

## The changing face of the LTTE: Ascertaining the threat of the Tamil diaspora's use of public diplomacy on Sri Lanka.

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**Abstract**— *Tamil diaspora has been part and parcel of the Eelam struggle of the LTTE from its inception. After the decisive military defeat of the LTTE in 2009, the Tamil diaspora became the only functioning organ of the extended Tamil Eelam struggle. The diaspora groups have organised themselves outside of Sri Lanka in such a way that they are capable of projecting their political aspirations in the International fora. As a result, it is of vital importance that the threat be objectively measured in order to successfully counter the threat of the Tamil diaspora on Sri Lanka's national security.*

**Keywords**— *Political Diaspora, Soft power, Public diplomacy, LTTE*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is rebuilding the rubble left after three-decade long war with the LTTE. The development post-war coupled with the favourable environment for foreign investment due to the absence of war, has been instrumental in lifting Sri Lanka to a middle-income country. In the midst of the development, the Tamil diaspora has not given up on their struggle to achieve the Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. The military defeat of the LTTE in 2009 constituted only a facet of the life cycle of the Tamil Eelam struggle. The second stage is on a more visible global platform with the use of politics and propaganda. This creates strain not only on the Sri Lankan development drive, but also constitutes a serious threat to the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

At present the Tamil diaspora is not a homogenous entity. There are many factions of the diaspora representing different views of how to achieve Eelam. The most prominent of the groups are the TGTE (Transitional Government of Tamil Eelam) led by Rudrakumaran from USA, the GTF (Global Tamil Forum) led by Rev. Emmanuel from UK, the "LTTE" group led by Nediavan in Norway, the "Tiger" group led by Vinayagam in France, as well as other groups such as the TRO (Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation), and the British Tamil Association. The diaspora has therefore been able to muster global reach and clout in international politics.

The organised diaspora groups are playing a key role in using diplomatic tactics to pave the way for the establishment of the Eelam. It is noteworthy that the countries are pushing for alleged war crimes investigations and the UNHRC probes against Sri Lanka are those countries that have strong presence of the organised diaspora groups. Furthermore, the Northern provincial council recently passed a resolution to enquire into genocide and war crimes and accountability. Therefore, it is of national importance to examine the extent to which the role played by the diaspora groups could destabilise Sri Lanka in the long run, and how to counter it using foreign policy as a soft power counter terrorism strategy.

### II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the Tamil diaspora's use of public diplomacy against Sri Lanka
2. To measure the power projection capacity of the Tamil diaspora against Sri Lanka's national security

### III. RESEARCH QUESTION

How would the Tamil diaspora impact Sri Lanka's national security through the use of soft-power tactics?

### IV. THE POLITICAL DIASPORA AS AN INTERNATIONAL PLAYER

Alongside the overall decrease in the occurrence of interstate crises since the two closing decades of the 20th century, there has been an increase in the occurrence of interstate-ethnic crises, which threaten to split existing countries with the intention of creating new independent entities. (Davis & Moore, 1997) Ethnic groups struggle for their rights, confront sovereign states and catalyse international crises, which then involve nation states as adversaries. These trends indicate the centrality of ethnic-non-state actors in the current global system and calls for the integration of such actors into theoretical frameworks on major interstate disputes.

While diaspora studies first emerged from cultural studies, anthropology and sociology, the recent trend in studying diaspora from a political science perspective has taken the Tamil diaspora as a case in point. (Wayland,

2004) Academic interest in politically motivated diasporas grew especially after 9/11 because foreign-born nationals living in Western states had aided and abated the terrorist attacks on US soil and other western countries thereafter.

Analysing diasporas as a political entity in the International system require a restructuring of the conceptual understanding of the word "Diaspora". The majority conceptualisation of diaspora views them as multigenerational groups of migrants who share a similar identity and maintain recurrent contacts with their country of origin (Sheffer, 2003). However, this approach of viewing diaspora does not reflect their political aspirations and actions thereof. The alternative accounts, which have recently become more widespread, treat diaspora as 'a category of practice, project, claim and stance, rather than as a bounded group' (Brubaker, 2005). However, a more balanced conceptualisation of the term "Diaspora" has been made by Adamson and Demetriou, which describes diaspora as:

"... a social collectivity that exists across state borders and that has succeeded over time to 1) sustain a collective national, cultural or religious identity through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland and 2) display an ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organizational framework and transnational links." (Adamson & Demetriou, 2007)

A regular diaspora community would act as an expatriate community remitting foreign exchange and technological expertise to their home country thereby helping strengthen the economies of their home countries as well as improving the standards of living of the natives. On the other hand, diasporas that have emerged as a result of political conflicts, rather than from economic or other types of voluntary migration, maintain traumatic identities attached to homeland territory and the myth of return, barring them from seeing potential avenues for conflict resolution (Sheffer, 2003).

As a result of the genesis of the Tamil diaspora to the struggle of a political Tamil identity, the Tamil diaspora is imbued with political motives. While political diasporas lobby their homeland governments, organise peaceful demonstrations and provide humanitarian aid, they also often mobilise for radical causes in the transnational space. They broadcast hate speech and nationally intolerant messages, engage in fundraising and sponsorship for radical groups and often take up arms to go fight in the homeland (Orjuela, 2008).

Since politically motivated diasporas assume the role of a non-state actor, they display the following traits common to non-state actors; (a) autonomy from the state, (b) transnationalism, and (c) aspirations for political change (Koinova, 2010). The Tamil diaspora, through their organisation and transnational operations qualify as a potent non-state actor in the International system playing against Sri Lanka.

By analysing a broad range of political diaspora's in the world, Hazel Smith and Paul Stares conclude that, except in a handful of instances, political diasporas tend to disturb the peace in their home countries rather than to bring peace. (Smith & Stares, 2007) In the case of the Tamil diaspora, the author posits that they constitute a threat to the peace of the home country, and hence they are peace wreckers.

#### V. SOFT POWER AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Non-state actors resort to soft power approaches to exert their power in the International system due to the reservation of violence in the hands of states. In his analysis of the multifaceted and changing nature of world power, Nye (Nye, 1990) highlighted the merits of 'soft power' that stem from the ability of actors to set the agenda and determine the framework of a debate. In the case of state power, Nye pointed to intangible resources such as culture, ideology and institutions, which are extensively used by non-state players as well.

Public diplomacy has so far been associated with an affair exclusively reserved to states. However, due to transnational politics and globalisation (Mishali-Ram, 2009), non-state actors are increasingly resorting to tactics such as public diplomacy to make their voice heard. This paved the way for non-state actors to gain a foothold in the International System, and gave them the ability to pursue their political objectives without having to resort to military power.

When examining acts of public diplomacy, it is often confused with any act of international communication. However, for a discourse to be deemed as public diplomacy, (La Porte, 2012) suggests that it must be minimally institutional, Firstly, this minimum institutionalization, that is, the non-state actors should have a basic organization, clear objectives, stable representation and coordinated activity. Secondly, the non-state actors' objectives must be political. According to Whitman, in the present global political context, the definition of a development or a situation as being political depends on their impact to the organization and maintenance of communities in key areas to a degree which necessitates action at the community level

(Whitman, 2009). Furthermore, according to Gregory (Gregory, 2011), the core concepts of Public Diplomacy are not just the objectives but also the practices used to achieve the former: in his case, understanding, planning, engagement, and advocacy.

Compared to states, non-state actors mobilise sectors of public opinion that support them and create alliances with other political actors who share the same aims. Non-state actors have incorporated and make the most of the new technologies and social networks which have become their usual means of communication with internal and external publics (Cox, 2006). As for the traditional actors, and despite the fact that the ministries for external affairs have increased their interest and sensitivity on matters of public diplomacy and communication, they still find it difficult to find the resources and staff needed in order to incorporate these activities as much as they should. (Kerr & Wiseman, n.d.)

Furthermore, Langhorne suggests (Langhorne, 2005) that the effectiveness of public diplomacy actions of non-state actors depends on the authority they have in the international arena and who and what legitimates them. Otherwise, the non-state actors will not be able to pursue their political goals. Drawing from the studies of (Wheatley, 2007), legitimacy and efficacy are the conditions that characterize good government and the stability of the political order in the new global context. However, whilst state actors derive legitimacy through democratic process such as elections, the concept of legitimacy for non-state actors differs from that of state actors. That is, the origin of legitimacy for non-state actors is closely linked to the moral authority which the actor can earn and is based on their capacity to resolve a certain type of problem, in the specialized knowledge or expertise they show or in exemplary quality of their principles and values (Avant et al., n.d.). Therefore, Edwards (Edwards, 1999) defines a non-state actor's legitimacy, or a state actor's for that matter, as the right that personalities and institutions have to exercise power in society, based on the citizens' support and trust. Thus, although the non-state actors may lack the 'democratic legitimacy' of countries or sub-state actors, they receive just as much backing by the citizens.

Consequently, Teresa (La Porte, 2012) posits that non-state actors need to fulfil two conditions should their actors be deemed as effective public diplomacy: legitimacy and effectiveness. The effectiveness of their public diplomatic pursuits are further bolstered by the following two scenarios: (1) defending citizens' interests before international institutions, and (2) explaining and implementing policies from those institutions locally.

## VI. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Based on the review of the literature, diasporic power should be investigated through their use of public diplomacy as a tool to gain power in the International system. Furthermore, it is necessary to measure the moderating effect of the Tamil diaspora's legitimacy and the effectiveness of their use of soft-power tactics to ascertain the impact of their actions which could impinge on the national security of Sri Lanka.

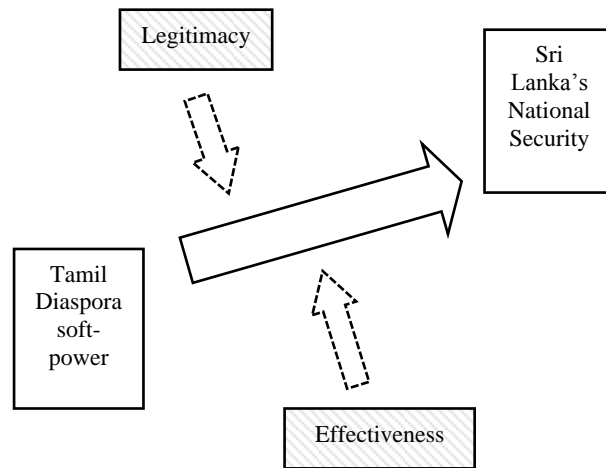


Figure 1: Conceptual modal to measure diasporic power

## VI. CONCLUSION

Depending on the characteristic of the Tamil diaspora and their global organisation, including their global reach, as well as the organised structure, it can be assumed that they play the role of a non-state actor against Sri Lanka.

On the basis of the organisational ability and networks of the Tamil diaspora, it is timely that the strategies and tactics used by the Tamil Diaspora as a non-state actor are examined in order to understand the threat they pose on Sri Lanka's national security. Having an objective model shall enable the policy-makers to take effective decisions to counter such threats from the Tamil diaspora groups.

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