

**LTTE SUICIDE TERRORISM: EVOLUTION,  
TACTICS AND EXECUTION  
(UNCLASSIFIED)**

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**WAPS International Conference**

**Oslo, Norway**

**August 2004**

# LTTE BACKGROUND

**Emerged amid heightened inter-ethnic and communal violence in the 1970s**

- **Originally named Tamil New Tigers (TNT)**
- **Led by Villupilai Prabhakaran**

**Main aim: establishment of a Tamil homeland in the north and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka**

**Generally considered to be one of the most sophisticated and deadly terrorist-insurgencies in the world**

- **Fought the SLAF to a stalemate**
- **Currently controls a de-facto Tamil state covering approx. 15% of Sri Lankan territory**

**Suicide terrorism integral to LTTE strategy**

- **One of the few groups to have fully institutionalized martyrdom as a sustained and permanent tactic**
- **Suicide attacks arguably a principal factor driving Colombo to the negotiating table in February 02**

# EVOLUTION OF LTTE SUICIDE TERRORISM: THE “PRABHAKARAN FACTOR”

**Prabhakaran a consistent and omnipresent influence in the LTTE**

- Cadres swear a pledge of allegiance *first* to Prabhakaran and *then* to the LTTE
- Unswerving loyalty “symbolized” in the guise of a cyanide capsule
  - Worn around the neck
  - Effectively amounts to a command to kill oneself rather than be taken prisoner

**Prabhakaran a central factor in legitimating, rationalizing and venerating martyrdom as a signature mode of attack**

- Emphasis on suicide terrorism derives from practical lessons and experiences of other groups (especially Hezbollah)
- And, reputedly, his love of films/documentaries depicting military, criminal and terrorist exploits (e.g. Death Wish II)

**For Prabhakaran, martyrdom reflects**

- A highly effective force equalizer
- The ultimate expression of selflessness and dedication to the Tamil cause

# THE BLACK TIGERS

## Constitutes the LTTE's main suicide wing

- 350 members drawn from “conventional” LTTE military ranks
- Selected for their ability to “blend in”, capacity to operate independently and perceived hatred of the enemy
- Intakes small, generally averaging no more than 10 cadres at a time

## Carries out three types of operation

- Those used primarily on the battle-field and directed against the SLAF
- Those aimed at critical national infrastructure
- Those that target “very important persons”

## Training 9 months in duration and split into 2 phases

- I - Focuses on honing physical/mental fitness and developing a baseline set of skills (e.g. bomb construction, vehicular driving, counter-surveillance)
- II - Emphasizes special mission-oriented training developed through simulations and test runs

# THE BLACK TIGERS (CONT'D)

## Intelligence and preparation

- **No BT attack ever carried out without extensive prior surveillance of target**
- **Pre-attack intelligence phase typically lasts for several weeks**
  - **Though can be considerably longer for assassinations of VIPs**
- **Operatives almost always accompanied by specially-designated “handlers”**
  - **Drawn from TOSIS (LTTE intelligence wing)**
- **Attacks videotaped to avail post-incident de-briefings**
  - **Used to inform planning for future mission**

**Thoroughness of procedures reflected by number of successful missions the BTs have conducted**

- **80% of strikes instrumental in achieving primary aim**

# THE BLACK TIGERS (CONT'D)

## Research and Development (R&D) and innovation

- **LTTE have developed a variety of explosive vests**
  - All equipped with built-in fail safe and redundancy systems
  - Claims that vests have been developed for children
- **Several other delivery mechanisms developed, including cars, trucks, motorbikes, bicycles and boats**

## LTTE has also exploited several features of the Sri Lankan landscape to avail attacks

- **Routine use of private/contract security services**
- **SLAF tendency to congregate at the scene of an attack**
- **Group has also allegedly taken advantage of constrained police powers post-February 2002 to**
  - Expand BT safe-houses in major cities
  - Deploy VIP “followers”

# SEA TIGERS

**LTTE has additionally instituted use of suicide assaults into the group's maritime wing - the Sea Tigers**

- **Most strikes involve explosive-laden boats that are rammed into surface ships of the SL Navy**

**Unlike the BTS, ST martyrs not specially trained**

- **Typically consist of wounded volunteers who undertake missions as a last "hurrah" to the group**

**However, like the BTS, ST suicide strikes supported by a concerted R&D effort**

- **Attack craft made of fiber glass and hollowed out in a shoe shape**
  - **Ensures they are fast, maneuverable and low profile**
  - **Suicide craft also equipped with special penetration rods**
  - **Designed to amplify shock-waves by puncturing hulls before explosives are detonated**
- **Experimented with mini 2-man suicide submarines**

# SEA TIGERS (CONT'D)

## ST suicide strikes highly effective

- More than 40 assaults conducted since 1990
- Principal factor discouraging recruitment to the SL Navy
- STs carried out a USS Cole-style attack as far back as 1990
  - Suggests the LTTE are at least 10 years ahead of al-Qaeda
  - May also be providing a critical benchmark for general developments in the area of maritime terrorism

# THE FUTURE

**LTTE has explicitly institutionalized and venerated suicide terrorism**

- **Therefore unlikely to disband martyr units in the near term**
- **Tigers doubtless view the BTs as a de-facto “sword of Damocles”**
  - **Can be brought into play should the peace process evolve in a direction counter to the group’s interests**

**Already one attack against a police station in Colombo (July 2004) and warnings of a full return to war**

- **Signals that the group is ready, willing and able to strike out against a Sri Lankan state that continues to be viewed with antipathy**
- **Also seems to reflect a collective group think mentality that has normalized suicide terrorism as not only “useful” but as the very sine non qua of the LTTE’s raison d’etre**