it could work for a negotiated settlement between Sri Lankan government and LTTE if only both parties asked it to do so. Does it not implicitly equate a legally elected government with an out-and-out terrorist organisation? Something almost akin to Beijing, Moscow or Washington urging India to sit at the same table to negotiate with armed Kasmiri secessionists. But that would be ridiculous.

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