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REJOINDER TO KRISTIAN STOKKE – A LONG DISTANCE PROPAGANDIST**

MUTTUKRISHNA SARYANANTHAN

SPECIAL ISSUE

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*In Pursuit of a Mythical State of Tamil Eelam
Rejoinder to Kristian Stokke – A Long Distance Propagandist*

Muttukrishna Sarvananthan

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*Point Pedro Institute of Development
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Abstract

This is a rejoinder to an article written by Kristian Stokke and published in the TamilNet in February 2006 which is euphorically titled “Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institutions and Forms of Governance in LTTE-controlled Areas in Sri Lanka”. The author’s critique of Kristian Stokke’s article is two fold: one is on the process of undertaking research for his article and the second is on glaring factual inaccuracies on which his article is tenuously based.

It is necessary to distinguish clearly between sabotage, a revolutionary and highly effective method of warfare, and terrorism, a measure that is generally ineffective and indiscriminate in its results, since it often makes victims of innocent people and destroys a large number of lives that would be valuable to the revolution. (Guevara 1985: 62-63) Sabotage has nothing to do with terrorism; terrorism and personal assaults are entirely different tactics. We sincerely believe that terrorism is of negative value, that it by no means produces the desired effects, that it can turn a people against a revolutionary movement, and that it can bring a loss of lives to its agents out of proportion to what it produces. (Guevara, 1985: 140)

1. Introduction¹

This is a rejoinder to an article written by Kristian Stokke² and published in the TamilNet³ in February 2006 which is euphorically titled “Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institutions and Forms of Governance in LTTE-controlled Areas in Sri Lanka”⁴. The author’s critique of Kristian Stokke’s article is two fold: one is on the process of undertaking research for his article and the second is on glaring factual inaccuracies on which his article is tenuously based.

Firstly, field research (interviews) for the article by Kristian Stokke (2006) was undertaken with ONLY the LTTE and its affiliated institutions such as the LTTE Peace Secretariat, Planning and Development Secretariat (PDS), Secretariat for Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs in the North and East (SIHRN)⁵, Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), North-East Secretariat on Human Rights (NESOHR), Tamil Eelam Police, LTTE Special Task Force for Tsunami-affected areas, and The Economic Consultancy House (TECH)⁶. Moreover, most of the secondary information used in the article are from TamilNet, a website sponsored by the LTTE churning out untruths, half-truths & blatant lies, and hence contentious. Due to the foregoing reasons his article is inherently partisan. When one undertakes research on “State Institutions” and “Governance” it is imperative to talk to the patrons of such state institutions and government, namely the people, in addition to the representatives of those institutions and structures to get a balanced view. By ONLY interviewing the personnel of the LTTE and aligned institutions Kristian Stokke has connived to suppress the truth and objectivity, which is unbecoming for a Professor.

Secondly, as a consequence of interviewing only the LTTE and aligned personnel, Kristian Stokke’s article suffers from several glaring factual inaccuracies, which again undermine the credibility of the arguments based on such inaccurate information and

¹ Corrections, comments, and suggestions are welcome to sarvi@slt.lk

² Professor of Human Geography at the University of Oslo in Norway.

³ An Internet based propaganda organ of the LTTE.

⁴ <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=17291>

⁵ Although SIHRN was set up as a bipartisan institution between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) it was headed by an LTTE appointee and is now defunct.

⁶ Although TECH claims to be independent, in reality it is not so.

qualitative data. Despite based on a conceptual framework of core state functions, Kristian Stokke's article totally lacks objective assessment of LTTE's "state building efforts" because it rests on partisan (and often false) empirical evidence. In short, it is a craftily written propaganda material masquerading as a scholarly article.

2. Areas and population under the LTTE: facts and fiction

There is much ignorance and even confusion about the physical size and population of LTTE-controlled areas. Even in learned discourses there is total lack of knowledge of factual information on these matters. This ignorance and confusion is worst among non-Sri Lankans who get involved (one way or the other) in the protracted ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Therefore, first and foremost let us check the facts.

According to our estimation, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) controls only 44% of the total physical area of the North-East Province⁷ (including inland water). Besides, bulk of the LTTE-controlled area is covered by jungles, and the rest rural. There are no municipal or urban councils in LTTE-controlled areas, only town and village councils. LTTE has total control of just two administrative districts out of the eight administrative districts in the North-East Province. According to our estimation total area under LTTE-control is just over 8,000 square kilometres while the total area of North-East Province is nearly 19,000 square kilometres (see Table 1). However, in terms of the Memorandum of Understanding⁸ (MoU) signed between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE on February 22, 2002 the total area under LTTE-control is only about 6,000 square kilometres, which is only 32% of the total physical area of the North-East Province.

There is a regional difference in the areas under LTTE-control. Thus, the LTTE controls almost 62% (circa 5,500 square kilometres) of the total area of the Northern Province (circa 9,000 sq kms), while it controls less than 28% (circa 3,000 sq kms) of the total area of the Eastern Province (circa 10,000 sq kms) (see Table 1). District-wise breakdown is given in Table 1. It is very important to note that even before the eruption of the civil war in the early-1980s Sri Lankan government was not in full control of vast areas of Mannar and Mullaitivu districts because over 70% of those districts were covered by jungles, and therefore was effectively no person's land. It is the same situation now. Thus, though the LTTE claims to control those areas, in effect bulk of it remains no person's land.

The foregoing data reveal that LTTE does not even nominally control majority (i.e. over 50%) of the geographical area of the North-East Province. In this circumstance, Kristian Stokke's (2006: 2) claim that "LTTE is currently in full control of large

⁷ The Eastern (comprising three administrative districts) and Northern (comprising five administrative districts) Provinces were temporarily merged in terms of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord signed in July 1987 between the GoSL and the GoI (Government of India). A referendum was supposed to take place in the Eastern Province to determine whether the people of Eastern Province want this merger to be permanent, but it has not materialised to date as a result of protracted conflict.

⁸ Also known as (aka) Cease Fire Agreement (CFA).

areas, especially in northern Sri Lanka” is a myth. Even more tenuous is Kristian Stokke’s (2006: 20-23) claim of representational role of the LTTE in an “emerging state”. This would be abundantly clear when we look at the number of people living in LTTE-controlled areas in the North-East.

Reliable population data of the LTTE-controlled areas is unavailable because LTTE has not allowed the GoSL to undertake a census in 2001. Nevertheless according to our estimation only 20% of the total population of North-East Province lives in LTTE-controlled areas. That is, out of the total provincial population of 2.64 million only 0.54 million lives in LTTE-controlled areas (see Table 1). This is not surprising because the present LTTE-controlled areas have been historically sparsely populated jungle and rural areas. In fact, population in the present LTTE-controlled areas has considerably increased during the past 25 years of civil war compared to past population trends in those areas.

Again there is a stark difference in the regional dispersion of population living in LTTE-controlled areas. Thus, while 34% (378,000) of the total population of the Northern Province (1.10 million) lives in LTTE-controlled areas it is only 10% (160,000) in the Eastern Province (1.54 million) (see Table 1). District-wise breakdown of population living in LTTE-controlled areas is given in Table 1. Of course there are LTTE supporters living in government-controlled areas of the North-East as well (albeit only a minority). In the same way not the entire population in LTTE-controlled areas is supportive of the LTTE (although majority is).

Hence, empirical evidence does not lend support to Kristian Stokke’s adulation of the LTTE’s representational role in the LTTE-controlled areas in particular, and in the North-East Province in general. The author is unable to determine whether Kristian Stokke’s failure to check the facts is simply oversight or purposefully deliberate. Such weaknesses in his article are a result of inherent weakness in the process of conducting research alluded at the outset of this rejoinder. According to Kristian Stokke (2006: 1) the purpose of his article “----is to address this knowledge gap in regard to the emerging state in North-East Sri Lanka”. By now the readers of this rejoinder would be able to determine that the actual knowledge gap is with none other than Kristian Stokke. When the author of the article himself lacks adequate knowledge and factual evidence how can he contribute to addressing the knowledge gap of the readers of his article?

Table 1: Areas and Population under the Rebels in Sri Lanka

District/ Province	Area (Square Kilometres)			Population in 2004 (Numbers)		
	Total	Under LTTE	LTTE / Total (%)	Total	Under LTTE	LTTE / Total (%)
Ampara (a)	4,431	1,000	23 %	613,000	30,000	5 %
Batticaloa (b)	2,633	1,000	38 %	544,000	100,000	18 %
Trincomalee (c)	2,729	700	26 %	383,000	30,000	8 %
EAST	9,793	2,700	28 %	1,540,000	160,000	10 %
Jaffna (d)	1,023	100	10 %	596,000	50,000	8 %
Kilinochchi (e)	1,237	1,237	100 %	143,000	143,000	100 %
Mannar (f)	2,002	1,000	50 %	97,000	30,000	31 %
Mullaitivu (g)	2,617	2,617	100 %	125,000	125,000	100 %
Vavuniya (h)	1,967	500	25 %	142,000	30,000	21 %
NORTH	8,846	5,454	62 %	1,103,000	378,000	34 %
North-East	18,640	8,154	44 %	2,643,000	538,000	20 %
SRI LANKA	65,610	8,154	12 %	19,443,000	538,000	3 %

Source: (i) North East Provincial Council, *Statistical Information 2005*, Provincial Planning Secretariat, Trincomalee, pp1.

(ii) Central Bank of Sri Lanka, *Annual Report 2004*, Statistical Appendix Table 55, Colombo.

Note: (i) Figures for Northern districts are estimates from past trends because Census of Population could not be undertaken since 1981.

(ii) All figures are rounded up to the nearest full numbers.

(iii) Mullaitivu district population as given in the Central Bank report is 144,000, which would be an overestimation because it cannot be higher than Vavuniya or Kilinochchi district populations.

(a) In Ampara district Tamils account for 19% of the total district population (Muslims 42% and Sinhalese 39%).

(b) In Batticaloa district Tamils represent 74% of the total district population (Muslims 24% and Sinhalese/Burghers 2%).

(c) In Trincomalee district Tamils represent 32% of the total district population (Muslims 36% and Sinhalese 32%).

(d) In Jaffna district Tamils represent 99% of the total district population. This is because Muslims in the district were forcibly evicted by the LTTE in 1990. Prior to that 88% of the district population was Tamil, 10% Muslim, and 2% Sinhalese.

(e) In Kilinochchi district Tamils represent almost 100% of the total district population.

(f) In Mannar district Tamils represent 85% of the total district population (Muslims 12% and Sinhalese 3%). This is because Muslims in the district were forcibly evicted by the LTTE in 1990. Prior to that only 70% of the district population was Tamil (25% Muslims and 5% Sinhalese). But majority of Tamils in the district are Christians by religion. Mannar is the only Christian majority district in Sri Lanka.

(g) In Mullaitivu district Tamils represent more than 95% of the total district population.

(h) In Vavuniya district Tamils represent 75% of the total district population. Sinhalese 18% Muslims 7%.

3. Core functions of modern state: security, welfare, and representation

According to Kristian Stokke, LTTE provides security, welfare, and representation to the people under its jurisdiction, which are the core functions of any modern state. However, he cautions, “in the case of the emerging LTTE state there is clearly an overarching emphasis on the question of security, but this has gradually been supplemented with an additional focus on welfare and economic development” (Stokke, 2006: 5).

It is true that the Sri Lankan state has failed to provide adequate security, welfare, and representation to the minority communities, particularly to the Tamils in the North-East. In spite of the inherent weaknesses of an over-centralised Sri Lankan state and faltering liberal democracy the alternative for the Tamil minority community is not the rule of an unaccountable, corrupt, and autocratic entity such as the LTTE. The Tamil community is more optimistic about transforming the Sri Lankan state (from unitary/Buddhist to federal/secular) than transforming the LTTE (from autocracy to democracy).

3.1 Security

Kristian Stokke (2006: 8-10) claims that LTTE’s police force and the judiciary play the role of providing security to the people living under its jurisdiction. According to him the primary function of the LTTE police and judiciary is to provide internal and external security. Citing LTTE sources he also claims low crime rates in LTTE-controlled areas, for which he does not provide any statistical evidence; naturally because, being a propaganda article he does not need any evidence. He just believes what the police and judicial chiefs of the LTTE and the TamilNet say. But, if he was able to do an independent field research in the Wann⁹ he would have realised whether his claim is factually correct, and if so why there is low rate of crime (see Sarvananthan, 2003: 10).

It is true that the Sri Lankan state subverted the rule of law, through the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) for example, as stated by Kristian Stokke. However, Tamils were able to challenge the excesses committed by the state security forces under the PTA by appealing to higher courts of law or the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka. Under the jungle laws of the LTTE in the Wann, Tamils living there cannot mutter a word against the irrationality, arbitrariness, and excesses of the security apparatus of the LTTE. In this context Tamils feel safer under the Sri Lankan law enforcement agencies and judicial system than the jungle laws of the Wann.

Every time LTTE detonates claymore mines against the state security forces and when the latter retaliate against the civilians there is no LTTE cadres around to provide security to the Tamil people. Because, by that time the LTTE cadres who had detonated the claymore mines are in their safe heaven, the Wann jungles. Or

⁹ Wann is a generic term for the four mainland districts of the Northern Province, namely Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu, and Vavuniya administrative districts. Other district of the Northern Province, namely Jaffna (where more than half the Northern population lives), is a peninsula.

whenever there is a violent act (including claymore mine attack) in LTTE-controlled area in the East or North it is blamed on the paramilitaries and the deep penetrating unit of the state security forces. It appears that it is convenient for the LTTE to put the blame on the enemy as an excuse for the lapse in maintaining internal security in the areas under its control.

Presently (April 2006) the LTTE is begging the government to provide safe passage to its Eastern military and political leadership to visit the Wannai for consultation with the leader of the LTTE prior to the proposed peace talks in Geneva between the GoSL and the LTTE. Could the LTTE that is unable to provide security to its own senior cadres provide security to ordinary civilians living under its jurisdiction or in government-controlled areas in the North-East?

Kristian Stokke (2006: 9) asserts that the LTTE “courts are known to be effective so that people who have a choice often take their claims to the Tamil Eelam courts rather than the Sri Lankan courts”. He goes on “despite their relative youth, the judges seem to be perceived by the public as professional” (ibid). Naturally, he has not provided any concrete evidence to substantiate the foregoing assertions. A recent US State Department report reveals that majority of the personnel in the judiciary of the LTTE have not even completed secondary level schooling successfully (see also Sarvananthan, 2003: 9). Besides, crime and corruption are rife in the North-East including LTTE-controlled areas (Sarvananthan, 2003: 11; Sarvananthan, 2005: 3-5).

3.2 Welfare

Kristian Stokke (2006) further claims that TRO & TECH (humanitarian organisations), and education & health divisions of the LTTE undertake welfare functions of the emerging Tamil Eelam state in LTTE-controlled areas. According to Kristian Stokke (2006: 11), the education and health divisions of the LTTE “provide certain basic services to the civilian population but also function as a check on public services provided by the Sri Lankan state”. As before he has not revealed what these “certain basic services” are, simply because he does not know or has not seen any. He has just written what the members of the LTTE have told him or the TamilNet has published online. Nor has Kristian Stokke provided any concrete evidence for the welfare functions of these institutions, amount of money they spend on such welfare functions, and the sources of such money. Is this the way to conduct scholarly research?

It is true that there are dual structures in LTTE-controlled areas of the North-East. There are educational and health services of the GoSL and corresponding arms of the LTTE. But the primary function of the LTTE-arms of these social sectors is to interfere in the services provided by the Sri Lankan state. These interferences include coercing the state services to provide employment to family members of their cadres and martyrs and steal goods from these government welfare services. Whatever little health and educational services the LTTE provides directly are to its own cadres and disabled fighters, and NOT to the general public living in areas under its control. However, while the Sri Lankan state hospitals and healthcare centres provide totally

free service to all (general public, LTTE cadres, government public servants, local, national, and international staff of the donor community based in those areas), LTTE runs private hospitals (Ponnambalam Memorial Hospitals) and healthcare services (Thileepan Memorial Health Clinics) for the general public who have to pay to obtain those services irrespective of whether they can afford or not.

Further, spouses of the senior members of the LTTE work as healthcare workers, administrative, clerical, and manual workers in government healthcare institutions in the LTTE-controlled areas and draw salary from the very same state against which they are waging a war. Similarly, family members of the LTTE cadres and martyrs are forced into the state education system (schools, non-formal education institutions, technical colleges, etc) as volunteer and regular teachers, administrative, clerical, and elementary staff.

When the LTTE is unable to provide employment to spouses and family members of cadres and martyrs in its own “emerging state” institutions how can they provide employment and welfare services to the general public? If the LTTE indeed has effective parallel health, education, and humanitarian welfare services why should it allow the Sri Lankan state schools, hospitals & health care centres, and district and sub-district administrative offices to function in areas under its control? If the LTTE could chase out Sri Lankan state police and judicial courts from areas under its control what prevents them from chasing out health and educational institutions of the government?

It is imperative to point out that during the time of war and the present ceasefire time it is the government, national & international non-governmental organisations, and bilateral & multilateral donor agencies that provided the entire humanitarian needs of the civilian population living in LTTE-controlled areas despite stealing by the LTTE. The role of Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organisation (TEEDO), TRO or TECH in humanitarian assistance (from LTTE’s own funds) is marginal and not worthy of mention.

It is true that government public servants working in LTTE-controlled areas are caught between two authorities, namely the line ministry at the centre and the administrative unit of the LTTE, and they normally tend to follow the directions of the latter. This is not due to “the fact that many Tamil government servants identify themselves with Tamil nationalism” and thereby the authority of the LTTE as claimed by Kristian Stokke (2006: 13). Instead, the government public servants working in LTTE-controlled areas follow the directions of the LTTE because of fear. LTTE’s jungle justice is such that if government public servants do not adhere to the commands of the LTTE they will be harassed or even killed. The shooting of Batticaloa District Secretary (aka Government Agent) in 2004 and killing of a Divisional Secretary in Thirukovil (Ampara district) in 2005 stands testimony to the jungle justice of the LTTE. Mind you, these two incidences happened in government-controlled areas of the North-East. Then one can imagine what would happen to public servants working in LTTE-controlled areas should they defy the orders of the LTTE.

Kristian Stokke (2006: 13-14) also claims that “-----North-East is generally seen as under-serviced in both health and education” and citing the TamilNet further claims “-----the current lack of government services are seen as a reminder of the biased distribution of state resources in Sri Lanka”. It is true that the public health and education services are under-serviced in the North-East, particularly in terms of human resources. However, this is not because of deliberate discrimination by the GoSL; but due to the reluctance of Tamil healthcare and educational professionals to work in the North-East, particularly in LTTE-controlled areas, as a result of the jungle laws in force in those areas (see Sarvananthan, 2003: 8).

In fact, it is the LTTE that discriminates in the distribution of public goods and services to the people living in the areas under its control. The LTTE often diverts goods and services (provided by the government to the general public) to the families of its cadres, martyrs, and supporters. The criterion employed by the LTTE for selection of recipients of welfare goods and services (provided by the GoSL, NGOs/INGOs, and bilateral/multilateral donor agencies) is loyalty to the cause of the LTTE (and its leader) rather than the needs of the population (see Sarvananthan, 2005: 3-4 for further details). In pursuance of this criterion they force the local government servants to provide employment to their nominees who often do not have the necessary qualifications for the recommended posts. In this way it is the LTTE that subverts the quality of public services (particularly health and education) in areas under its control.

Kristian Stokke (2006: 15) says SIHRN was “crippled due to the unresolved legal status in regard to receiving and disbursing development funds”. This is far from the truth. In fact, the GoSL and the LTTE agreed to set up a North East Reconstruction Fund (NERF) by the World Bank, which agreed to be the custodian of the proposed fund (Goodhand 2005: 81). It is the LTTE that pulled out of all agreements reached with the GoSL previously and abandoned the formal peace talks in April 2003.

Another academic writer, Jonathan Goodhand (2005: 48), regards LTTE extortion/taxation as “primitive accumulation” needed to run a parallel administration in areas under its control. He further asserts that once alternative sources of funding are assured to the LTTE it would do away with this primitive accumulation. If the LTTE spends its tax/customs revenue for providing social and economic services to the people under its jurisdiction we would agree with this primitive accumulation argument. However, to the best of our knowledge, LTTE spends the revenue from illegal extortion/taxation on weaponry and military preparedness, on luxury vehicles for its senior leaders, on higher education of children of senior leaders abroad, on the families of its cadres & martyrs, etc, and not a cent on the general public living in areas under its control. In this reality it is a pipe dream to expect LTTE to give up its “primitive accumulation” once legitimate sources of funding are assured.

The Tamil nationalist struggle in Sri Lanka was centered on the centralised nature of the Sri Lankan state. Ironically, LTTE regime in the areas under its control is even more centralised than the Sri Lankan state. This is the major reason for breakaway of the Eastern Command of the LTTE led by Vinayagamoorthy Muralidharan (alias

Karuna). LTTE's so-called welfare functions are submerged into its security apparatus (military wing) and not "partnership arrangements" as claimed by Kristian Stokke (2006: 20). Since LTTE's administrative (including PDS), education, and health divisions cannot obtain government and donor funds directly they partner with local, national, and international NGOs to circumvent the legal hurdle in order to steal government and donor funds. Most of such partner NGOs are front organisations of the LTTE. Therefore, not only the Sri Lankan state but also the LTTE that need to decentralise its governance structures.

3.3 Representation

In the past four years of ceasefire LTTE has not been able to mobilize the masses for public rallies or political meetings either in the areas under its control or in the government-controlled areas. Whenever the LTTE organised protest marches in the North-East it always forced school children in uniform, teacher training college students in uniform, technical college students, and university students to join in. There were very little voluntary participation in LTTE-instigated protest marches and rallies. This again shows the unrepresentative nature of the LTTE, and that it does not qualify as a liberation movement. If the LTTE is a genuine movement of freedom fighters there is no need to force school children in uniform or other civilians to join non-violent forms of protest. In typical liberation struggles people join in such non-violent forms of protest spontaneously and voluntarily. It is a disgrace for the self-proclaimed sole representative of the Tamils in the North-East that even after 30 years of existence¹⁰ it is unable to mobilise popular support for its 'cause', which is establishment of a separate Tamil Eelam state in the North-East Province of the country.

Moreover, LTTE could have made use of the four-year old ceasefire to seek representation in local and provincial councils, if not in the national legislature (Parliament), so as to demonstrate its popular support both nationally and internationally. Although it claims not to have made use of the opportunity to legitimise its claim to be the sole representative of the Tamils because it would have amounted to acceptance of the present governance structures in the North-East and the Constitution of Sri Lanka, the real reason for LTTE shunning away from representation is the fear of revealing its low standing among the population in the North-East, particularly among the Tamils.

At the parliamentary elections in 1977 the Tamil democratic political party, namely the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), campaigned for establishing a separate state of Tamil Eelam in the North-East part of Sri Lanka. It is true that the Tamil people of the North-East overwhelmingly voted for the TULF in 1977, and thereby for the establishment of a separate state of Tamil Eelam. However, that popular mandate was to the TULF, which espoused the cause of a separate state by non-violent democratic means. The LTTE or any other Tamil militant or political group cannot hijack this popular mandate given to the TULF.

¹⁰ LTTE was formally established on May 05th 1976.

Kristian Stokke (2006: 21) asserts (albeit indirectly) that the popular mandate for a separate state given by the Tamil people in the North-East in 1977 has been reinforced by the results of the April 2004 parliamentary elections, which was won by the Tamil National Alliance¹¹ (TNA) – the proxy Tamil political coalition of the LTTE. Firstly, the European Union election monitors of the 2004 parliamentary elections had categorically stated that the elections in the North-East were NOT free and fair. There were widespread intimidation, impersonation, and stuffing of ballot boxes by the LTTE cadres and their supporters throughout the North-East. Therefore, 2004 elections cannot be taken as a referendum on the cause of the LTTE unlike the 1977 elections when the TULF got a reasonable mandate (50% of the total valid votes cast in the North-East).

Secondly, even with such violent intimidations and malpractices the results of the elections were not unambiguously in favour of the TNA because of low turnout in the North (see Table 2). For example, in Jaffna (the most populous electoral district in the North)¹² the voter turnout was just 47% whereas historically it has been more than 80%¹³. Similarly in the Wannu electoral district¹⁴ the voter turnout was 67% whereas historically it has been higher than 80%¹⁵. Hence, it could be inferred that people who refrained from voting in the North did not agree with the policies of the LTTE and its proxy TNA party.

Overall, throughout the North-East only 52% of the total valid votes cast were to the TNA in spite of widespread impersonation and stuffing of ballot boxes. Moreover, TNA received only 36% of the total registered votes. Besides, the share of TNA votes was also lower than the share of Tamils in the total population of the North-East, which is 62% (see Table 2). These results hardly qualify the LTTE to be the authentic or sole representative of the Tamils in the North-East. Furthermore, 36% of the total registered votes received by the TNA in 2004 were lower than 42% of the total registered votes received by the TULF in the 1977 parliamentary elections. However, the share of TNA votes as a proportion of the total valid votes cast in 2004 (52%) is marginally higher than that received by the TULF in 1977 (50%) (see Table 2; Silva, 1981: 222-3).

Kristian Stokke (2004: 21) also claims that LTTE holds “regular consultation” with the TNA. The meetings LTTE holds with TNA are not consultations, rather coercion to speak and do what the LTTE hierarchy tells.

¹¹ Tamil National Alliance is a coalition of former Tamil militant groups (who were rivals of the LTTE) and the two traditional Tamil democratic parties, namely the Tamil Congress and the breakaway group of the TULF).

¹² Jaffna electoral district incorporates Jaffna and Kilinochchi administrative districts.

¹³ It was 81% in the 1977 elections.

¹⁴ Includes Mannar, Mullaitivu, and Vavuniya administrative districts.

¹⁵ It was 85% in the 1977 elections.

Table 2: Parliamentary Elections 2004 Results in the North-East of Sri Lanka

District	Ampara	Batticaloa	Trincomalee	Jaffna	Wanni	Total
Total registered voters	379,044	303,928	224,307	644,279	226,604	1,778,162
Total polled	308,625	254,023	191,657	305,259	151,003	1,210,567
Invalid votes	18,264 (6 %)	12,648 (5 %)	8,863 (5 %)	21,233 (7 %)	10,626 (7 %)	71,634 (6 %)
Total polled as a share of the total registered voters	81 %	84 %	85 %	47 %	67 %	68 %
TNA votes	55,533	161,011	68,955	257,320	90,835	633,654
TNA votes as a share of the total valid votes cast	19 %	67 %	38 %	91 %	65 %	52 %
TNA votes as a share of the total registered voters	15 %	53 %	31 %	40 %	40 %	36 %
Share of the Tamil population in the district	19 %	74 %	32 %	98 %	85 %	62%

Source: Elections Secretariat, Colombo.

Note: Jaffna electoral district includes Kilinochchi and Jaffna administrative districts.

Wanni electoral district includes Mannar, Mullaitivu & Vavuniya administrative districts.

4. Freedom fighters versus terrorists

Kristian Stokke (2006: 1) extols about the “ongoing political transformations within the LTTE”¹⁶. This is the most blatant lie I have read in academic writings on the LTTE in recent times. In the past four years of nominal ceasefire there is not an iota of evidence in the deeds (as opposed to words) of the LTTE towards political transformation. Recent incidences unambiguously demonstrate LTTE’s pathological thirst for unbridled violence (see Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission reports)¹⁷. Tamil people view LTTE’s interest and interference in administrative, social, and economic matters in the North-East during the past four years of ceasefire as tightening its stranglehold on the North-East community, particularly the Tamils, rather than political transformation for better. Kristian Stokke may attempt to fool the Norwegian government & people and the international community (in general) about the so-called political transformation of the LTTE, but we can assure him that the Tamil community of the North-East Sri Lanka will not buy his humbug.

There is a growing interest in the distinction between ‘freedom fighters’ and ‘terrorists’ in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks in the United States in 2001 (for example see *Third World Quarterly*, 2005: passim; Policzer, 2005). Kristian Stokke (2006: 1) tends to regard the LTTE as a movement of freedom fighters in the same way as the African National Congress (ANC). In fact, his article begins with a preamble by Desmond Tutu. The epistemology of ‘freedom fighters’ and ‘terrorists’ can be traced to Lenin’s extensive writings on the national question, right to self-determination & liberation movements, and Ernesto Che Guevara’s distinction between revolutionary

¹⁶ This view is also shared to a limited extent by Jonathan Goodhand (2005).

¹⁷ <http://www.slmml.org/OperationsMatter/complaints/Accumulated.pdf>

and terrorist tactics in guerilla warfare. The author does not want to delve into this debate too much in this rejoinder. Nevertheless, a short response to Kristian Stokke (2006: 1) is necessary and desirable.

According to the author of this rejoinder basic distinction between liberation struggles and terrorism rests with different means of achieving an end. Although both, liberation struggles and terrorist struggles, may head towards the same end, it is how (or the means by which) you arrive at the predetermined end what distinguishes between the two. Liberation struggles may involve both armed violent and non-violent struggles. Besides, liberation struggles are waged against the state security forces or armed opposition groups and not against unarmed civilians, and therefore majority of the casualties are armed combatants. In the case of terrorist struggles armed violence dominates the struggle with very little or no role for non-violent protests or democratic discourse. Besides, in terrorist struggles often majority of victims are unarmed civilians rather than armed combatants. Furthermore, liberation movements target the enemy armed forces/groups or civilian collaborators with the enemy armed forces/groups, whereas terrorist movements target not only the foregoing but also unarmed civilians (including intellectuals) who do not agree with their means of achieving the ultimate goal.

For example, LTTE's attack on the Katunayake International Airport in July 2001 is an act of a liberation movement because it was an economic sabotage, and more importantly there was no civilian casualty at all in that operation. Only a couple of air force personnel and suicide bombers of the LTTE (all combatants) were killed in the entire operation. Major damage was to the civilian aircrafts of the Sri Lankan Airlines, and helicopters & fighter jets of the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF). On the other hand suicide truck bombing of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka in January 1996 is a terrorist act because of the death of over 100 unarmed civilians in that operation despite being an act of economic sabotage as the case of the airport attack.

In the real world all liberation struggles and terrorist struggles would have a combination of both legitimate acts of violence and terrorist acts. Nonetheless, whilst legitimate acts of violence are predominant and terrorist acts are sporadic in liberation struggles, in terrorist struggles terror acts are predominant. Based on this distinction the author would regard the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of Southern Sudan as freedom movements, but not the LTTE of Sri Lanka.

This is because in the armed conflict in Sri Lanka majority of the victims have been civilians¹⁸. In fact, anecdotal evidence suggests that LTTE has killed more civilians (from all three communities, namely Tamils, Sinhalese, and Muslims) than the armed forces personnel though numbers are unavailable. Further, LTTE has killed more Tamils than the state security forces, particularly in internecine war among various Tamil militant groups since 1985 to date. The African National Congress (ANC), Pan

¹⁸ LTTE claims to have lost almost 18,000 of its cadres and the government claims to have lost almost 14,000 security forces personnel out of a total of nearly 70,000 loss of lives in the 25 years of armed conflict in Sri Lanka.

Africanist Congress (PAC), and the Inkatha Freedom Party existed side by side during their struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa. The ANC did not attempt to eliminate PAC or Inkatha and claim to be the authentic or sole representative of the black people like the LTTE, which has proscribed all other Tamil militant groups and continue to hunt them down and has forcibly liquidated all Tamil democratic political parties, except the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF).

Liberation movements or freedom fighters have no necessity to indulge in terrorist activities because they would have the backing of the masses to wage non-violent struggles. Only the armed militant groups that do not have popular support have the necessity to indulge in terrorist activities such as suicide bombings and hit and run attacks, which are hallmarks of the LTTE. By indulging in suicide bombings and hit and run attacks these groups provoke a backlash against the civilians by the state security forces and/or civilians from the opposition, and thereby seek sympathy and support for their cause within and outside their communities (particularly internationally).

Hence, militant groups resorting to suicide bombings and hit and run attacks are devoid of popular support and are in desperation to shore up their fledging support base. Recent attacks (since December 2005) by the LTTE on state security forces in the North-East stand testimony to this fact, because all such attacks were undertaken in the presence of considerable number of unarmed civilians. If the LTTE wanted to take on the state security forces they could have chosen isolated places where civilian presence would have been nil or very minimal. They typically choose urban areas to mount claymore mine attacks on the state security forces in order to raise civilian casualties. The fact that LTTE still relies on hit and run guerilla warfare and suicide bombings, even after 30 years of existence, is testimony to its backwardness in the course of liberation of the people whom it purport to solely represent. It appears that LTTE still remains a terrorist organisation like the IRA (Northern Ireland) or ETA (Spain) rather than graduating into a liberation movement like the SPLA (Southern Sudan).

Moreover, all armed militant groups using child combatants (including the LTTE) lack popular support for their 'cause'. If these armed groups have popular support among the masses that they claim to represent there would be sufficient adults to join their ranks to fight for the cause (like in Palestine or Southern Sudan). It is only those groups that cannot convince the adults about the legitimacy or justification of the means of their struggle are forced to recruit (either voluntarily or involuntarily) children because they can be easily brainwashed. Therefore, one of the criteria that could be used to distinguish between 'freedom fighters' and 'terrorists' is whether or not armed groups recruit children to fight a war.

In this background Kristian Stokke's (2006: 1) attempt to draw parallel between the ANC and the LTTE is ludicrous (to say the least), and similar to equating the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) with Al Qaeda. It appears that Kristian Stokke does not understand the distinction between statesmen/women (like Nelson Mandela) and megalomaniacs (like Osama Bin Laden) of the world. The author

sincerely hopes Kristian Stokke and the Norwegian Research Council, which sponsored his research into LTTE's state building project, would do a serious soul-searching on their findings and writings.

5. Conclusion

Few analysts have regarded the Sri Lankan conflict as 'crisis of the state' rather than an ethnic conflict (Goodhand 2005; Uyangoda, 2003). The author of this rejoinder agrees with this prognosis to a limited extent. However, we have to be careful not to promote a demagogic sub-national state in the name of transforming the existing crises ridden centralised state. The experience of Afghanistan is a case in point; in order to fight Soviet expansionism the western world (particularly the US) actively aided and abetted the Afghan Mujahedin throughout the 1980s, which created the Taliban regime that was a threat to human civilisation within and outside Afghanistan. Increasing numbers of Tamil people (the silent majority) in the North-East hope and wish similar fate do not befall them.

The fundamental fault with most of the analysts on Sri Lankan conflict (both national and international) is their false assumption that the LTTE is a liberation movement. In fact, increasing number of Tamils (the silent majority including the author) does not buy this humbug anymore. Past four years of nominal ceasefire has amply demonstrated the real face of the LTTE to Tamil people in the North-East, if not to others in Sri Lanka and abroad. In the past four years of fieldwork in the North-East the author has learnt that increasing number of Tamils feel that they have "fallen into fire (demagogic de-facto sub-national state) from the frying pan (racist Sri Lankan state)".

It is true that majority of the Tamils (including the author) still regard the Sri Lankan state as a racist state. However, it is also true that the de-facto regime of the LTTE in the North-East is even more racist than the Sri Lankan state. The treatment of ethnic minorities, particularly the Muslim community, in the North-East by the LTTE lends credence to our view. It is important to recall at this moment, with shame, how Muslims were evicted from their historical habitats in the North in 1990 and massacred at Mosques in the East by the LTTE. A self-proclaimed liberation movement, which does not respect the rights of other minorities living in contested territories, has no moral right to be so-called.

It is true that successive Sri Lankan governments in the post-independence period have reneged on political solutions to solve the ethnic problem. Prominent among the agreements reached between the Sinhala and Tamil political leadership are the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact¹⁹ (B-C Pact) of 1958 and Dudley-Chelvanayakam

¹⁹ S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike was the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka from 1956-1959 and S.J.V.Chelvanayakam was the leader of the principal Tamil political party at that time, namely Federal Party.

Pact²⁰ (D-C Pact) of 1966. It is not only the Sinhala political leadership that betrayed the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils, but Tamil political leadership too.

In the run up to independence from British colonial rule the main Tamil political leader at that time, namely G.G.Ponnambalam, demanded 50%-50% representation for both the major communities of Sri Lanka (Sinhalese and Tamils) in the legislature which was rejected by both the British colonial rulers and the Sinhala political leaders at that time. At that time Tamils comprised only about 20% of the total population of

Sri Lanka, which included both the North-East Tamils and the Hill Country Tamils. Therefore, G.G.Ponnabalam's demand for 50% representation was manifestly unreasonable. By demanding more than what was justifiable, the Tamil political leadership at that time lost what was legitimately due to the Tamil minority. Thus, greed of a single political leader for power betrayed the cause of the entire Tamil community at that time. History seems to be repeating again for the Tamil community now. Thus, the intransigence of the LTTE leader, self-proclaimed sole leader and protector of the Tamils and the sole champion of the Tamil cause, is sabotaging what is justly due to the Tamils. History will teach him that he would be a loser as G.G.Ponnambalam was almost 60 years before him. However, we would like to remind the Sri Lankan state that the legitimate struggle of the Tamils for equality did not end with G.G.Ponnambalam, and will not end with the leader of the LTTE.

Twentieth century has witnessed number of academic apologists of Nazis, Zionists, and Despots (like the Pol Pot) from within and outside the countries that experienced these systems of governance. Now, Kristian Stokke has joined this long list of academic deviants. Of course, he is not the first one in this game of adulation of the LTTE. There are few others before him, namely Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam (German), Peter Schalk (Swedish), Palanisamy Ramasamy (Malaysian), et al. Ironically, most of these hero worshippers of the LTTE are western academics who totally lack local knowledge and are ignorant of facts.

Perhaps Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam started the scholarly writing on the LTTE (by a non-Sri Lankan) in the 1980s and since then has toned down her adulation of the LTTE. On the other hand, Peter Schalk (1994) of 'Birds of Independence' fame was a one-off hero worshiper of the LTTE. Palanisamy Ramasamy²¹ of the ISGA fame was sacked from his Professorship at a Malaysian University in 2005 because of anti-government (Malaysian) utterances. However, he is still an unrepentant apologist of the LTTE. There was even an attempt to launch an academic journal in the name of *Journal of Eelam Studies* edited by T.Umakanthan at the University of Ulster (Northern Ireland) and published in London in summer 1989, which died a natural death after just one issue. It was a journal by South Asian leftwing scholars (particularly sympathisers of Naxalites in India) propounding the thesis of Indian expansionism in South Asia. It has been the experience of the protracted civil conflict

²⁰ Dudley Senanayake was the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka from 1965-1970 and S.J.V.Chelvanayakam was the leader of the principal Tamil political party at that time, namely Federal Party.

²¹ He was a member of the expert group that prepared the proposal for an Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) for the LTTE in 2003.

in Sri Lanka that academics and academic publications espousing the cause of the LTTE (as opposed to the legitimate and reasonable cause of the Tamils of Sri Lanka) have become oblivion.

It is high time the Norwegian Research Council finds better way of spending the tax payments of Norwegian citizens. The author of this rejoinder sincerely believes that the Tamil community of North-East Sri Lanka, the primary stakeholder in the Sri Lankan conflict, would relegate the so-called research study by Kristian Stokke to the dustbin of history.

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