

WARID: Sri Lanka (LTTE) 2005-2009
STARDATE: 2 December 2005
ENDDATE: 19 May 2009¹
Related cases: Sri Lanka (LTTE) 1983-2001
Sri Lanka (JVP) 1987-1990
Last update: 15 September 2015
Authors: Ben Christian, Tarik El Bouyahyani, Valerie Gebhard
Reviewers: Norbert Ropers, Mirjam Weiberg-Salzmann

Conflict overview

After three years of relative peace, violent confrontation between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the rebel organization the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) reemerged, leading to war at the end of 2005.

Both the first and the second war between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) – which has always been dominated by Sinhalese – and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who claimed to be the sole representative of Tamil interests, were secessionist conflicts (ICG 2012: 7).² In 1981, the Sri Lankan Department of Census and Statistics indicated that the population was comprised of 73.9% of Sinhalese, 12.7% of Sri Lankan Tamils, 5.5% of Indian Tamils and 7.1% of Moors (CBSL 2013: 20). Ethnic tensions between the major ethnic group, the Sinhalese, and the largest minority, the Tamils, were sparked after the country gained independence in 1948. Gradually, different governments introduced measures discriminating against minorities, leading to the increased political and cultural exclusion of the Tamil population (ICG 2012: 3; Weiberg 2003). In the 1970s, the radicalization of Tamil student organizations entailed the creation of guerrilla groups, the most effective being the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) led by Velupillai Prabhakaran. The LTTE called for secession from the GoSL and the emergence of a Tamil homeland in the northern and eastern provinces, called *Tamil Eelam* (ICG 2012: 4; Rotberg 1999: 7).

1 Consistent with the UCDP Encyclopedia end date: “President Mahinda Rajapaksa formally declared that the more than 25 year long civil war in Sri Lanka was over and that it had ended in victory”: <http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=144®ionSelect=6-Central and Southern Asia#> (15 July 2014).

2 The case-specific literature distinguishes Eelam wars I–IV. In this project, Eelam war I-III is consistent with the first LTTE war (1983-2001). The second LTTE war (2005-2009), which is described in this paper, equates thus to Eelam war IV.

In 1983, Tamil rebels killed 13 Sinhalese soldiers, an incident that triggered country-wide attacks on the Tamil population. These attacks were tolerated, if not supported, by the Government of Sri Lanka (Destradi 2009: 2; Rösel 1997: 173; Weiberg-Salzman 2011: 74).

The first war broke out as a consequence of this. Various mediation efforts failed until a ceasefire agreement was finally reached in 2002 (Destradi 2009: 2).³ The situation in Sri Lanka remained tense during the entire post-war period and no political solution was found.

In 2003, the LTTE withdrew from official talks, stating that the peace process had failed. However, the organization proposed an interim self-governing authority for LTTE-controlled territories. New elections favored the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), resulting in the complete stagnation of the peace process. In 2005, former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, who had stated that no political solution could be reached without military victory, also won the presidential elections (Smith 2011: 6, 7). Meanwhile, an increasing number of ceasefire violations, mainly by the rebelling side, were reported (Destradi 2009: 3). While official talks continued until mid-2006, violent attacks became more frequent again in 2005 and finally led to a full-scale war.

The war officially ended with President Rajapaksa announcing the victory of the SLA and the total defeat of the LTTE on 19 May 2009 [**WARENDUC=4; WARENDOS=4**].⁴ During the 42 months of war [**WARDUR=42**], The Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) best estimates indicate a death toll of around 21,000 [**FATALUC=21000**]. Data is difficult to assess as numbers often include the period before 2005. However, the case-specific literature indicates a much higher fatality rate, ranging from 10,000 to more than 70,000 fatalities [**FATALOS=40000**].⁵ Due to demands for secession, only territory claimed by the LTTE will be considered disputed territory.⁶ Therefore, according to the Sri Lankan Census of Population and Housing in 2001, the pre-war population in the districts concerned was estimated at about 2.4 million [**PREWARPO=2400000**].⁷ Relying on data from the UCDP, the civil war

3 For more information see Hashim 2013: 88-131.

4 http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=144®ionSelect=6-Central_and_Southern_Asia# (15 Jul 2014).

5 We consider – consistent with many experts – a death toll of 40,000 as the most realistic estimate (Report of the secretary-general's internal review panel on United Nations action in Sri Lanka 2012: 14).

6 The Tamil claims go back to the medieval Tamil-speaking Jaffna Kingdom. However, there is no evidence as to how large the territory was (ICG 2012: 10). Therefore, the northern and eastern provinces were claimed in their entirety. The following districts were counted: Jaffna, Killinochchi, Mullaitivo, Vavunya, Mannar, Ampara, Batticaloa, Trincomalee.

7 See: Sri Lankan Census of Population and Housing 2001: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/PDF/Population/p9p2%20Population%20by%20district%20,%20sex,%20ratio%20and%20population%20density.pdf>. A different census from 2004 estimates a pre-war population of 2,100,000: <http://www.eelam.com/tamil-homeland/statistics.jsp> (15 Jul 2014).

caused the death of about 0.88 % of the entire population [**INTENSUC=0.88**]; estimates from other case-specific literature equate to 1.67 % of the population [**INTENSOS=1.67**].

The military balance at the end of the war

As mentioned above, the war officially ended with President Rajapaksa announcing the victory of the SLA and the total defeat of the LTTE on 19 May 2009 [**VICTORY= -1**]. One day before, the death of LTTE-leader Prabhakaran was announced. Almost the entire political and military leadership of the LTTE had been killed by the end of the war [**LEADER= -1**].⁸ Furthermore, in August 2009, LTTE's 'international leader' and the possible successor to Prabhakaran, Selvarasa Pathmanathan, was arrested since the GoSL wanted to avoid a resurrection of the LTTE (Weiberg-Salzmänn 2011: 163).

Due to its absolute military defeat, the LTTE lost control of the territory it previously controlled by the end of war [**REBTERR= -1**]⁹ and the GoSL clearly controlled more of the former disputed territory at the end of war. Since 2008, the army successfully pushed back the LTTE and at the beginning of 2009, the LTTE had already lost 90% of its former territory [**MORETERR= -1**].¹⁰

Cunningham et al. (2009) indicate a 'low' relative fighting capacity on the side of the rebels at the end of war. However, this applies to the year 1991. In its history, the LTTE stated that it was extraordinarily equipped for an insurgency group (Liyanage 2011: 26; Smith 2011: 76); it was known worldwide as being one of the most powerful rebel groups. Yet, its military strength decreased substantially in this war and there are various factors leading to its absolute military defeat in 2009. First, the LTTE underrated Rajapaksa's will to end the long-lasting civil war by military means and overrated the influence the diaspora would have on the International Community in moderating the government's warfare (Weiberg-Salzmänn 2011: 167). Second, in 2004, the eastern wing of the LTTE broke away under Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (Colonel Karuna) and allied with the GoSL. Third, intelligence provided by India and the USA with respect to the LTTE's supply routes weakened the rebels. Last, but not least, the GoSL was successful in establishing static warfare in the north. The LTTE was therefore forced to engage in conventional defensive battles (Weiberg-Salzmänn 2011: 167) and lost its former strategic advantage of using mostly guerrilla tactics against the superiority of GoSL troops [**REBFIGHT= -1**]. Since the death of nearly the entire LTTE leadership, it

8 Weiberg-Salzmänn 2011: 163.

9 Cunningham et al. 2009 (terrcont: 'yes').

10 Weiberg-Salzmänn 2011: 162.

was clear that the rebel group was unable to continue fighting in more than a sporadic manner at the end of war [**CONFIGHT= -1**].

Not surprisingly, the military balance at the end of the war was strongly in favor of the GoSL [**WARBAL= -1**].

The military balance in the post-war period

Data from 2000 shows that the ethnic composition of the Sri Lankan army was strongly in favor of the Sinhalese majority at 95%-98% (De Silva 2001: 18). The CFA stated that the two parties remained in their positions, meaning that no integration took place. Considering that the war broke out once again, Tamil participation in the SLA is very improbable. There is little evidence of Tamils serving in the SLA in the post-war period. In 2012, the Sri Lankan army announced the integration of 100 Tamil women into the Sri Lankan army and the recruitment of 2,000 Tamil-speaking police officers. Future programs were intended to gradually increase the integration of Tamils in the SLA; for the period 2009-2012, however, there was no substantial participation in the police and state forces [**STATEFOR 2009-2012= -1**].¹¹

While the LTTE had lost all of their substantial military means, the GoSL maintained the paramilitary troops that had come to existence during the war. According to the IISS yearbooks 'The Military Balance', there were about 60,000 people actively engaged in paramilitaries from 2009-2012. Especially in formerly LTTE-occupied areas, the GoSL maintained its influence with the help of state-supported paramilitary organizations [**SEPFORCE 2009-2012= -1; TROOPS 2009-2012=n.r.; ARMS 2009-2012=n.r.**].¹²

As a consequence of the absolute military defeat of the LTTE, the GoSL was entirely in control of the country. Even lower ranked cadres of the LTTE had been killed and the group did not have any capacities to control territory whatsoever [**TERRCON 2009-2012= -1**].¹³ As such, there were no territorial gains made by the LTTE in the post-war period and the country remained under the control of the GoSL [**TERRWIN 2009-2012= -1**]. The few LTTE cadres that had survived the war were forced into exile [**VULNERAB 2009-2012= -1**].¹⁴

There were no armed peacekeeping troops present in Sri Lanka. The unarmed Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission had been abrogated in 2008 and there was no renewed mandate after the war [**PEACKEEP 2009-2012=n.r.**].¹⁵

11 http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=100_female_tamil_%20soldiers_20121116_04 (21 Jul 2014).

12 BTI 2012: 5.

13 Hashim 2013: 195.

14 Clarke 2011: 164.

15 <http://www.slmm-history.info> (3 Jul 2014).

None of the permanent members of the UN Security Council would have intervened militarily in the case of a renewed armed conflict. In the aftermath of the war against terror, waged after 11 September 2001, the USA had clearly campaigned for the international isolation of the LTTE and the imprisonment of its cadres (Weiberg-Salzman 2011: 165). The USA may have intervened, however, through political rather than military measures [**P5ALLY 2009-2012=n.r.**].

All in all, the post-war military balance was strongly in favor of the GoSL [**POSTBAL 2009-2012= -1; BALANCE 2009-2012= -1**].

Economy

World Bank data indicates a constant growth in both GDP per capita and the Sri Lankan population in each year of our investigation.

Table 1: GDP per capita in Sri Lanka in current USD

Year	Population ¹⁶	GDP per capita ¹⁷
2009	20,450,000	2057
2009	20,653,000	2400
2011	20,869,000	2836
2012	20,328,000	2922

The scale of compromise after the war

Regarding the enforcement of concrete compromises, the situation was strongly in favor of the Sri Lankan government. During the negotiations between the two parties in the period of relative peace before the second war, the LTTE reduced its demands for ‘Tamil Eelam’ to a federal sub-state of Sri Lanka (Weiberg 2003: 46). The LTTE proposed an ‘Interim Self Governing Authority’ that was rejected by the Government of Sri Lanka (Weiberg-Salzman 2011: 106f). In 2006, Prabhakaran announced the goal “to establish self-government in our homeland”.¹⁸ The defeat of the LTTE and the non-existence of any substantial negotiations or improvements in the post-war period led to a clear prevalence of the Sri Lankan Government in regards to the national quest [**EXBORDER 2009-2012= -1; INBORDER 2009-2012=n.r.; COMPETEN 2009-2012=n.r.**].

Due to the fact that the LTTE lost all influence in its former strongholds, the GoSL was able to exercise control over the entire island for the first time in many years [**GOVERN 2009-**

16 <http://api.worldbank.org/v2/en/indicator/sp.pop.totl?downloadformat=excel> (3 Jul 2014).

17 <http://api.worldbank.org/v2/en/indicator/ny.gdp.pccap.cd?downloadformat=excel> (3 Jul 2014).

18 The Hindu, 27 Nov 2006.

2012= -1]. As such, the government had exclusive decision-making authority – in the former disputed territory as well – after 2009 [**VETO 2009-2012= -1; VETOSAT 2009-2012=n.r.**]. The last episode of civil war in Sri Lanka was also mainly fought along ethnic and cultural lines. The Sinhalese majority represented by the Sri Lankan government stood against the Tamil minority that the LTTE claimed to represent. As such, the LTTE demanded that the government no longer discriminate against the Tamil minority politically, culturally or socially (Nadarajah/Vimalarajah 2008: 17, 21, 30f). None of these demands were met by the Sri Lankan Government, as the LTTE was completely defeated. As an example, the Tamil language was still not implemented as an ‘official language’ of the Sri Lankan state even though it was added to the constitution in the thirteenth amendment (Art. 18.2).¹⁹ This prevented Tamils from holding certain offices or from participating in society in general²⁰.

This development was even enforced after the end of the war, when president Rajapaksa further denied the Tamil minority's existence and their claims; he incarcerated hundreds of thousands Tamils, who fled from the battle fields in the north into prison-like ‘refugee camps’ and forbade them from leaving. These camps did not meet the most basic needs of the inmates and prevented contact to family members as well as foreign aid. Moreover, the GoSL initiated a program of Sinhalezation in the Northeast [**SPECPRO 2009-2012= -1**].²¹

Freedom House considers elections in the post-war era in Sri Lanka as basically free and fair (Freedom House 2014). However, this rating is disputable due to the political pressure on opposition parties executed by Rajapaksa (Weiberg-Salzmann 2011: 165). Despite the GoSL's aggressive campaigns, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) – founded on pressure from the LTTE in 2001 but later heavily attacked and accused of being too moderate concerning the national quest (ICG 2012: 7) – gained 14 seats in the parliamentary election of 2009 and controlled almost all of the local councils in Tamil areas. The Tamil minority was thus able to participate politically in the post-war period [**ELECT 2009-2012=0**].²² However, we must mention that political decision-making power mainly rested with the GoSL (ICG 2012: 15).

The Sri Lankan economic order was rather liberally oriented (Knight-John/Athukorala 2005: 392f, 405f); it was only formally challenged by the LTTE and its leader Prabhakaran – the emphasis on socialist ideology was presumably used as a political tool by the LTTE (Weiberg 2003: 15) in order to mobilize Tamils who lived in poverty and wished to be liberated through

19 http://www.priu.gov.lk/Cons/1978Constitution/Chapter_04_Amd.html (12 Mar 2014).

20 <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/sri-lanka-military-blocks-access-to-tamil-newspaper-office> (12 Mar 2014).

21 Weiberg-Salzmann 2011: 163-164.

22 ICG 2012: 7.

a more inclusive economic model. In the post-war period, this item received even less regard from both conflict parties and was therefore not a conflict issue [ECONOMY 2009-2012=n.r.].

There are no additional issues under discussion during wartime [ISSUE 2009-2012=n.r.; ISSUE2 2009-2012=n.r.] that can be identified and no new topics emerged in the post-war period [NEWCON 2009-2012=n.r.; NEWCON2 2009-2012 =n.r.]. Due to the fact that there were no compromises implemented, we code the BENEFIT item as not relevant [BENEFIT 2009-2012=n.r.; BENEFIT2 2009-2012=n.r.].

In sum, between 2009 and 2012, the scale of compromise was strongly in favor of the GoSL [COMPROM 2009-2012= -0.80]. Even though the humanitarian situation was disastrous – especially for the Tamils in the last months of war –, the GoSL, led by Rajapaksan, was nearly able to fulfill all of its interests through an aggressive military strategy and a policy of non-compromise against the Tamil minority.

Stability of peace

Until the end of 2012, the conflict between the LTTE and the GoSL had not re-escalated [SAMEWAR=0; DATESAME=n.r.; PEACMON1=43]. Moreover, no new wars emerged in this short post-war period [ANYWAR=0; DATEANY=n.r.; PEACMON2=43]. However, some observers argue that a new escalation is probable due to the fact that repression still exists against the Tamil minority and no political party in Sri Lanka has the intention of actually enforcing a true constitutional democracy (Weiberg-Salzman 2011: 168).

References

- Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2012: Sri Lanka Country Report, http://www.bti-project.org/uploads/tx_itao_download/BTI_2012_Sri_Lanka.pdf (26 Jun 2014).
- Clarke, Ryan 2011: Conventionally Defeated but Not Eradicated: Asian Arms Networks and the Potential for the Return of Tamil Militancy in Sri Lanka, in: *Civil Wars* 13: 2, 157–188.
- Cunningham, David E./Gleditsch, Kristian Skrede/Salehyan, Idean 2009: It Takes Two. A Dyadic Analysis of Civil War Duration and Outcome, in: *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53: 4, 570-597, data available at: http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~ksg/data/nsa_v3.3_7March2012.asc (26 Jun 2014).
- De Sivla, Kingsley Muthumuni 2001: Sri Lanka: Political - Military Relations, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, The Hague.
- Destradi, Sandra 2009: Nach dem Bürgerkrieg – Welche Zukunft für Sri Lanka? In: *German Institute of Global and Area Studies* (ed.): *Focus Asien*, 6, 2009.
- Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2013, http://www.cbsl.gov.lk/pics_n_docs/10_pub/docs/statistics/other/econ_&_ss_2013_e.pdf (26 Jun 2014).
- Freedom House 2014: Freedom in the World Country Ratings, 1972-2013, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world#.U70rs7HfeUk> (9 Jul 2014).
- Hashim, Ahmed S. 2013: *When counterinsurgency wins*, Philadelphia, PA.
- International Crisis Group 2012: Sri Lanka: Tamil Politics and the Quest for a political solution, Asia Report N°239, Brussels and Colombo.
- International Institute for Strategic Security Studies (IISS) 2009/2009/2011/2012: *The Military Balance*, London.

- Knight-John, Malath/P.P.A. Wasantha Athukorala 2005: Assessing Privatization in Sri Lanka: Distribution and Governance, in Nellis, John/Birdsall, Nancy (eds.): Reality Check: The Distributional Impact of Privatization in Developing Countries, Center for Global Development, Washington, DC.
- Liyanage, Sumanasasiri 2011: Sri Lanka: State of the County before the CFA: Essential Social, Economic and Political Factors leading to the Cessation of Violent Hostilities, in: The Centre for Just Peace and Democracy (eds.): Envisioning New Trajectories for Peace in Sri Lanka, Maharagama, 13-20.
- Nadarajah, Suthaharan/Vimalarajah, Luxshi 2008: The politics of transformation. The LTTE and the 2002-2006 peace process in Sri Lanka, Berlin.
- Smith, Chris 2011: Caught in the peace trap? In: Goodhand, Jonathan/Spencer, Jonathan/Korf, Benedikt (eds.): Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka. Caught in a peace trap?, New York, NY.
- Report of the secretary-general's internal review panel on United Nations action in Sri Lanka 2012, <http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri Lanka/The Internal Review Panel report on Sri Lanka.pdf> (26 Jun 2014).
- Rotberg, Robert I. 1999: Sri Lankas Civil War. From Mayhem toward Diplomatic Resolution, in: Rotberg, Robert I. (eds.): Creating Peace in Sri Lanka. Civil War and Reconciliation, Washington, DC, 1-16.
- Rösel, Jakob 1997: Der Bürgerkrieg auf Sri Lanka. Der Tamilenkonflikt: Aufstieg und Niedergang eines singhalesischen Staates, Baden-Baden.
- Weiberg Mijam 2003: Friedensprozess ohne Ende– am Ende ohne Frieden? Zur Verhandlung des Bürgerkrieges auf Sri Lanka, HSFK-Report Nr. 8/2003, Frankfurt am Main.
- Weiberg-Salzmann, Mirjam 2011: Die Dekonstruktion der Demokratie durch die Kultur: der Bürgerkrieg auf Sri Lanka, Baden-Baden.