

The post conflict role of the security forces in Sri Lanka

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Abstract— *The emergence of the prolonged conflict in Sri Lanka occurred due to narrow political ideologies ignited in the minds of our communal leaders. As a result certain sectors of the society breached the strong bond that they had with the State and it eventually disturbed the smooth functioning of the governance structure of the State. Sri Lankan security forces played the pivotal role in this crucial moment in safeguarding the national interest of the country. The role of Sri Lankan security forces after the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has become rhetoric in many national and international theatres. It is a well known fact that after any prolonged conflict a victorious security force has to take over the civil administration until the society returns to normalcy. In such a context Sri Lankan security forces also took the responsibility of enhancing the capacity and assisting the administration in the conflict affected areas during and after the humanitarian operation. Even at present Sri Lankan security forces are entrusted with administrative and development work in order to win the hearts and minds of the conflict affected communities. This paper reveals the significant role that the security forces play in reconstructing Social, Economic and Political fabric of conflict affected communities. It further highlights their responsibility in safeguarding the traditional and human security psyche of the society in order to prevent another insurgency in the future. In this context the author argues the importance of gradual departure of the security forces from Social, Economic and Political spheres of conflict affected areas while facilitating the civilian mechanisms during the transition. Within this broader conceptual framework the author postulates the communal unity as the core factor which can construct long lasting security of the nation. The research will be carried out mainly based on primary data including the author's personal experience over the last three decades.*

I. INTRODUCTION

“The United States urges the Pakistani and Afghan armies to crack down harder on Taliban and other extremists, but does anyone have a plan for what to do after the war on terror is won? Sri Lanka does.”¹

Following the end of the Second World War, significant events took place in South Asia. The de-colonization process gave birth to a new host of independent states.

At the same time the colonial masters deliberately divided ethnic minorities from the majority at the time of bestowing them with the independence. These resulted painful intrastate conflicts in most of the states in South Asia and in the case of Sri Lanka it lasted for three decades. The emergence of the prolonged conflict in Sri Lanka occurred due to narrow political ideologies ignited in the minds of communal leaders. As a result certain sectors of the society lost the strong bond that they had with the State and it eventually disturbed the smooth functioning of the governance structure of the State. However, the history of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is being misinterpreted by the involvement of many external spoilers, labeling the majority Sinhala-Buddhist community as hardliners who are hostile towards the minority Tamils and thereby saying that the majority is denying Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic character.

With the commencement of decolonization in 1946, the euphoria of independence was overshadowed by the turbulence of internecine conflicts that followed. The protracted civil conflict in Sri Lanka attracted the attention of the international community. Indo-Lanka agreement brought Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka. The massive influx of refugees to India due to the conflict also increased Indian involvement and the Indian state of Tamil Nadu intensified the crisis by considering Sri Lankan internal conflict as one of their political interests. The significant presence of the Tamil Diaspora in the Western countries such as Norway, England, America, Canada, France, Germany and Switzerland, gave life to this internal problem internationally.

All terrorist organizations are interlinked and interdependent and the LTTE was not an exception. International experts have long suspected the existence of a nexus between the LTTE and other internationally designated terrorist organizations including Al-Qaeda. Security experts have claimed that Al-Qaeda has copied most of its terror tactics from the LTTE. The LTTE has emerged as a formidable force and influence within the informal arms market and as such has attracted collaborative arrangements with other terrorist groups. The LTTE has developed close relationships with several Islamist groups operating in such networks in a mutually beneficial manner such as Pakistan Talibans, Palestinian groups and Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines. The LTTE arms network was headed by Kumaran Pathmanathan well known as “KP” and his

¹<http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/learning-sri-lanka-accessed> 20th July 2013

arms procurement team known as the “KP Department” operated from a highly secretive shipping network based in Singapore and Hong Kong. This procurement wing of the LTTE was dismantled by the Sri Lankan military intelligence with the arrest of KP in Malaysia. Moreover The LTTE has set dangerous examples and precedence to the existing and emerging militant organizations around the world. Its collapse in a most dramatic way left a surprising shock among world community. Further existence of the LTTE would have transformed Sri Lanka into the ‘Terrorist Hub in Asia’ and instead of calling us the ‘Miracle of Asia’ one would have termed ‘Sri Lanka as the Debacle of Asia’.

The role of the security forces was molded not only by the intra state conflicts. The tsunami that struck Sri Lanka on December 26th, 2004 was another hard-hit disaster in terms of loss of life, infrastructure and destruction of economic assets. Just after the catastrophe, the military lead the civil society and international agencies to fulfill the urgent need of setting up a mechanism which will prepare the country to withstand the effects of various types of disaster related challenges. The sensible handling of the civil administrative matters of Tsunami affected areas paved the way to security forces to win hearts and minds of the people in the entire country. The Sri Lankan Society was able to overcome the world’s most ruthless terrorist organization and to manage the world’s most devastating natural disaster and in both cases the relief was brought due to the timely intervention of the security forces.

After defeating the most ruthless terrorist outfit in the world, the Security Forces are now in a process of bringing back normalcy to the post war conflict period. During the post war period the Pro-LTTE Tamil Diaspora and their sympathizers have found ways to mount international pressure on the Sri Lankan government on various humanitarian issues. In such a context it is interesting to note the first hand observations of two eminent Canadian scholars Arie Kruglanski and Michele Gelfend², who have observed the following.

The world has a lot to learn from Sri Lanka. This island nation, south of India, was torn by a vicious civil war for twenty-six years, which ended in 2009 with a clear victory for government forces over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Since then, the ruling authorities have done a remarkable job forging reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation with the Tamil minority. This is truly an example of how military victory needs to be followed up by forgiveness and peacemaking.³

² Arie Kruglanski is a distinguished university professor and Michele Gelfand is a distinguished scholar researcher at the University of Maryland, College Park. Both are senior researchers at the National Centre for the Study of Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism.

³ Arie Kruglanski & Michele Gelfand Learning From Sri Lanka ,<http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/learning-sri-lanka>-accessed on 10th July 2013

Further they state that systematic empirical research carried out with thousands of detained LTTE fighters has yielded them with encouraging results. They have concluded that over the time, Tamil attitudes toward the Sinhalese have significantly improved; this seems attributable to the rehabilitation programmes. Of the twelve thousand initial inmates of the rehab centres, over eleven thousand have been released to their families and efforts are being successful in re-integrating them into their communities.

As academics, Kruglanski and Gelfend have displayed their unwillingness to take sides in the international debate over accusing Sri Lanka on humanitarian Issues in their article. But they have shown their willingness to bear witness to the remarkable reconciliation efforts by the Sri Lankan government. They have held informal discussions with Tamils and Sinhalese, including members of the Tamil Diaspora and of the Tamil Nadu community in Southern India. They have also interviewed Commanders of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and Ministers of the Sri Lankan Government. They have also held discussions with the members of an international NGO assisting in the reconstruction efforts. Most importantly, they have carried out empirical research with over nine thousand former LTTE members, visited their rehabilitation centers and interviewed former senior LTTE fighters released into their villages. Kruglanski and Gelfend conclude their article by saying that there is a lack of optimistic criticism on the Sri Lankan case by the International Community on the efforts by the Sri Lankan Government, and the International community may pay more attention to the case of the Sri Lankans in the future.⁴

II. NATIONAL INTEREST: SRI LANKAN PERSPECTIVE

Sri Lanka was considered as a hub in the Indian Ocean from ancient times. Sri Lanka is situated in the middle of the trade routes that connect the West to the East. The extensive trade transactions brought not only financial benefits but also diverse cultural exposures to Sri Lanka. If Sri Lankan people did not have the consent to mix and preferred to be isolated, the country would have preferred not to serve the merchants who used the silk route as per the chronicles of Marko Polo.

Since 1945 most significant threats to state security have been internal, rather than external. In the case of defining the role of the Security Forces; it is crucial to understand the concept of National Interest in Sri Lankan terms. The general understanding of the concept of National Interest is that it is the supreme goal and objectives of a nation which ultimately amounts to national survival and security. It is a widely believed notion that it is easy to preserve the national security under a mono-cultural society. However, having over three decade’s experience of an internal conflict; the Sri Lankan case proves otherwise. Over

⁴ <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/learning-sri-lanka->

centuries, the national interest and the national security of Sri Lanka were well preserved within the unity among communities and whenever it shifted its position, the country was engulfed in peril.

Sri Lanka provides a distinct case in the idea of National Interest. The basis of the notion is the amalgamation of all ethnic, religious communities and the equal participation in the socio-economic and political privileges. The Social contract of the Sri Lanka was based on three main pillars. They were the Monarch, Agriculture, and Buddhism. The monarch, who was at the paramount point in this structure, provided the trust on safety in the minds of people. Whenever there was a weaker king, the society lost confidence about their safety. Agriculture was the common activity performed by the minorities and the majorities for their livelihood. It is very interesting to observe that a religious community (Sinhala Buddhists) being so accommodative to bring the deity of their fellow religion (Hindu) into their shrine rooms in order to worship amicably. In a world of so many religious divisions, such a practice followed by Sri Lankans ensured nothing other than unity and security to the entire nation. The accommodation of the Hindu culture in the Buddhist temple provided the needed space for a minority to comfortably live in peace.

Unlike the Southern Indian invaders, who troubled our politics from Anuradhapura to Kotte periods from time to time, the western colonial masters constitutionalised their interest by introducing various socio-political and economic structures to Sri Lankan society. The colonial masters also created 'local political elite' who were educated in the west but thought exactly in the line of colonial ideology. The post-independence, west oriented policies legislated by the so called political elite paved the way to institutionalize the earlier constitutionalised policies.

The traditional western Idea of state security emerged as a necessary condition of the effective monopoly on the use of violence within a given territory. When it is threatened by any actor, the states considered it as a threat to the monopoly of violence. Whether through external invasion or internal rebellion the social contract was to suppress it in order to safeguard the interest and the security of the nation. Until recently the western idea about the security of states was such a competitive one.

The Sri Lankan security thought was different from the idea of competitive security and closer to the modern concept of 'Comprehensive Security' preached by Barry Buzan of the Copenhagen school of security thought. The comprehensive security thought encompasses not only traditional security but also many individual security notions like health, food and water security, and education etc., aspects earlier covered by disciplines like Development Studies or Economics. The thought of security of Sri Lankan society was entangled with many

cultural and social factors. There is a term called 'Rakka' in Sri Lankan religious literature. This word overarches the meaning of entire gamut of issues that are being covered by the security psyche of Sri Lankan community. The Sri Lankan Buddhist concept of "*Dammo have rakkati damma charin*" which means "ones deeds are the decider of his or her own security" is closer to the establishment of safety and human security.

III. THE POST- CONFLICT NATION BUILDING ROLE

State is a necessary condition for individual security because without the state it is not clear what other agency is act on behalf of the individual. (Buzan)

According to Kofi Annan, Human Security in its broadest sense embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and healthcare and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potential freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment. These are the interrelated blocks of human – therefore national – security.⁵

During the 30 years of war Sri Lankan security forces gathered vast amount of experience in order to support the post war Security Development and Peace nexus. During the entire battle they followed a principle of zero casualties to the civilians. Instantaneously after the battle the Sri Lankan forces and their leadership switched over their mindset and diverted all possible resources to rebuild the livelihood of the war affected community. After 30 years of psychological imprisonment and sacrificing of their children to the LTTE the Tamil community was in a deep strain. Tamil civilians during the last phase of the battle were used by the LTTE as a human shield to protect their leadership. Even during the war the enemy survived by consuming the ration provided to innocent people by the government. Knowing all this even at the height of the battle the Sri Lankan government never abandoned the innocent civilians. At that time, people in rural villages who were under the clutches of the Tigers frequently said "What peace? We were hungry before the war, during the war, and even now we are hungry." In such a situation building peace was a daunting task for the Sri Lankan government because much of the northern area was laid in ruins and people struggled to meet basic needs.

The civilians who came for survival towards the security forces were welcomed with utmost care. All their basic needs were immediately looked after and their security was ensured while executing a rigorous resettlement process for them. In addition to immediate post conflict action; the midterm task of the soldier involved responsibilities like De-mining, Infrastructure development

⁵ Kofi Annan 21 January 2005

and IDP resettlement. The Security Forces coordinated and integrated all efforts into one comprehensive effort with a clear direction. The process included releasing of government buildings which housed ex-combatants, establish Protective Accommodation Units (PARCs), providing mandatory security for rehabilitation centres and other accommodation, providing basic needs, i.e. emotional, family, religious, dietary, sanitary, educational & vocational, and recreational activities to maximize rehabilitation gains while coordinating pre-committed and continued funding. The expected outcome was the smooth transition of a war traumatized community into normal civilian life, increased employment and employability of them and making them live with dignity and harmony like the other citizens in the country.

It is a known fact that violent conflicts cause poverty and poverty also increases the likelihood of civil war. Countries with low, stagnant, unequally distributed per capita incomes that are heavily dependent on primary commodities face “dangerously high risks of prolonged conflict”. This is further exacerbated by what the World Bank calls “The Conflict Trap”. This trap reflects the fact that once countries have experienced a conflict they double their chances of having another conflict within a 5 to 10 year period. If they have experienced two conflicts their chances of another are quadrupled.⁶ In the 21st century, all states and their collective institutions have advanced the cause of larger freedom by ensuring freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in dignity. In an increasingly interconnected world progress in the areas of development, security and human rights must go hand in hand. There will be no development without security and no security without development. And both development and security also depend on respect for human rights and the rule of law.

To avoid such a situation predicted by the UN Secretary General, the Sri Lankan Security Forces had to play a different role. First, it is both unrealistic and apolitical to talk about restoring mutual trust in a war affected society. The memories of the violence perpetuated by the terrorists are still echoing in the minds of the civilians and the remnants of destruction still quite visible. Those affected by conflict have different perspectives on what is ‘reasonable’ or ‘realistic’ to expect in terms of a commitment to reconciliation. On the other hand the expectations of the war affected communities were very high and demanding. This situation got worsened by the projects of certain anti-government INGO activities.

Social development interventions by the security forces are therefore specifically designed to foster intergroup understanding and to strengthen nonviolent conflict resolution mechanisms, and to heal the wounds of the

conflict. The security forces made their programmes differ from conventional INGO projects. In some programmes certain LTTE sympathizer INGOs included the element of

separation of the two communities (Sinhalese and Tamil) as a solution for the protracted conflict. Instead of keeping two communities at a distance the security forces started engaging them in every possible sphere and uniting every stakeholder in order to build peace. The notion of ‘Unity’ was given the paramount importance regarding establishing security and national interest. By inventing the new engagement strategy the Security Forces were able to prevent re-occurrence of violent conflict. They discovered the art of securing the community through unity and participatory development. The communities were made to understand that security and development could be achieved only through the unity between communities. This “Engagement through unity and security” strategy also reduced the deep-seated anger, prejudices, and misunderstandings among the war affected people through reciprocal dialogue, cooperative action, and realistic understanding of the past.

While the LTTE Diaspora was spending millions of dollars on strategising their propaganda warfare the Sri Lankan government did not prioritise its work as to counter such propaganda, Instead it focused on the benefit and development of the lives of war affected Tamil community. As the executors of the vigorous government plan the Sri Lankan security forces became very successful. It is important to note that there has not been a single terrorist activity by the LTTE in Sri Lankan soil since the war ended. The possible reasons for that may be two-fold.

Annihilation of the entire leadership of the LTTE and the absence of leadership to the LTTE ideology in Sri Lanka in the post war period.

The successful rehabilitation campaign run by the Security Forces has raised the confidence levels of the Tamil community so that sections of the Tamil community do not want to go back to violent measures.

While securing the social activity Economic reconciliation could be described as the deliberate attempt by governments to put native economic actors of a country at the core and forefront of all economic decisions. Government put Sri Lankan businesses and business people in all schemes to promote economic development. The state has employed a strategy that favours Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims who live in the North and the East. The security forces guided the communities on how to utilize the resources in the area in order to achieve the ownership in their development process.

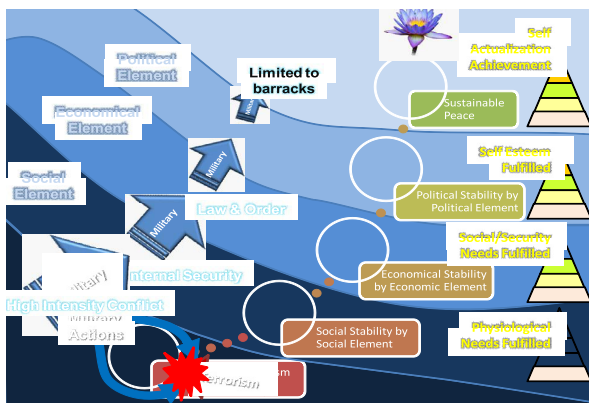
The holistic approach to development encompasses, mutual understanding and respect, equity of opportunity,

⁶ Kofi Annan 21 January 2005

freedom of person, democratic participation and sustainable development and economic equity. The crux of mutual understanding includes centrality of building “mutuality” across the boundaries of difference. Empathetic understanding, cosmopolitan consciousness, capacity to listen, dialogue based acceptance of the dignity of others, treating each person with dignity are other values attached with mutual understanding.

IV. THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY AND GRADUAL DEPARTURE FROM THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SPHERES

The model adopted by the Sri Lanka military forces could be explained under Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow’s theory is focused on human development and psychology.



Source: Author

The annihilation of military presence of the LTTE is over, but the conflict in overseas theatres continues in various facades. Just after the military victory there had been mention of the need to cut down the size of the security forces since the physical battle is over. On the contrary, the government is developing security plans to deal with LTTE remnants and prevent a resurgence of the most ruthless terrorist campaigns the world has ever known.

The post conflict role of the military is expanded in three key areas.

1. Stabilization of the social component
2. Stabilization of the Economic Component
3. Stabilization of Political Component

V. STABILIZATION OF SOCIAL COMPONENT

This task will be accomplished by establishing National Security of the country. The soldier is enjoying a massive increase in popularity after the war and the social and professional standing of the military in Sri Lankan society soared to an unprecedented heights.

The military victory over the LTTE has made national heroes the key actors of every aspect in conflict affected areas.

The paramount need of any developing nation lies on the foundations of national security. Even if the physical battle is over the armed forces have to carry out many operations in order to maintain the peaceful environment. Establishing a strong intelligence network and preparedness for any emergency through continuous training is another aspect to be aware of by the guardians of the nation.

When the social needs are fulfilled and national security is established the uncertainties in the minds of the people will be vanished and social psyche will be prepared to move to the next step of the development, i.e. the Economic component.

VI. THE ECONOMIC COMPONENT

The better health of civil-military relations indicates that the professionalism of the military leadership is in a position to cover almost all aspects of post conflict development process. The socio-economic role of the military and the profile of military leaders have increased dramatically in recent years. The soldier changed his role from a military character to a friendly social worker and a nation builder.

Before the resettlement of the IDPs, security forces had a daunting task of converting the liberated areas into mine-free territory. By now 90% of the demining process has been completed. The next challenge was the building of the livelihood of the resettled people. Most of the people in the area were engaged in agriculture related occupations and landmines were their biggest enemy/challenge for the upliftment of the resettled people. The demined lands were released by the security forces for cultivation. During the past few years, the agricultural production has increased, overwhelmingly, with the cultivation of the agricultural products in the North and East.

In the period of establishing the economic component the Law and Order organizations are expected to be re-established and civilian organizations will be given more prominence. The Ministry of Law and Order established under the President will be a key Ministry in this regard.

When the Economic component is fulfilled the social security will be established in the society. The national goals like eradication of poverty, establishment of Millennium Development goals (MDGs) will not be mere theories on a policy paper but actual working strategies when the economic component is established.

VII. THE POLITICAL COMPONENT

According to the World Bank’s Political Stability Index, Sri Lanka is heading towards a strong position. In 2011 it scored the maximum points in comparison to the last three decades. When the political element is fully stabilized the society will achieve the self-esteem position.

For the past three decades the northern and eastern part of the country was ruled by the gun and there was no space for democratic values and plurality. Therefore the liberated areas will attain this self-esteem position by re-establishment of democratic political practices which will help to develop the positive political culture.

The self-actualization is the next step. It is meant to realize one's full potential. It further expresses the country's creativity, quest for enlightenment, pursuit of knowledge, and the desire to give to society are examples of self-actualization (Goldstine, 1994). When Sri Lanka reaches the self-actualization level that is the pinnacle of the national objective of becoming a Hub in Asia where security forces can proudly return to barracks.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Humanitarian intervention is the use of military force to protect the victims from human rights violations. The government of Sri Lanka carried out an intra-state humanitarian operation to liberate the Sri Lankan people from the clutches of the LTTE. Even though it is an intra-state operation, the whole world in general and South Asia in particular received benefits from the annihilation of the LTTE. Given the LTTE links to international terrorism network, the end of the LTTE was a factor that supported US Government's War Against Terrorism (GWAT) and it contributed to improve peace and security in the International System.

Humanitarian Interventions are always criticized, both when it takes place and sometimes when states fail to intervene. The human rights of the entire Sri Lankan society, including Tamils, were violated by the LTTE during the last three decades. When the government became successful in the intervention process some critics attempted to interpret it in a pessimistic manner. The author's personal experience proves that humanitarian intervention is not only the reactive military intercession during human rights exploitation, but also the ability of the interested parties to work together in order to solve the problem and it should be more proactive than reactive.

The humanitarian operations could be considered as long term peace support operations. In this regard the new role of the Sri Lankan soldier is inspired by a holistic approach to Security Development and Peace. He is contributing to build a culture of protection and safety in dealing with situations in post conflict Sri Lanka. The soldier has to play many roles in order to accomplish his task. When he has to secure the country from the enemy he fights against the world's most dangerous asymmetric threats. When he deals with development he has to become a professional in every aspect of development to safeguard the economic activity of the country. When the development security nexus results peace he has to be a role model to civilians. Further, in this process he will safeguard the human rights which are the key to Human security. The trust could only

be built by fully engaging war affected community in the development process of the country. One has to ask the question whether those who hinder that process want to keep the communities in the dark and poverty forever.

Another factor for assessing the humanitarian nature of an intervention is whether it is reasonably calculated to make things better rather than worse after the intervention. The world cannot deny the development of the livelihood of the war affected areas. The security forces intervened in administration of the conflict affected areas with the aim of maximizing humanitarian results. Any pragmatic supporter of the post war development will realize that the military actions are necessary in order to smoothly deliver the results of the development process to the ground level. After the liberation of conflict affected areas from the clutches of terrorism, the security forces had taken over the administrative responsibilities of those areas as there was no civil administrative structure for decades. Everything was decided by the rule of the gun and terror and the non state actors had to dance to the tune of the LTTE in order to do their work in terrorist controlled areas. In such a situation a lot of misuse of resources for terrorist purposes took place. Currently, the administrative structure is assisted by security forces. There are some agencies or actors, who do not want to collaborate with the military. Those who have hidden agendas avoid contact fearing that they will be subjected to financial scrutiny of the government. Those who really want to deliver results to the war affected public have decided to cooperate more or less intensively with the military. Therefore the security forces hold a great responsibility in re-building the devastated social fabric and in bringing normalcy to the war affected areas.

It is not the interest of the government to take the assistance of the security forces in post conflict development in the North and the East forever. The government is in a strong view that, in the postwar context, after law and order are restored, the role of the security forces in the liberated areas should be gradually removed. However, they should not be removed from their present duties in a hurry since any sudden departure will create a vacuum in security which can be exploited by the pro LTTE elements for their advantage. Therefore the gradual departure of the security forces from the Social Economic and political spheres has initiated with a proper and steady plan. Unlike many other stories of intervention where the subjected community and the territory are exploited, Sri Lanka has proven to the world that it has maximized the benefits of peace to North-East Communities

The ultimate advantage of this plan is two-fold. Without a doubt the intervention of the soldier will ensure the security of the society. On the other hand, Sri Lanka will produce a Full Option soldier who could successfully deal with Military, Economic, Identity, Environmental, Health, Natural, and Accidental or Criminal threats to the security of our Nation.

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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR



The author is the 20th Commander of the Sri Lanka Army. He is held in high esteem by many as an iconic soldier with great strength of character, bravery, high sense of duty, utmost humility and selflessness. He is also considered a brilliant strategist cum self-thought tactician who has indelible memories both in the battlefield and his life in the Army, which is more than 34 years as of today. He was the first Commissioner General Rehabilitation responsible for rehabilitating more than 12,000 LTTE ex-combatants in late 2009 and his novel rehabilitation approach caught world-wide attention and also brought home much commendations.