

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

Ahmet Yiğitalp TULGA

ABSTRACT: Today, the ghost of terrorism threatens the world. This ghost has disturbed the people of Sri Lanka for many years. Sri Lanka is an island country located in Asia. Sinhalese and Tamil, two biggest ethnic groups of this island country, have been in conflict for many years. This ethnic conflict is based on colonial era. After independence, the Sri Lankan government wanted to establish a Sinhalese state. This request was encountered resistance of Tamils population. Another reason for this resistance was that Tamils wanted to establish an independent state in the north of the Sri Lanka. Therefore, the Sri Lankan government started a war to end the Tamil armed resistance. This war ended in 2009 with the absolute victory of the Sri Lankan army. This study tries to analyze the Tamil issue in Sri Lanka. In addition, this study tries to reveal the causes and consequences of conflict.

Key words— Sri Lanka, Tamil, Sinhalese, Conflict, Terrorism, Liberation movement, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Suicide Bomb

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dia during the colonial period.

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is an island in South Asia. Sri Lanka Island is located Southwest Begal Bay and Southeast Arabian Sea. The capital city of Sri Lanka is Colombo. In Sri Lanka there are many different ethnic elements. There are Sinhalese, Tamil, Burgher, European, Indian and Muslim. The majority of the island's population is Sinhalese people. Tamil is the second largest population in the island. The Tamils came to the island in 500 BC (Ruben, 2000). Sinhales came to the island 2000 years before (Ruben, 2000). Three quarters of Sri Lanka's population is Sinhalese people. 17% of the island is Tamil people. 2/3 of the island is Buddhist. 14% of population are Hindu and Muslim.

Sinhalese people often live in the south, west, and center part of the island. Tamils live in the northern and eastern regions of the island. Tamils are divided into two groups. Jaffna Tamils is the oldest Tamils people on the island. India Tamil is the second group. Most of the Indian Tamils came to Sri Lanka from In-

Tamils and Sinhalese have been fighting for many years. The conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese is based on British colonial period. After Sri Lanka's independence, Tamil ethnic group was unable to obtain their political, cultural and economic rights. For this reason, the Tamil issue arose. In Sri Lanka, the conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples is based on the differences of religion, language, race and status.

The religious factor is very important in the identity formation of Sinhales and Tamils living in Sri Lanka. Mahavamsa, an interpretation of Buddhist in Sri Lanka, plays a very important role in shaping the social life of Sinhales (Ruben, 2000). Tamils' religion is Hinduism. Similarly, Hinduism also shapes Tamil's social life.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the British colonial period, the British

gathered Tamils and Sinhalese under the name Ceylon (Spencer, 1990). Before this period, the two ethnic groups were living apart from each other (Knuth, 2006). For this reason, during the colonial period, the British tried to create a homogeneous Ceylon nation (McConnel, 2008). On the other hand, the British made some changes in the demographic structure of the island. During the colonial period, 500000 Tamil were brought to the island from India and this population was placed in Sri Lanka (Bailey, 2007).

The first uprisings in the island against British colonialism were initiated by Sinhalese. The Buddhist Sinhalese monks started the uprising against British imperialism. These riots were nationalist and religious revolts (Knuth, 2006). These revolts helped to create religious and nationalist identities in the Sinhalese ethnic group (Bailey, 2007).

Relations that maintained calm between the two ethnic elements during the colonial period were exacerbated by the problem of representation between two ethnic groups after independence. After independence, Britain handed over the Sri Lankan government power to Sinhalese population. With the passing of power by monks Buddhist, nationalist Sinhalese groups began to become more active (Bailey, 2007). The Sinhalese, who took power, made it possible for the police power to consist entirely of Sinhalese (Voorde, 2007). This situation, the majority of unarmed Tamils tried to create a force to protect themselves.

The paramilitarist groups of the People's Liberation Front (JVP) formed by Sinhalese's Buddhist monks and ultra-nationalists began attacking the Tamil people. As a result of Sinhalese nationalist groups' attacks on Tamil population, Tamils also started to organize and arm in their region (Crisis Group, 2007). In addition, the Tamils were not included in the Sri Lanka's government, also Sinhalese language became the official language of the state, and most of the Tamil people had not been granted the citizenship of Sri Lanka (Scott, 1999). Finally, with the 1972 constitution, the official religion of the state became Buddhism and also the ruling party changed the country's name from Ceylon to Sri Lanka (Bajoria, 2009). As a result of these policies, the problem between Sinhalese-Tamil became violence. In this period, as a precaution, the Sinhalese began to implement the settlement policy and the policy of changing the demographic in the Tamil area. This also led to the struggle of Tamils against assimilation.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

At the beginning of the 1970s Tamils expressed their demands for independence with politics. However, they were not able to achieve great progress because Sri Lanka's government continuously banned Tamil's political organizations. For this reason, Tamils understood that the solution of this problem would not be with the political channels. Therefore, many underground guerrilla organizations were established in the beginning of 1970s. In the 1970s, 42 militant groups were established. However, 5 of these organizations

succeeded. One of these armed guerrilla groups is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The organization was founded in 1976 by Velupillai Prabhakaran. The organization was struggling for Tamiler's self-determination right (Lindey, 2009). The LTTE gained a reputation for its fatal and complex actions. The founder of the LTTE, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, was the second commander of the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) organization (Ruben, 2000). The first commander, Thanabalasingham, arrested and Prabhakaran became the new leader of TNT. Prabhakaran changed the name of TNT and redesigned the organization according to his own ideology (Voorde, 2007).

The legitimacy of the Tamil people's struggle for independence was defined by the Thimphu principles. It was stated that the independence aim could be reached with LTTE (Rabasa and Gregg, 2006). To achieve these goals, he created a unique elite, brutal and highly professional organization (Wijesekera, 1993). Over the years, the LTTE successfully directed the Sri Lankan government to the negotiating table and reached some of its targets (Campbell and Gunaratna, 2003).

According to Pharakaran, the Tamils would be victims as long as they could not protect themselves, and for this reason they had to be armed (Arena and Arrigo, 2006). The first action of this newly formed armed organization was to assassinate a mayor of Tamil origin. The reason for this action was that the murdered mayor was betraying Tamil population. The

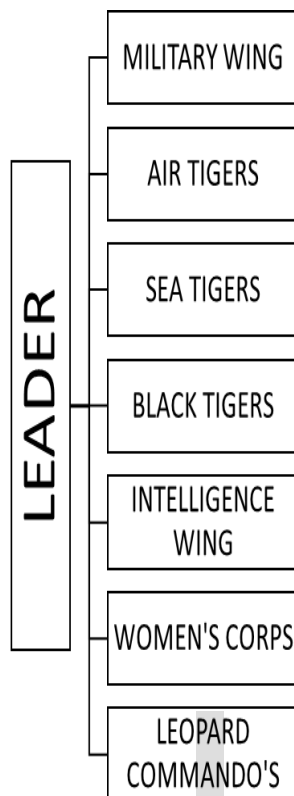
LTTE was accepted by the public due to the social activities it undertook in the Tamil area (Arena and Arrigo, 2006).

In 1983, The LTTE organized an armed attack to Sri Lanka's army force convoy and killed 13 soldiers after the attack. In 1983 the organization began to take control of the northern regions, where the majority of Tamils were. In the following years, necessary systems for the state such as army, education, administration and banking were formed within the controlled regions (lindey, 2009).

In 2006, the anti-LTTE coalition came into power. This coalition included Sri Lanka Freedom Party, People's Liberation Front and National Heritage Part. Muslim leaders also supported the coalition. In 2006, the government began to work to end the LTTE completely. In 2007, Sri Lankan army captured completely eastern regions of Sri Lanka (Bajoria, 2009). In 2009, the government announced that the LTTE had been completely dissolved and also its leader had been killed.

Structure of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

TABLE 1



Until 2006, the LTTE is estimated to have 25,000 militants. Apart from this number of militants there are many heavy weapons in military wing (Arena and Arrigo, 2006). Land forces and leading staff organized in the form of rescued regions in each village. The LTTE had an effective naval force. For a long time, The LTTE had been controlling the island's northern coasts, thanks to the naval forces. The LTTE naval forces had many marine vessels that a state should have. It is estimated that the LTTE's naval forces had 3000 or 4000 personnel (Davis, 2005). Navy personnel had good knowledge about the maritime environment. They were very experienced in marine-based operations (Davis, 2005). The LTTE naval force was very skilled in the secret and surprise attacks against ships. There was also a suicide squad in the Navy force. These teams organized suicide attack with

bombs on targets set at sea (Jackson and Chalk, 2007). The ships of these teams were made fiberglass to speed up and avoid being caught to the radar (Jackson and Chalk, 2007). The attacks of these naval suicide teams were as effective as the Black Tigers.

Another important unit of the LTTE was air Tigers. According to the Sri Lankan defense ministry, the LTTE had 11 airplanes in 2008 and until 2006 LTTE had lost 52 planes (Jackson and Chalk, 2007). Air tigers were used to destroy the Sri Lankan government's oil refineries and to neutralize Sri Lanka's airports. The helicopters in the air force were also used for transportation.

The most remarkable feature of the LTTE is the suicide attacks. This feature is very popular topic in international relations. Black Tigers is the main suicide wing of the LTTE. Black Tigers is the unit that organizes the remarkable suicide actions of the LTTE. It is estimated that Black Tigers have approximately 350 militants. This unit has three major attack targets (Bajoria, 2009). The first target was the personnel and residential areas of the Sri Lanka army forces during the war. The second target was critical infrastructure facilities, religious buildings and banks. The third target was politicians, senior government officials and high-ranking military and police officers. The LTTE gave great importance to the education of Black Tigers. The highest level of training within the LTTE was given to Black Tigers. The training of Black Tigers varies between 9 and 12 months (Jackson and Chalk, 2007). These trainings were physical, psycho-

logical and mission-oriented. Throughout the training process, a new identity was given to those who participated in the training, and they were separated from other LTTE members. At the end of these trainings, They were organized their suicide bomb actions on targets set (Davis, 2005).

In the Black Tigers unit there are many women militants (Bloom, 2007). According to Yoram Schweitzer (2006), over 220 of the suicide bombings between 1985 and 2006 were organized by women. Much of this has been organized by LTTE's female militants (Bloom, 2007). The scholars think that the LTTE used female suicide bombers for two reasons (Zedalis, 2004). The first reason is tactical. The second reason is strategic. According to these two reasons, the actions of women bombers attract more attention in the media. Similarly, actions organized by women bombers attract more public attention and also women are less suspicious (Bloom, 2007).

Apart from Black Tigers, the LTTE has many female militants. LTTE used women militants effectively. Many women in the LTTE served effectively. Women are also included in the managerial and combat staff in the LTTE (Dissanayake, 2017). Two elements of female membership are "emancipation" and "empowerment" (Dissanayake, 2017).

Since the year it was established, women militants had participated LTTE. But in the early years, the role of women was more supportive. In the following years, the role of women became more active. Five members of the 12-member central committee are

women.

In 1983, the LTTE's Women's wing, Women's Front of the Liberation Tigers, was established. This wing is also known as "Birds of Freedom" (Chawade, 2016). In 1989, LTTE's first female brigade Sothiya was established. Women's brigades have anti-tank, anti-aircraft and heavy weapon units (Ann, 1993). "Birds of Freedom" has women's freedom and feminism ideology. "Birds of Freedom" tried to fight against gender discrimination and integrate women into the society. Likewise, the LTTE had been using women in the Black Tiger unit since 1997. Approximately 40% of the LTTE's organized bombed actions were organized by women (Zedalis, 2007). In this way, the LTTE institutionalizes women's suicide attacks and exemplifies other terrorist organizations (Ann, 1993).

Conclusion

Sri Lanka faced many problems from the colonial period after independence. One of these problems and the biggest was the ethnic conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese. This ethnic problem started a conflict process in Sri Lanka through long ages.

One of the most important elements in the formation of the identities of Sinhalese and Tamil peoples was religion. Another reasons of the conflict was the model of the nation state that was desired to be formed after independence. The Sri Lankan government tried to create a homogeneous society and this policy encountered resistance of Tamils people. The

Sri Lankan government used force for the process of creating homogeneous society, and against this force, the Tamils had to establish a resistance organization to protect themselves. For this purpose, many armed organizations were established. One of them was LTTE.

The LTTE is an organization that aimed the Tamil region independence and adopted the Marxist ideology. Within years, first, LTTE provided the social control in the North, and in the advancing years, it fully controlled the north of the island. Years of conflict ended with the Sri Lankan army winning an absolute victory against the LTTE in 2009.

However, this does not mean that the Tamil problem has been completely solved in Sri Lanka. The political, economic and social causes of the conflict still continue today.

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