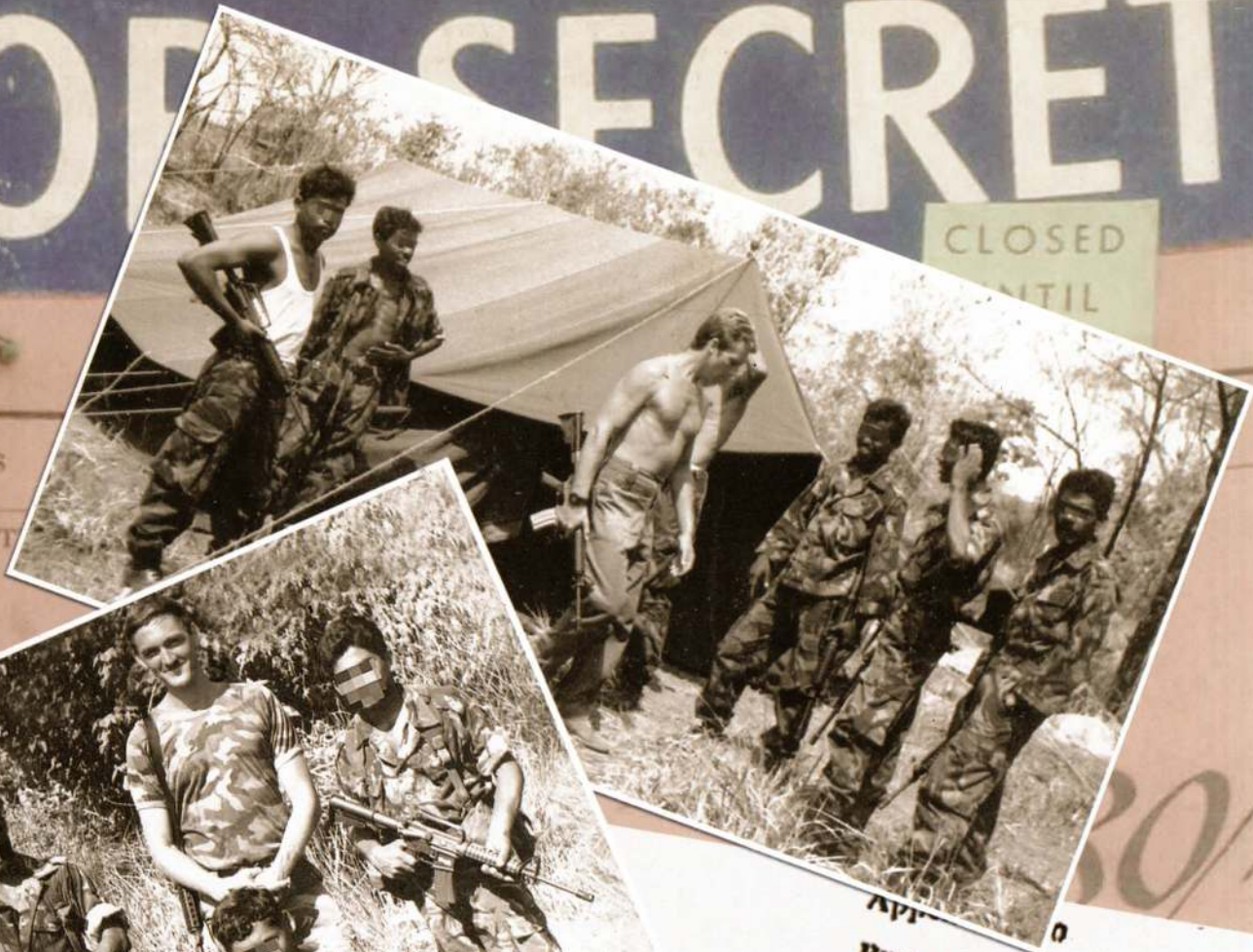
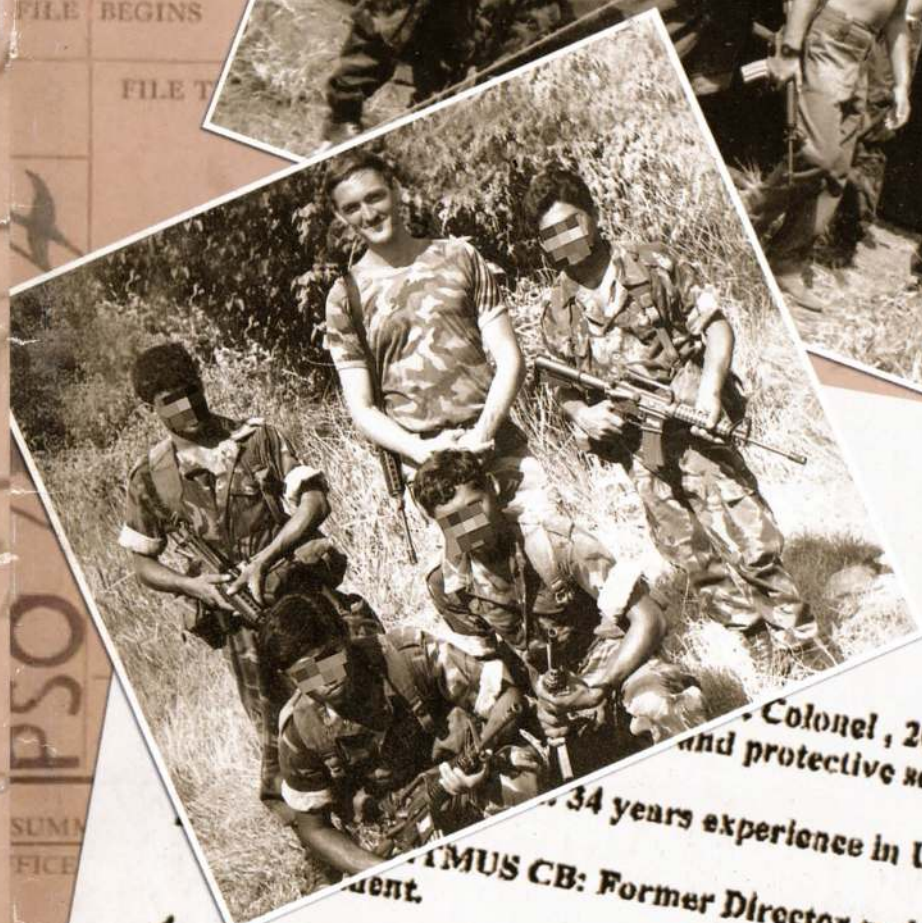


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34 years experience in UK Special Forces. Project leader
TMUS CB: Former Director and Coordinator
4. TONY DAVID

BRITAIN'S DIRTY WAR

against the Tamil people - 1979-2009

Phil Miller

CONFIDENTIAL

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2004: Amoured all-wheel-drive vehicles, utility helicopters, components for naval light guns, ground vehicles, components for assault rifles, components for combat aircraft, components for semi-automatic pistols, semi-automatic pistols, small arms ammunition, components for military aero-engines, components for military transport aircraft, machine guns, night vision goggles (T), military infrared-thermal imaging transport aircraft, components for general purpose machine guns, gun, 2005: Components for heavy machine guns, components for military transport aircraft, components for semi-automatic light guns, components for combat aircraft

About the author

Phil Miller is a researcher for Corporate Watch in London. Phil also uncovered British involvement in crushing the 1971 JVP uprising in Ceylon and planning the 1984 Golden Temple raid in Amritsar, as well as Downing Street's backing of British mercenaries in Uganda during the 1980s.

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This document, published by the International Human Rights Association Bremen, is an updated version of the evidence Phil gave to the Peoples' Tribunal on Sri Lanka. Phil's expert evidence on 'British State complicity in genocide of the Tamil people' concentrated on the post colonial period. For the rest of the material on British and the closely related US complicity please go to <http://www.ptsrilanka.org/en/documents>. The Tribunal's website also contains a video interview of Phil as well as various documents that were presented to the panel of judges at the Tribunal which was held in December 2013. The Tribunal, held under the aegis of the Rome based 'Permanent People's Tribunal' was organised by the 'Irish Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka' and ourselves.

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Front Cover: Photographs provided by Hiru Group

Britain's dirty war against the Tamil people 1979-2009

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Preface

This is dedicated to the asylum-seekers deported from Britain to Sri Lanka. Disbelieved by the Home Office, betrayed by the British government and sent back to torture. It was witnessing their plight in 2011-2013 that prompted me to explore Britain's real foreign policy on Sri Lanka.

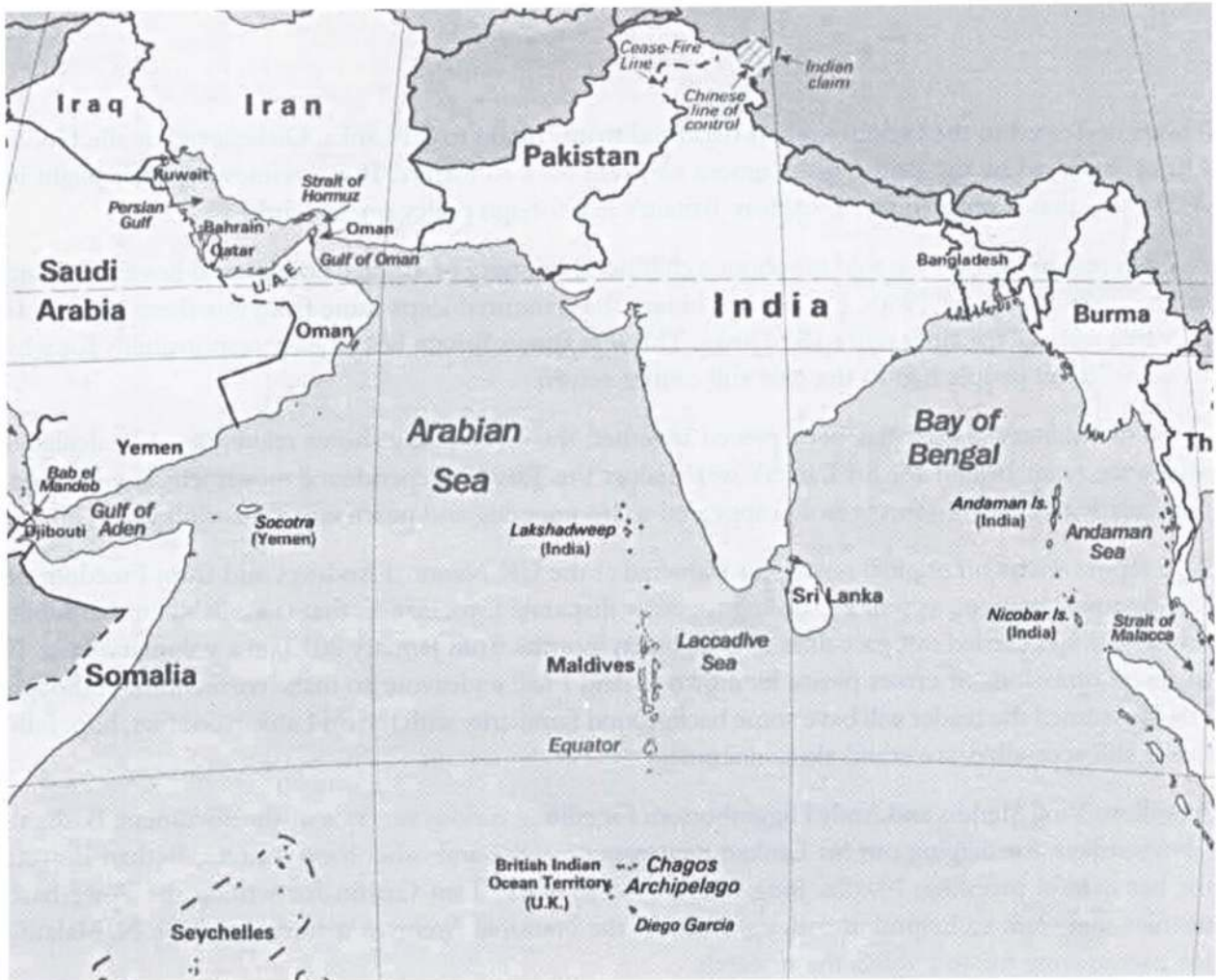
A Tamil refugee in London told me about a childhood memory of strange police Land Rovers arriving in Sri Lanka during the 1980s. His uncle told him the armoured jeeps came from Northern Ireland. If only that were all the Brits sent to Sri Lanka. This text shows Britain bears heavy responsibility for why so many Tamil people had to flee and still cannot return.

Once the military history has been pieced together, the chronology shows relentless and calculated assistance from Britain for Sri Lanka's war against the Tamil independence movement at each step, particularly when Colombo's resolve appeared to be wavering and peace was a possibility.

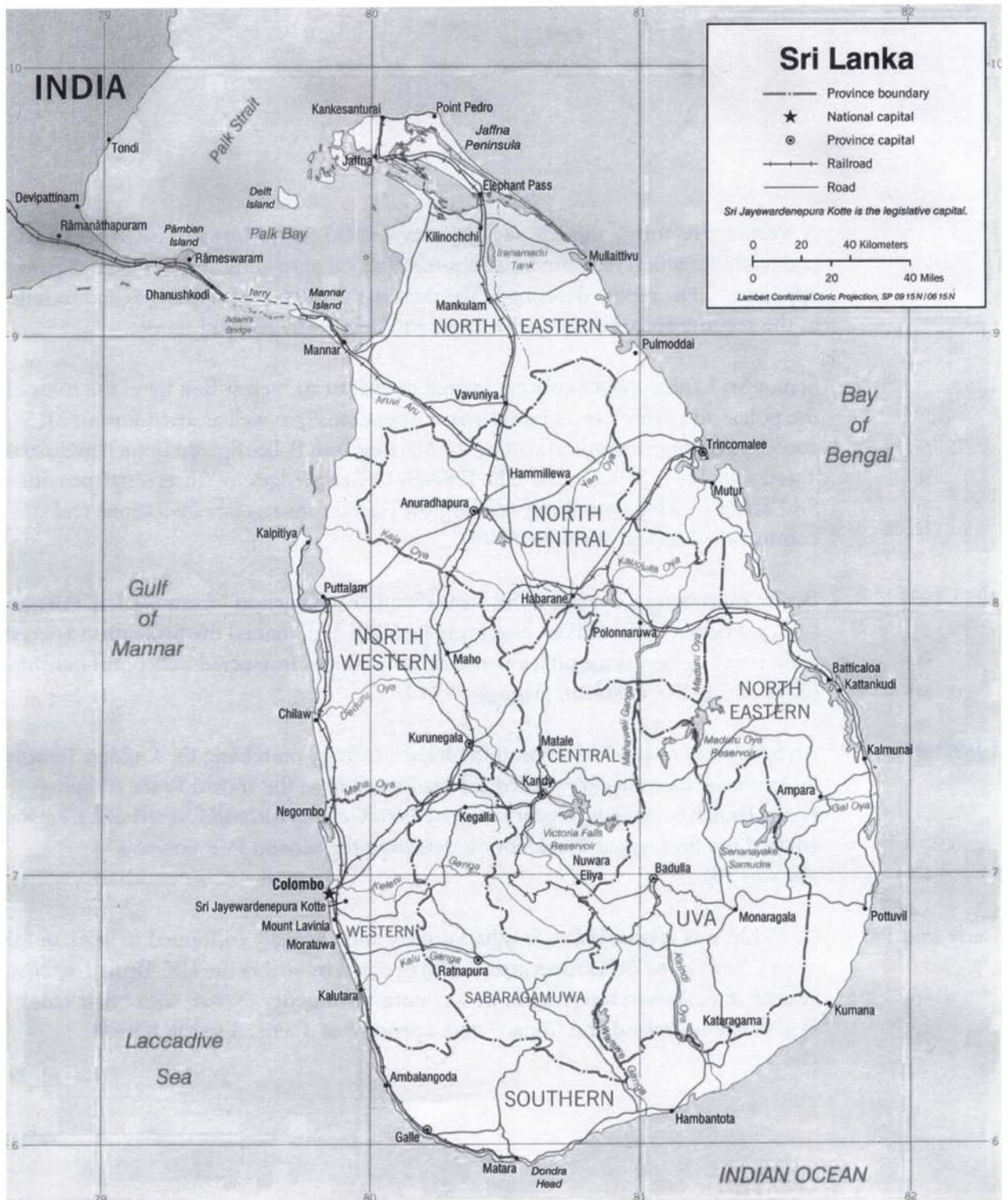
This report draws on original research conducted at the UK National Archives and from Freedom of Information requests, as well as pooling together disparate information that is available in the public domain. It was carried out part-time over eighteen months from January 2013 on a voluntary basis. If there are omissions or errors please let me know and I will endeavour to make corrections. Although I have assumed the reader will have some background familiarity with the Sri Lankan conflict, hopefully this is still accessible as a stand alone document.

Thanks to Viraj Mendis and Andy Higginbottom for editing various versions of the document, Bashana Abeywardane for digging out Sri Lankan newspaper articles and other local sources, Bethan Bowett for her careful proofing, Nicolai Jung for his design work, Tom Griffin for writing the Powerbase profiles that were so helpful in making sense of the National Archives material, and Dr. N. Malathy for encouraging me to publish the research.

Map of Indian Ocean region



Map of Sri Lanka



Timeline of British intervention in Sri Lanka

- 1979 A former director of the UK security service MI5, Jack Morton, visited Sri Lanka and made “practical recommendations for the total reorganisation of the intelligence apparatus”. His report described “the depressing picture of apparatus and morale in the security forces tackling the Tamil problem”. *(See page 12)*
- 1983 Senior Sri Lankan police officers invited to Belfast to “see at first hand the roles of the police and army in counter-terrorist operations”, as well as attending an MI5 conference on terrorism and visiting the Metropolitan Police Special Branch to discuss Tamil separatists living in the UK. Foreign Office pledges to “discreetly” provide Sri Lankans with para-military training for counter-insurgency operations and commando courses. *(See pages 12-13)*
- 1984-1987 British mercenaries operate in Sri Lanka with “no objection” from the UK Foreign Office. Former SAS soldiers, employed by KMS Ltd, trained the Sri Lankan Special Task Force (a notorious police commando unit) and instructed helicopter gunship pilots during live missions. *(See pages 13-16)*
- 1988-1989 An SAS officer, who had advised the Indian military on raiding the Golden Temple in Amritsar, also allegedly visited Sri Lanka to advise the Indian Peace Keeping Force. British counter-insurgency expert Major General Richard Clutterbuck allegedly advised the Sri Lankan President on defeating the second JVP uprising. *(See page 16)*
- Early-mid 1990s KMS Ltd was rebranded as Saladin Security and allegedly continued to work in Sri Lanka. Top tier of Sri Lankan army's officer corps trained in the UK. British defence attaché in Colombo reported to be a counter-insurgency expert, with “first-hand experience in Ireland and Oman” and a protégé of General Frank Kitson. *(See pages 18-19)*

- 1997-1998 British officers played a “crucial role” in setting up Sri Lanka’s new Army Command & Staff College. British Colonel permanently attached to the college. Term three syllabus focused on counter-insurgency in Sri Lanka. First batch of students included Kamal Gunaratne, who would go on to be a commander in the killing fields a decade later. *(See pages 19-21)*
- 2001 Britain bans LTTE under Terrorism Act. Tigers attack Colombo Airport. Tim Spicer and his firm of Special Forces veterans visit Sri Lanka to advise on port security. *(See pages 23-25)*
- 2002 Ceasefire Agreement signed. Britain begins to advise Sri Lanka on its “defence review”. *(See page 28)*
- 2003 Britain makes substantial arms sales to Sri Lanka. *(See pages 28-29)*
- 2004 British defence attaché “instigated a comprehensive training and development programme for the Sri Lankan Armed Forces” over the next three years. *(See page 30)*
- 2005 European travel ban imposed on LTTE while Britain held EU presidency. *(See page 31)*
- 2006 Sri Lankan government requested British assistance with “Higher Defence (MOD) Management, Security Policy Development and Intelligence, and Policing”. EU places full terrorism ban on LTTE, under heavy pressure from UK and USA. *(See pages 29-32)*
- 2007 British consultancy firm, the Libra Advisory Group, “enhanced” Sri Lankan intelligence services. *(See page 31)*
- 2008 British security development work ongoing with Sri Lanka. *(See page 30)*
- 2009 Top UK diplomat maintained that Sri Lanka should not be on the UN Security Council’s agenda. Foreign Office sends senior Northern Ireland policemen to Colombo as “critical friends”. *(See pages 32-33)*

1. Introduction

When Prime Minister David Cameron travelled to Sri Lanka in November 2013, his visit to the northern city of Jaffna was widely seen as British support for the island's Tamil population against persecution

from the Sinhalese-majority government.¹ This perception gained further credibility in March 2014, when Britain played a key role in passing a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council, which called for an investigation into war crimes committed during the civil war between the Sri Lankan government and the insurgent Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). These recent developments have obscured the fact that successive British governments have helped the Sri Lankan state to suppress the Tamil independence movement since its inception.



David Cameron visits Jaffna, Sri Lanka. November 2013 - Cut out from official British Embassy photograph

Is this current British administration really any different? A Scottish police officer is still stationed in Colombo. His role is to design a new National Police Academy for Sri Lanka, not to investigate war crimes.² Just before the fanfare of the latest UN Human Rights Council session, the British government had quietly dispatched its lawyers to a European Court of Justice hearing in Luxembourg, where they argued that the EU-wide terrorism ban must remain on the LTTE.³ Indeed Whitehall has opposed the LTTE from the very beginning and had provided Sri Lanka with counter-insurgency assistance accordingly – over two decades before it was banned as a terrorist organisation in the UK.

This article traces the contours of British collusion with Sri Lankan security forces throughout the thirty years of genocidal counter-insurgency warfare waged against those Tamils who struggled for an independent state.⁴ This relationship has taken various forms, including: black operations by British mercenaries, overt training by UK military officers, supply of sophisticated weaponry, the passing of anti-terror laws and deliberate inaction at the UN Security Council. At every stage, British officials had choices to make. The cumulative outcome of those decisions is evident in Sri Lanka's brazen mass killings of Tamils on the beaches of Mullivaikal in 2009. But it is a record of those choices that follows here.

Notes

¹ Rowena Mason, "Tamils hail David Cameron as 'god'," *The Guardian*, November 15, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/15/david-cameron-visits-tamils-sri-lanka> (accessed June 21, 2014)

² LinkedIn, Bruce Milne profile, <http://uk.linkedin.com/pub/bruce-milne/23/3ba/634> (accessed June 21, 2014)

³ TamilNet, "EU terror ban on LTTE challenged", February 26, 2014 <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37071> (accessed June 21, 2014). This court case was not reported anywhere in the British press.

⁴ Genocide as recognised by the Peoples' Tribunal on Sri Lanka, Second Session, Bremen 2013. To read the judgement go to <http://www.ptsrilanka.org/>

2. Tackling the Tamil problem 1979-1989

From the time when the British granted political independence to the island in 1948, the Tamil people faced systematic oppression from the Sinhala controlled state. Their language rights were destroyed - excluding them from any state sector employment; discriminatory rules essentially stopped them from entering universities, and state organised 'colonisation schemes' placed Sinhala settlers in the north and east of the island, the place which the Tamils considered their homeland. For nearly three decades, Tamils adopted strictly Gandhian methods to organise mass political protests, which were met with an increasingly violent and chauvinist Sinhala political backlash, resulting in a series of anti-Tamil pogroms by rampaging mobs, aided and abetted by the state's security forces.¹

Met with escalating force from an intransigent state, the Tamil's non-violent direct action campaign eventually settled on clear support for their own independent state - of Tamil Eelam. When non-violence gave way to armed struggle in the late 1970's, the British Government did not pull any punches. In response to the deteriorating security situation on the island by 1979, Britain sent a man named Jack Morton² to offer the Sri Lankans some advice. Morton, a former director of the UK security service MI5, was a veteran British spook. In 1973, he had helped re-organise the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) Special Branch to set up an MI5/Army database on terror suspects for Britain's counter-insurgency campaign against Irish rebels. The RUC Special Branch would gain a reputation for being "a force within a force", an opaque arm of the British state that colluded with Loyalist death squads.³ Morton had other experience under his belt. He had been Director of Intelligence in Malaya during Britain's long war against anti-colonial Maoist rebels.⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly then, Morton bequeathed the Sri Lankans with "practical recommendations for the total reorganisation of the intelligence apparatus" which was at the "heart of any discussion on [Sri Lanka's] Special Branch". Morton's 1979 report lamented "the depressing picture of apparatus and morale in the security forces tackling the Tamil problem".⁵

The start of Sri Lanka's civil war is often dated to July 1983, when Sinhalese mobs carried out a pogrom (known as Black July) against Tamil people, with collusion from the police. A month before the anti-Tamil riots, two senior Sri Lankan police officers were invited to Belfast to "see at first hand the roles of the police and army in counter-terrorist operations" in June 1983.⁶ The same pair of policemen were also booked on MI5's "International Conference on Terrorist Devices and Methods", and scheduled to visit the Metropolitan Police Special Branch "to discuss counter terrorist measures and the activities of organisations based in the UK agitating for a Separate State for Tamils in Sri Lanka". These details of extensive British collaboration with Sri Lanka's security forces just prior to Black July only came to light in October 2013 following a Freedom of Information request. They passed almost unnoticed.⁷

The Sri Lankan police had already requested British help with "para-military [training] for counter-insurgency operations" and "commando operations training" in April 1983.⁸ The Foreign and

Commonwealth Office (FCO) felt that these courses “are of some political sensitivity and Tamil extremists in Sri Lanka could be expected to complain bitterly that HMG [Her Majesty's Government i.e. Britain] was assisting in the training of the Sinhalese authorities, in order that they could continue their policies of ‘repression’ of the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Tamil people in the country. As you know, we should like to help the Sri Lankan Government (discreetly) as much as we can with these Courses”.⁹

The blasé comment is striking, but it is the bracketed word “discreetly” that is most significant. During the mid-1980s, British mercenaries worked for the Sri Lankan military, but the UK government always denied any involvement when challenged by inquisitive journalists.¹⁰ Newly-released Downing Street papers from 1984 reveal this deception went right to the top of government.

In September 1984, Peter Ricketts, an aide to foreign secretary Geoffrey Howe, wrote to Margaret Thatcher's private secretary giving tacit approval to a request from a private security company (Falconstar Ltd, comprised of UK Special Forces veterans) to provide senior counter-insurgency consultants for Sri Lanka. Falconstar's work in Sri Lanka did not advance much beyond some preliminary consultations with the island's National Security minister. However, another UK security company, KMS Ltd, was already operating in Sri Lanka. Downing Street was well aware of its activity, but KMS was allowed to continue carrying out its work, which involved providing exactly the forms of military training that the FCO's South Asian Department had pledged to provide “discreetly”.



Sir Peter Ricketts, 2014

Ricketts alludes to the ‘deniable’ nature of this liaison:

“We have made it clear that this is a purely commercial matter and that HMG are not involved. Although we have little knowledge of Falconstar Ltd's capabilities in counter-insurgency or police training, we would have no objection to their seeking to obtain business in Sri Lanka. But that is a matter for them to pursue. If the firm succeed in their bid to secure a consultancy **it is important for us to be able to maintain** that any contract between Falconstar Ltd and the Sri Lankan Government is a purely commercial arrangement with which HMG has no connexion.”[emphasis added]¹¹

Ricketts wrote: “The Sri Lankan security forces have proved woefully inadequate in dealing with Tamil terrorist activities. In an effort to make good these deficiencies, the Sri Lankan Government have engaged another British company, KMS Ltd, to provide training in counter-terrorist techniques”.¹²

KMS Ltd was founded in 1974 by an ex-SAS Major, David Walker, and a former deputy head of SAS Group Intelligence Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Nightingale. The acronym is thought to stand for Keenie Meenie Services (also spelt ‘Keeny Meeny’), which is meant to be Arabic or Swahili slang for ‘covert operations’. (KMS had already trained the Sultan of Oman's special forces, and would go on to assist the Contras in Nicaragua and the Taliban in Afghanistan before it was renamed Saladin Security¹³).

By 1984, the Indian government was already complaining to British diplomats about what it perceived as the presence of SAS men in Sri Lanka fighting the Tamils. But Whitehall maintained this façade of non-intervention throughout the 1980s. The man who signed off on this diplomatic deception, Peter Ricketts, would go on to have a long and distinguished Whitehall career.¹⁴ He was Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee from 2000-2001, Director-General (Political) of the FCO from 2001-

2003, and then the UK's permanent representative to the NATO council until 2006. After that, he was appointed Permanent Under Secretary (PUS) at the FCO from 2006-2010. The PUS is the most senior civil servant in the FCO. Rickett's held this position during the climax of Sri Lanka's counter-insurgency campaign against the Tamil Tigers. He was then appointed Prime Minister David Cameron's National Security Adviser, a newly created post. In 2012, Sir Peter Ricketts became UK Ambassador to France and is still on this post today. His career illustrates a degree of continuity within the British civil service over the three decades of conflict in Sri Lanka – staff who made critical decisions at the beginning were still in influential positions by the end.



Photograph from the STF website shows a commando unit posing with two foreign military advisers

The para-military wing of the Sri Lankan police, the Special Task Force (STF), specifically refers to KMS' formative role in their official history from this period:¹⁵

“An Institution in the United Kingdom known as the “Kini Mini Service” (K.M.S.) comprising of British ex-SAS officers provided training to the STF officers at the very beginning. Among the subjects taught were tactics adopted by Riot squads, weapon training, firing practices, Counter Terrorism Search, Handling of Explosive, Mapping

& Use of Compass equipment and First Aid. Also the introduction of the world renowned American made M16 Automatic Rifle. This entitled the S.T.F. to the Green Beret which was awarded to internationally renowned Special Forces personnel.”

The same claim has been made in the Sri Lankan press:

“After the initial training at Katukurunda Police College, the first [STF] recruits underwent training at Army Combat Training school at Kondavattuwan, Ampara. Subsequent to the then Security Advisor to the President, Ravi Jayewardene's intervention, the government obtained the services of ex-British Air Services (SAS) personnel to train police commandos. The British experts employed by the Channel Island based Keeni Meeni Service converted Katukurunda wing of the Police Training College into a sophisticated training facility.”¹⁶

“With its establishment in 1983 with the outbreak of militant activities in the North and East, the STF received its basic and advanced training by an exclusive team of former British Special Air Service / SAS representing the Channel Islands based Keeni Meeni service / KMS. The STF troops are trained on counter revolutionary warfare, fighting in built up areas / FIBUA, Closed Quarter Battle, Quick Reaction Deployment, Handling Riot Situations, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, VIP Protective Security and Peace Keeping Operations.”¹⁷

As the conflict developed, other sources show how KMS' role expanded to include training helicopter gunship pilots around 1986-1987. Tim Smith, a former British army helicopter pilot, claimed in his memoirs that KMS employed him as a helicopter 'instructor' for the Sri Lankan Air Force. However, instructors like Smith flew sorties in operational areas, constantly drawing them into the conflict. Smith concludes his tale about his first tour in 1986 by writing that, “In five months I had been personally involved in the death of 152 Tigers. Well, to be totally accurate, at 152 I had given up

counting. Perhaps the company in their comfortable offices in Colombo and Kensington would never know what it was like in Jaffna. I had come to Sri Lanka to teach in Katunayaka, and would leave Jaffna having at least shown them how it was done.”¹⁸

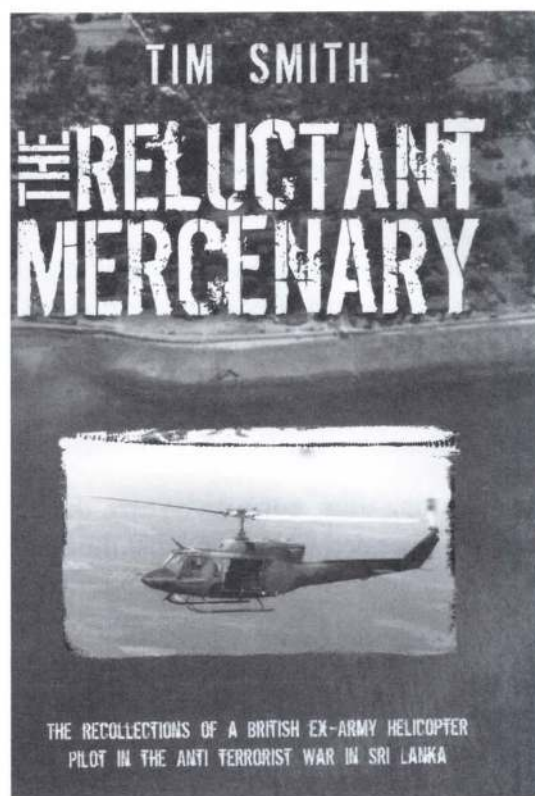
A paper written in 1986 by Mayan Vije further alleges that from 1983 “British pilots have been flying helicopters and airplanes in attacks in Tamil areas and other British mercenaries are reported to be leading ground attacks. The air attacks by the mercenaries have resulted in many civilian deaths and destruction of property”.¹⁹ Her claim is based on a newspaper report in the UK *Sunday Times* on 11th May 1986 by seasoned reporter Simon Winchester, and corroborates Tim Smith’s account.

Author T. Sabaratnam cites media reports from the *London Daily News* (March 1987) and the *Washington Times* (19th May 1987) to provide more details:

“The *London Daily News* said that dozens of KMS men were serving in Sri Lanka and they were paid a tax-free salary of 33,000 US dollars a year. Richard S. Ehrlich of the *Washington Times* revealed that the number of KMS men who served in Sri Lanka was at least 35... The following was Ehrlich’s conclusion: Although KMS is here in a training and advisory role, the line between that and actual combat gets blurred at times, particularly in the air war.

There are, for example, 35 KMS men training Sri Lankans to fly U.S.- built Bell 212 and 412 helicopter gunships. When flying over battle zones, according to one source, “The KMS man sits in the co-pilot seat so a Sri Lankan is captain of the aircraft.”

The problem occurs when there is ground fire. Then, said the source, “the Sri Lankan guy in the rear of the helicopter shoots back and the KMS pilot takes control” because he has more experience dodging enemy fire.”²⁰



Cover of book authored by Tim Smith



Tim Smith with KMS colleagues in Sri Lanka



Tamil detainees inside Smith's helicopter

To give an idea of this British security company’s significance in Eelam War I (1983-1987), one could consider whether all of KMS’ 35 instructors had a similar kill-rate to their colleague Tim Smith (over 152 in 5 months)? If so, their collective impact would have been over five thousand deaths involving the company’s staff, over a matter of months.

Given that the company was training the Sri Lankan forces to use sophisticated equipment and techniques, one should further wonder what impact this had on escalating and prolonging the nascent conflict by exacerbating a cycle of violence. This degree of hands-on assistance from elite British military advisers during a critical period in Sri Lankan military development must have had a profound impact on the state's confidence and ability to fight the LTTE, influencing their decision to pursue the war rather than to seek a negotiated settlement.

Another KMS employee, former SAS soldier Robin Horsfall, quit his job training the Sri Lankan forces around 1986:

“After three months, I came to the conclusion that I was working for the wrong side. The information that continually flooded in to me from other Britons working in the country painted a picture of a bigoted government, suppressing a minority in a similar way to how the Nazis treated the Jews before World War II”.²¹

Unfortunately, other British mercenaries were less principled than Horsfall.

“During those formative years, the SLAF [Sri Lankan Air Force] lacked side gunners. [Wing Commander] Cabral said that the SLAF had made a determined bid to enhance its capabilities in accordance with overall objectives. The role played by former British Special Air Services (SAS) specialist Chris Elkington could never be forgotten, Cabral said, adding that though he had been hired as a pilot, the foreigner played a crucial role in developing SLAF air gunners' capability. Those who served with him always remembered the jovial soldier whose skills couldn't be matched by any ordinary person. Elkington had also been given the opportunity to serve the then President. Cabral emphasised that air gunners played a vital role and their importance to missions could never be disputed.”²²



Richard Clutterbuck

Even after the Indian intervention in 1987 to disarm the Tamil militant groups, Britain appears to have remained embroiled in the island's security policy. The *Hindustan Times* recently alleged that a British SAS officer advised the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka in 1988 (abbreviated to IPKF – an acronym retold as ‘Innocent People Killing Force’ owing to the force's propensity for civilian massacres).

The paper's “Special Forces and intelligence sources” made the astonishing claim that this was the same British officer who had advised the Indian military on assaulting the Golden Temple in Amritsar in 1984.²³

Indeed, British counter-insurgency advice may have gone to the highest levels of the Sri Lankan state. Terrorism expert Professor Rohan Gunaratna alleges that British Major-General Richard Clutterbuck advised President J. R. Jayewardene in the late 1980's on how to defeat the 1987-1989 JVP uprising (JVP: a Sinhalese anti-capitalist group), lessons which could easily have been transferred to dealing with the Tamils.²⁴ Clutterbuck was at the very heart of British counter-insurgency doctrine, making his mark in Malaya.²⁵

Notes

¹ While this is well known, what is hidden is that the British colonialists had introduced all the elements that laid the basis for the post-1948 offensive against the Tamil people on the island. The different facets of the Sinhala supremacist ideology and the building of the unitary state structure were crafted by the British to further their strategic aims in the Indian Ocean region. A text detailing the colonial period will be available on the www.ptsrilanka.org website by the July 15, 2014.

- ² Powerbase, Jack Morton http://www.powerbase.info/index.php/Jack_Morton (accessed June 21, 2014)
- ³ For more information about collusion and the RUC Special Branch in the 1970s, see Anne Cadwallader, *Lethal Allies*, (Cork, Mercier Press, 2013).
- ⁴ For more background on the Malayan Special Branch, see Leon Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police 1945-60, The Role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency*, (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008).
- ⁵ Disclosed in a Freedom of Information request by the author. The original FCO file reference is FSC 382/1, UK assistance to Sri Lankan police, 1983. The Morton report is referred to in a paper marked 'Sri Lanka Police - visit by Overseas Police Adviser to Colombo 7-11 March 1983'.
- ⁶ *Ibid.* The Sri Lankan police officers were Senior Deputy Inspector-General HWH Weerasinghe and Assistant Superintendent KS Padiwita.
- ⁷ Adrian Rutherford, 'Top PSNI men advised forces of bloody Sri Lankan regime', *Belfast Telegraph*, October 15, 2013, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/top-psni-men-advised-forces-of-bloody-sri-lankan-regime-29659207.html> (accessed June 22, 2014)
- ⁸ FSC 382/1, 'Overseas training for Sri Lanka Police Officers', 15 April 1983, Letter from Sri Lankan High Commission London to Peel Centre, UK Police Training College
- ⁹ FSC 382/1, 'Sri Lankan Police Training', 3 May 1983, confidential FCO letter from the South Asian Department to the Overseas Police Advisor
- ¹⁰ For example, see the House of Commons debate May 22, 1986 in Hansard vol 98 cc303-4W, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1986/may/22/sri-lanka#S6CV0098P0_19860522_CWA_402 (accessed June 23, 2014)
- ¹¹ UK National Archives, PREM 19/1395, 'Sri Lanka: Military and Police Training', 6 September 1984. Available at http://www.jdslnka.org/images/art_img/news_features/politics_current_affairs/peter_ricketts_letter.jpg (accessed June 21, 2014).
- ¹² PREM 19/1395, 6 September 1984
- ¹³ Saladin is an active UK-registered company, <http://www.saladin-security.com/about-us.php> (accessed June 21, 2014)
- ¹⁴ Gov.uk, Sir Peter Ricketts GCMG GCVO, <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/peter-ricketts-2> (accessed June 21, 2014)
- ¹⁵ Sri Lanka Police, History of the Special Task Force, <http://www.police.lk/index.php/special-task-force-> (accessed June 21, 2014)
- ¹⁶ Shamindra Ferdinando, Probe reveals timber racketeers' link to Pottuvil massacre, *The Island*, September 26, 2006, <http://www.island.lk/2006/09/26/features3.html> (accessed June 22, 2014).
- ¹⁷ Daily Mirror, Special Task Force Martyrs day message, *Daily Mirror*, September 1, 2006, <http://archives.dailymirror.lk/2006/09/01/opinion/04.asp> (accessed June 22, 2014)
- ¹⁸ Tim Smith, *The Reluctant Mercenary* (Sussex, The Book Guild Ltd, 2002), 173
- ¹⁹ Mayan Vije, *Militarization in Sri Lanka*, Tamil Information Centre, 1986
- ²⁰ T. Sabaratnam, *Pirapaharan*, Chapter 24 Volume 2, <http://www.sangam.org/articles/view2/?uid=638> (accessed June 22, 2014).
- ²¹ Robin Horsfall, *Fighting Scared* (London, Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2002), 221.
- ²² Shamindra Ferdinando, SLAF receives ex-SAS man's expertise, *The Island*, April 11, 2013, http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=76753 (accessed June 22, 2014)
- ²³ Saikat Datta, RAW facilitated Britain's SAS officer's India visit, *Hindustan Times*, January 15, 2014, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/operation-bluestar-raw-facilitated-britain-s-sas-officer-s-india-visit/article-1172981.aspx> (accessed June 22, 2014)
- ²⁴ Rohan Gunaratna, Defence Seminar 2013, YouTube, at 01:40 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TykYCXsmb50> (accessed June 22, 2014)
- ²⁵ Powerbase, Richard Clutterbuck, http://www.powerbase.info/index.php/Richard_Clutterbuck (accessed June 22, 2014)

3. To war with wisdom and knowledge* 1990-2002

The Anglo-Lankan military relationship continued unabated into the 1990s, as the war with the LTTE rumbled on. KMS rebranded as Saladin Security, which also worked in Sri Lanka, according to an article in the Royal United Service Institute (RUSI) journal. RUSI is a defence think-tank with close links to the British military. The article, dated 2000, claimed that, "While KMS undertook international contracts, Saladin originally only conducted domestic contracts, although with the demise of KMS in the early-1990s, Saladin continues to operate internationally (citing Sri Lanka and the Middle East as two areas)."¹ This allegation was also made in a submission to a Parliamentary Select Committee on Foreign Affairs by the Campaign Against the Arms Trade in 1998,² in a debate at the Canadian Parliament in 2007 and by the Strategic Studies Institute that same year.³



Sivaram posing in front of a British-made Sri Lankan military vehicle

In addition to assistance from British companies, the UK state was also directly involved. According to the late Tamil journalist Sivaram, "until 1997 the cream of the Sri Lankan army's officer corps was trained in UK". Sivaram was acutely aware of the effect this relationship was having on the war against the Tamil independence struggle, saying he felt Sri Lanka had become "a laboratory case of standard counter-insurgency as disseminated by the British and the Americans".⁴ In a conversation with his biographer, Sivaram "felt that C-I [counter-insurgency] in its modern form found its start in Britain's successful C-I war in Malaysia and in

its other post-World War II colonial wars ... to really get a sense of this history, Sivaram urged me to look up the writing of Frank Kitson, a British army C-I commander who honed his skill in Kenya 1953-5, Malaya 1957, Cyprus 1962-4, and Northern Ireland 1970-72".⁵

Kitson had worked alongside Ian Henderson in Kenya, and his book about defeating the Mau Mau, *Gangs and Counter-gangs*, was included in the book-list sent from the British High Commission in Nairobi for consumption by Ceylonese (Ceylon changed its name to Sri Lanka in 1972) security chiefs in the midst of the 1971 JVP uprising.⁶

* *Motto of Sri Lanka's Army Command & Staff College, established with British assistance in 1997*

Sivaram said that after 1995 he personally “started developing a more comprehensive perspective and understanding of counter-insurgency. Fortunately, the British defence attaché in Colombo, who became a good drinking buddy, was a specialist in the matter. He had first-hand experience in Ireland and Oman. And the most important thing: he was a protégé of Frank Kitson, the father of modern counter-insurgency techniques”.⁷

UK Short Term Training Team

Cut out from the 1998 issue of Sri Lanka's Army Command & Staff College's internal student magazine, The Owlet



In September 1997, the British Army seconded a Short Term Training Team (STTT) comprising Lt Col CRF (Chris) Rider STAFFORDS and Lt Col GM (Geoff) Moynan KOSB to the ACSC. These two officers assisted in no small measure the CI and the DS to get off ground. The College will forever be grateful to them for their endeavours.

Although Sivaram's autobiography implies that training of Sri Lankan officers in the UK ended in 1997, in actual fact Britain was instrumental in creating a new military academy in Sri Lanka that year, called the Army Command & Staff College (now renamed as Defence Services Command and Staff College). The College's motto is “To war with wisdom and knowledge”.

The 1998 issue of the College's internal student magazine, The Owlet, reveals that Britain played a prominent role in setting up the training institution. As the magazine says, the UK seconded a “Short Term Training Team (STTT) to set up the College in 1997. Two British officers, Lt.Col CRF (Chris) Rider and Lt.Col GM (Geoff) Moynan had played a crucial role in this effort.”

As the Commandant of the College put it: “The generosity of the British Army in providing course material, the services of two Senior Officers at the inception and a Training Advisor subsequently, to actively support this ambitious and historical venture, is sincerely appreciated.”

Cut out from the 1998 issue of Sri Lanka's Army Command & Staff College's internal student magazine, The Owlet, detailing the hierarchy of the College.

The Directing Staff

Deputy Commandant



Brig H N Halangoda RWP RSP USP USACGSC

Chief Instructor



Col RM Jayasinghe USP psc

British Military Adviser Training



Col JS Field CBE



Col A Lankarero RSP USP psc



Col DMD Alwis USP psc

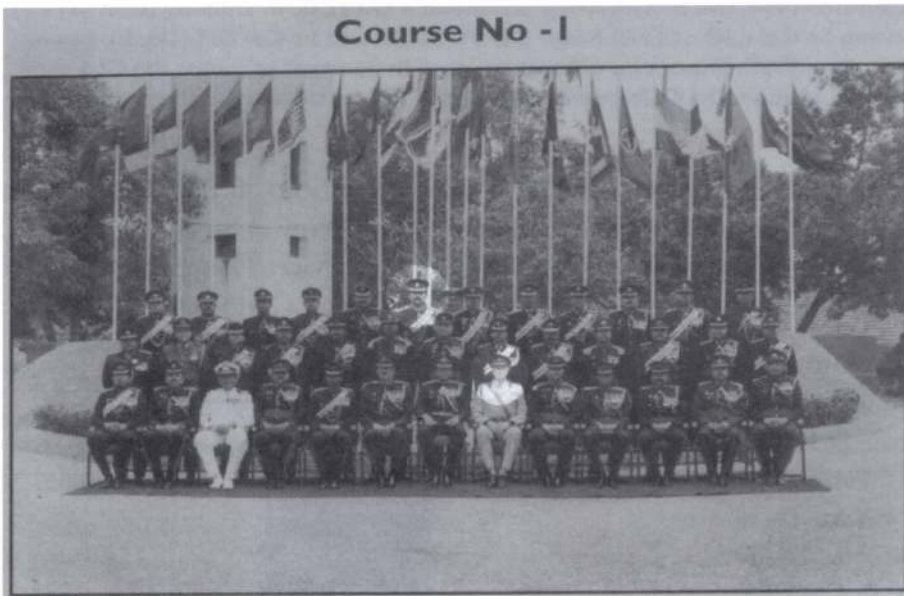


Col AWJC De Silva psc

Thereafter, a British army officer, Colonel John S Field CBE, was permanently attached to the college during 1997-1998 as the British Military Adviser Training.⁸

The photographs in the magazine make clear just how senior a role Colonel Field held at the College. The curriculum was based on the British system and designed for senior officers from all branches of the armed forces. Counter-insurgency, as applied to the situation in Sri Lanka, was a key component during Colonel Field's tenure. Here is the magazine's description of the third term:

“From the word go, we were reading volume after volume on Marxism and Leninism, as this term known as the ‘COIN TERM’ dealt with strategies of counter insurgency. By the end of the first week, some revolutionary leaders such as Mao Tse-Tung, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara were more familiar to us than some of our own batch-mates. There were three exercises planned for the term, but unlike in the previous terms, all the exercises were conducted in the ACSC premises. These Tactical Exercises Without Troops (TEWTs) were based on the current situation of our country, and since all of us have had first hand experience in the ongoing battle, we found the exercises very interesting and enjoyable. The exercises were named INK BLOT, SLEDGE HAMMER and MAGNUM FORCE.”



The first batch of students in 1997-1998. Kamal Gunaratne is pictured behind the British Colonel Field. Cut out from the magazine *The Owlet*.

Among the first batch of students in 1997-1998 was a young Kamal Gunaratne. He is pictured in the magazine behind the British Colonel Field. During the final stage of the war in 2009, Major General Kamal Gunaratne was at the heart of the killing fields. He was the General Officer Command of the 53rd Division, which reportedly killed the Tamil female journalist Isaipriya.⁹ LankaNewsWeb further alleges that Kamal Gunaratne personally supervised the execution of the LTTE leader's son, Balachandran.

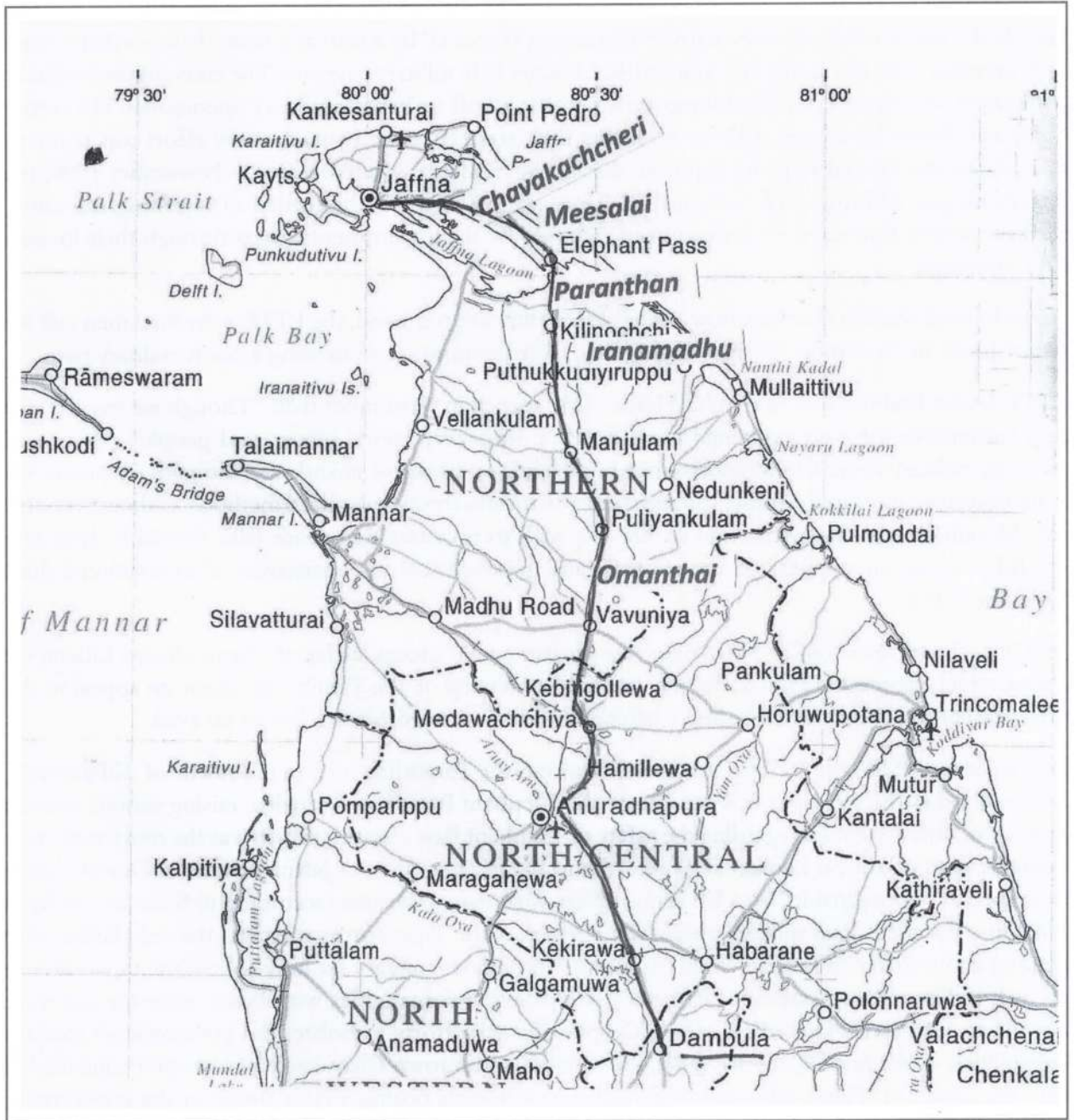
Sri Lanka's Sunday Times reported that after Colonel Field left the College, his post was taken by another British officer: “Col. John Field of the British Army was assigned as the British Military Advisor Training (BMAT) to the ACSC. On his departure, Lt. Col. Brian Martin was appointed as the British Army Training Liaison Officer (BATLO), and is due to take up residence at the college soon.”¹⁰

The College's Wikipedia page, a source

Young Lieutenant Colonel Kamal Gunaratne



which I cannot authenticate, claims the BATLO position remained until 2001: "The Sri Lanka Army was fortunate to obtain the assistance of the British Army in setting up the Staff College, especially with the preparation of the syllabus and teaching material. Initially there had been one British Army Colonel or Lieutenant Colonel attached as a Training Liaison Officer, to provide advice and teaching material from 1997 to 2001."¹¹



Northern Sri Lanka with the Vanni region, the A9 main road is marked red.

The time period between 1997 and 2001 was historically the most significant phase of the Tamil struggle politically as well as militarily.

Following the Government of Sri Lanka's (GoSL) successful military offensive 'Riviresa' (Operation Sunrays) in 1995, which regained the control of Jaffna peninsula, the government was determined to open an overland main supply route that would connect Jaffna with the southern part of the island. The government forces already held the areas north of Kilinichchi, which included Elephant pass and

the gateway to Jaffna peninsula while maintaining their control over the areas south of Vavunia. The strategic objective was to link Vavunia with Kilinochchi by capturing a 76 km stretch of A9 road which would have seriously weakened the Tiger capabilities by splitting the Tiger controlled areas into two. The massive operation (which is also known to be the longest operation in the history of Eelam War) was launched in May 1997 and lasted 19 months.

Whilst holding their ground against government troops advancing on their southern front, the Tigers launched a major offensive code named 'Unceasing Waves II' by advancing from their northern front in September 1998 to capture the well fortified Kilinochchi military garrison. The conventional military prowess of the Tigers compelled the government to call off its longest military operation in December 1998 with heavy losses and without achieving their strategic goal. Instead, every effort was made to consolidate the limited territory captured during the 'Riviresa' offensive. But in November 1999, the Tiger's biggest offensive yet, code-named 'Unceasing Waves III', succeeded in regaining the entire territory within four days, which had been captured by the government troops through their longest ever operation.

In the light of the fact that they now held a clear military upper-hand, the LTTE refreshed their call for negotiations in November 1999 by urging the government to stop pursuing a costly military path.

LTTE leader Prabhakaran said in his Heroes Day speech in November that: "Though we stand today as a formidable force strengthened by manpower, firepower, moral power, and people's power and have the military capability to liberate our homeland, we have not abandoned the path of peace. We want to resolve the Tamil conflict through peaceful means, through civilized methods, without recourse to a bloodbath and the destruction of life. We wish to re-iterate that peace talks should be held in a cordial peaceful atmosphere of mutual trust and goodwill with the assistance of international third party mediation."

In a speech delivered on 29 November, the parliamentary group leader of Tamil United Liberation Front, which represented the traditional political leadership of the Tamils, also made an appeal to the government to accept the Tiger peace offer and to initiate negotiations, but to no avail.

By December 1999, the LTTE successfully overran the Paranthan area in the north of Kilinochchi, which stood as the southern defence line of the Elephant Pass Base Complex, raising serious worries among the defence circles regarding the safety of Elephant Pass garrison, which was the most important strategic asset of the Sri Lankan army in order to secure the grip over Jaffna peninsula. Despite being described as "impregnable" by a US army officer who visited the area (according to Sivaram), in April 2000, the Elephant Pass military garrison collapsed as the Tiger forces marched towards Jaffna after gaining control over the entire Vanni mainland. The serious military set back forced the Government to seek Indian military assistance while re-establishing diplomatic ties with Israel (after the ties were cut off in 1991) with immediate effect. Despite all such efforts to bolster the government's military capabilities, in the middle of May 2000, the second largest town Chavakachcheri in the Peninsula fell into the hands of Tigers who marched further northwards posing a clear threat to the government troops trapped in Jaffna.

The conditions that paved the way for Norwegian mediation were created by this changing of the strategic configuration in the North. In November 2000, the LTTE renewed their peace offer and declared a month long unilateral ceasefire on 24 December 2000.

The LTTE statement, issued on 21 December 2000, said:

"We make this declaration of cessation of armed hostilities unilaterally hoping that the Sri Lanka government will reciprocate positively and instruct its armed forces to observe peace during the festive season of Christmas, New Year and Pongal (Hindu Harvest Festival). Our

decision to cease armed hostilities should be viewed as a genuine expression of goodwill indicating our sincere desire for peace and negotiated political settlement. We offer this space of peace to facilitate and promote initiatives to create congenial conditions of normalcy de-escalating the armed confrontation.”¹²

The LTTE's offer of a unilateral ceasefire was acknowledged and welcomed by British Foreign Office minister Peter Hain on 22 December 2000.¹³

However, the Sri Lankan Government, led by President Chandrika Bandaranayaka Kumaratunga, issued a statement rejecting the ceasefire offer saying on 26 December 2000 that:

“The Government believes that further gestures of goodwill are unnecessary, when it has clearly indicated its wish to engage in talks with the LTTE forthwith on the substantial issues involved, with a view to resolving the ethnic question, ending the war and paving the way for a durable peace. The Government considers a ceasefire as a consequent step that would arise when negotiations proceed to the mutual satisfaction of both sides. The Government of Sri Lanka repeats its call to the LTTE to engage honestly in this opportunity for peace. Until then, military operations will continue.”¹⁴

Despite the GoSL repeatedly rejecting the ceasefire offer, the Tigers extended their offer until April 2001.

However, on 28 February 2001, the British Home Secretary Jack Straw announced that the LTTE would be included on the list of organisations that were to be banned under new anti-terrorist legislation, saying he was satisfied that they were involved in terrorism.¹⁵

“The proscription will adversely affect the Tamil interests and severely undermine the current peace initiatives. Furthermore, the British decision will encourage the repressive Sri Lankan regime to be more uncompromising, intransigent and to adopt a military path of State violence, terrorism and war.”

The contrasting statements of Peter Hain and Jack Straw, made just months apart, show the duplicitous role played by the UK FCO. Talking peace when mediation by the Norwegians and Germans was in the background, while simultaneously taking practical measures to undermine the LTTE.

Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief negotiator, responded to the ban saying:

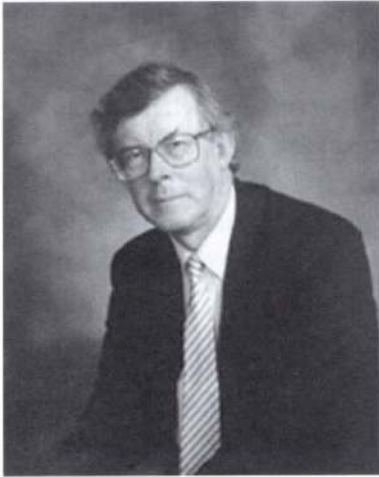
“It is regrettable that our liberation movement, the authentic representative organisation of the Sri Lankan Tamils, which has been fighting for the political rights of our people for the last 25 years, is included on the list of proscribed organisations in Britain. It is a sad day for the Anglo-Tamil relations. The Tamil people, who have been collectively campaigning as a single voice against the proposed ban will be seriously disappointed by the British decision. The proscription will adversely affect the Tamil interests and severely undermine the current peace initiatives. Furthermore, the British decision will encourage the repressive Sri Lankan regime to be more uncompromising, intransigent and to adopt a military path of State violence, terrorism and war.”¹⁶

The British ban on the LTTE was desperately anticipated by Sri Lanka and provided breathing space for Chandrika Bandaranayake's government. Chandrika said in an interview with the Indian magazine 'Frontline' in March 2001: “If the international community takes the pressure off the LTTE, they will not be interested in peace at all. Because the LTTE does not believe in peace. ... We clearly expect them [UK] to ban the LTTE because it is the most terroristic organisation operating from British soil at the moment. Their new law very clearly gives them the possibility of doing that.”¹⁷

The British decision to list the LTTE as a proscribed terrorist organisation under an opaque piece of legislation, the Terrorism Act 2000, came at a time when the movement was not even criminalised in

Sri Lanka. Britain banned the LTTE along with 20 other “terrorist” groups in early 2001 (before 9/11). There is still no transparency about why the Act proscribed some international armed groups but not others.

The UK-based Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC), who have conducted extensive research into the effects of this legislation, say the government’s main expert advisor, Professor Paul Wilkinson, had warned in a 1996 report that terrorist groups look internationally “for any ideological, political or diplomatic support it can manage to obtain”. Wilkinson had recently co-founded (with Bruce Hoffman) the ‘Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence’ at St Andrews University.



Professor Paul Wilkinson

Also at this time, a former Sri Lankan government employee turned terrorism ‘expert’, Rohan Gunaratna, was doing his Phd at St Andrews, as a “British Chevening Scholar (The UK Foreign Office’s Scholarships and Awards Scheme) from 1996-1999. His PhD was supervised by Bruce Hoffman. After completing his PhD he became a Fellow at the University’s Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence.”¹⁸ CAMPACC claim that Gunaratna and Wilkinson were working together in the run up to the ban, gathering information on Tamils and LTTE in the UK, with Gunaratna visiting a number of offices of Tamil organisations under the pretext of doing “research” for St Andrews.

Shortly after the British ban, and in the middle of a unilateral ceasefire, the Sri Lankan government forces launched a fresh offensive in April with the aim of regaining Elephant Pass. But all efforts were destroyed in a matter of days, with a fierce counter offensive campaign launched by the Tigers who thwarted the government assault successfully.

On 24 July 2001, the LTTE mounted a potentially decisive attack on the Bandaranaike International Airport in Colombo, which destroyed almost a third of the Sri Lankan Air Force’s aircraft and half the civilian fleet of Sri Lankan Airlines. It also caused a spike in insurance premiums for any trade through the island, which could have forced the Sri Lankan government to accept a Ceasefire. Again though, the British offered the Sri Lankans a military alternative. Lloyd’s insurance brokers in London agreed a plan with the Sri Lankan authorities to enhance port security against future LTTE attacks. The Sri Lankan government hired a crack team of British former special forces soldiers, led by notorious mercenary Tim Spicer, for a tour of the island’s sensitive trade hubs (Colombo, Trincomallee and Galle).¹⁹ In this way, serious economic pressure caused by the LTTE attack was mitigated.



Thirteen aircraft including two Kfir jet fighters, one MI-24 Helicopter gun ship and one MIG-27- jet fighter were destroyed in the predawn attack on the Katunayake air base, about 35 km. north of Colombo. Three military trainee planes and five civilian jets were also among the destroyed air craft.

Duncan Campell, a veteran investigative journalist who wrote about the episode, commented that:

“Excluding Spicer and a professional photographer, the majority of the 15 names on his personnel list were retired British Special Forces and intelligence officers. The most prominent among them was Harry Ditus, described as the British government’s “former co-ordinator of transport security.” A fuller profile would have identified “Hal” Doyne-Ditus, CB (Commander of the Bath) as a senior career intelligence officer with Britain’s ultra-secretive internal Security Service, conventionally known as MI5. After serving as assistant director of MI5, Doyne-Ditus was posted to Belfast, Northern Ireland in the mid 1980s to serve as the U.K. government’s director and coordinator of intelligence at the height of its 20-year battle with the Irish Republican Army.



Sir Tim Spicer, OBE

Two were specifically identified as covert intelligence operators: John Wilson, QGM (Queen’s Gallantry Medal), as a “methods of entry expert” and Tom Lockhart, QGM, QCVS (Queens Commendation for Valuable Service) as a “U.K. Special Forces surveillance and technical surveillance expert.” Four of the team were described as having had more than 30 years service with Special Forces.

Appendix 1 to Protective Security Assessment Sri Lanka	
TRIDENT TEAM COMPOSITION	
1.	TIM SPICER OBE: Lieutenant Colonel , 20 years in the British Army. Expertise includes counter terrorism and protective security. CEO of TRIDENT
2.	JOHN FARR MBE: 34 years experience in UK Special Forces. Project leader
3.	HARRY DITMUS CB: Former Director and Coordinator of Transport Security for UK government.
4.	TONY DAVIDSON MBE: 34 years experience in UK Special Forces and security policy.
5.	MIKE COLDRICK MBE CM DSA: EOD/IED expert- UK Armed Forces and the Metropolitan Police.
6.	TOM LOCKHEART QGM, QCVS: UK Special Forces surveillance and technical surveillance expert
7.	ROBERT HESLOP MBE: 30 years experience in UK Special Forces.
8.	MICHAEL FISH MBE: 35 years experience UK Special forces.
9.	JOHN WILSON QGM: Maritime Special Forces and methods of entry (MOE) expert.
10.	BRYAN HUTCHINSON: 20 years experience in UK Special Forces.
11.	TREVOR WILSON: 20 Years experience in UK Special Forces.
12.	MICHAEL PEARSON: UK Armed Forces and Civil Aviation Security.
13.	PHILIP SUGDEN: British Airports Authority and airline security.
14.	RICHARD GARNER: Former head of British Airways overseas security.
15.	MICHAEL SMITH: Civil Aviation Security and management.
16.	GRAHAM WILSON: Professional photographer.

Also on Spicer’s list was Mike Coldrick, a highly decorated army and police bomb disposal expert, and a one-time official of the Special Forces Club, the exclusive private club for British and Allied intelligence and special forces operatives and veterans.”

Spicer’s security review continued into early 2002, by which point the Sri Lankan government had agreed to the LTTE’s offer of a Ceasefire, albeit with a considerably strengthened hand for the Sri Lankan government.

Fax of Spicer’s team sheet

Notes

¹ Kevin A. O'Brien, "PMCs, Myths and Mercenaries: the debate on private military companies" *The RUSI Journal*, Volume 145, Issue 1, (2000), copy available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20030908191226/http://www.kcl.ac.uk/orgs/icsa/Old/pmcs.html> (accessed June 22, 2014)

² Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, First Report, Appendix 14, Memorandum submitted by the Campaign Against Arms Trade, January 1998, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199899/cmselect/cmfaaff/100/100ap15.htm> (accessed June 22, 2014)

³ Canadian House of Commons debate, October 25, 2007, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3085693&Language=E&Mode=1> and essay by Dr Steven Metz, "Rethinking Insurgency", Strategic Studies Institute, 2007, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=790> (accessed June 22, 2014)

⁴ Mark Whitaker, *Learning Politics from Sivaram* (London, Pluto Press, 2006), 134.

⁵ Whitaker, 135

⁶ On 16 April 1971, Britain's High Commissioner in Colombo, Angus Mackintosh, telegraphed the Information Research Department at the FCO: "The desk officers in the [Ceylonese] MEA (Ministry of External Affairs) have been instructed to produce studies of insurgencies in Malaya, Indonesia, Philippines and Kenya and in legal, security and rehabilitation measures taken by governments there and elsewhere. Like all other officials here they start from a position of perfect ignorance. Published background material would therefore be most welcome. Some copies of Robert Thompson on countering communist insurgency would not come amiss for a start". [TNA FCO 37/787] The High Commission in Nairobi replied with a book-list about Britain's repression of the Mau Mau in Kenya from 1953-1960.

⁷ Whitaker, 138

⁸ Later Field may have been posted to Zimbabwe as the Defence Attaché.

⁹ Channel 4 News, Who are Sri Lanka Army's 53 Division?, December 8, 2010, <http://www.channel4.com/news/who-are-sri-lanka-armys-53-division> (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁰ Hiranthi Fernando, Making majors, *Sunday Times* (Sri Lanka), March 21, 1999, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990321/plusm.html> (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹¹ Wikipedia, Defence Services Command and Staff College, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defence_Services_Command_and_Staff_College (accessed March 7, 2014)

¹² TamilNet, Tigers declare "goodwill" month-long ceasefire, December 21, 2000, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=5673> (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹³ TamilNet, Britain welcomes LTTE ceasefire, December 22, 2000, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=5675> (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁴ Government of Sri Lanka, Govt. tells LTTE: Ceasefire only after negotiations proceed, December 26, 2000, http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/CA20001220001226ceasefire_after_negotiations_proceed.htm (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁵ BBC News, Tamil Tigers on banned list, February 28, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/1194949.stm (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁶ TamilNet, UK ban imposes restraints on peace process – LTTE, February 28, 2001, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=5821> (accessed June 24, 2014)

¹⁷ N. Ram, 'The best window of opportunity since the war began', *Frontline*, Volume 18, Issue 05, March 3-16, 2001, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1805/18050040.htm> (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁸ Powerbase, Rohan Gunaratna, http://www.powerbase.info/index.php/Rohan_Gunaratna#St._Andrews (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁹ Duncan Campbell, Marketing the new 'Dogs of War', *The Center for Public Integrity*, October 30, 2002, <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2002/10/30/5681/marketing-new-dogs-war> (accessed June 22, 2014)

4. From Ceasefire to Mullivaikal 2002-2009

Britain contributed politically and militarily to the break-down of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement, by distorting the balance of power in favour of the Sri Lankan government. Despite the truce, Britain continued to train, advise and equip the Sri Lankan military, police and intelligence agencies. It is worth contrasting the scale of British arms sales to Sri Lanka from 2003-2006 (the most peaceful period of the ceasefire), with the arrest of AC Shanthan, a leading Tamil activist in the UK, under the Terrorism Act in June 2007 for materially supporting the LTTE. At Shanthan's sentencing in June 2009, Mr Justice Saunders said:



LTTE leader V Prabhakaran with AC Shanthan (right)

“Over a three year period from March 2003 to June 2006 Shanthan coordinated the sending of goods to the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Money was used to buy goods which at least in part, I am satisfied, had been obtained by Shanthan from members of the Tamil diaspora resident in this country. Other money was supplied by the LTTE. There were a wide variety of goods supplied: Toughnote computers, which certainly could be used by the

military but could also be used in civilian ways; electrical goods, which could be used militarily but equally could have civilian uses. There were high power torches, which equally could have a civilian or military use. There were no guns or explosives included in the goods. There were a very large number of goods either shipped to Sri Lanka by Shanthan or taken in by Tamils living in England visiting relatives in Sri Lanka. The only items which were for an obvious and only military use were the Jane's manuals.”¹

In that same period, according to the NGO Saferworld, the British government supplied Sri Lanka with:

2003

Components for aircraft military communications equipment, components for military aero-engines, components for military aircraft navigation equipment, components for naval light guns, components for small arms ammunition, equipment for the use of naval light guns,

illuminators, military cargo vehicles, tear gas-irritant ammunition, military transport aircraft, military utility vehicles, armoured all-wheel-drive vehicles, equipment for operation of military aircraft in confined areas, general military aircraft components, components for military electronic equipment.

2004

Armoured all-wheel-drive vehicles, components for military communications equipment, components for military utility helicopters, components for naval light guns, ground vehicle military communications equipment, air guns, components for assault rifles, components for combat aircraft, components for heavy machine guns, components for semi-automatic pistols, semi-automatic pistols, small arms ammunition, technology for the use of semi-automatic pistols, components for military aero-engines, components for military transport aircraft, components for submachine guns, heavy machine guns, night vision goggles (T), military infrared-thermal imaging equipment (T), military utility vehicles, military transport aircraft, components for general purpose machine guns, gun mountings, submachine guns, weapon sights.

2005

Components for heavy machine guns, components for military training aircraft, components for military utility helicopters, components for naval light guns, components for semi-automatic pistols, components for heavy machine guns, components for combat aircraft.

Incorporation: components for naval light guns, armoured plate, ballistic shields, body armour, components for military transport aircraft.

2006

Air guns, aircraft military communications equipment, armoured all-wheel-drive vehicles, components for general purpose machine guns, components for heavy machine guns, components for military aero-engines, components for semi-automatic pistols, semi-automatic pistols, small arms ammunition, components for combat aircraft, components for combat helicopters, components for military transport aircraft, equipment for the use of combat helicopters, military utility vehicles.

In addition to a policy of arming one party in a Ceasefire whilst prosecuting the other, the UK also delivered the Sri Lankan side with a series of so called 'Security Sector Reforms'. These were funded by the UK's Global Conflict 'Prevention' Pool (GCPP). This was a tri-departmental initiative composed of the FCO, MOD and the Department for International Development (DFID).

In April 2006, the International Development Secretary Hillary Benn said in response to a Parliamentary question that:

“The Global Conflict Prevention Pool (GCPP) has supported defence reviews in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. In each case, advice was delivered through the Security Sector Development Advisory Team (SSDAT), a team of technical advisers from the Ministry of Defence and DFID”.²

Sri Lanka's "defence review" began in 2002 with British input from the outset.³

The Foreign Office included the role of SSDAT as part of their 'UK Peace Building Strategy in Sri Lanka' for 2006 to 2009. One objective of the strategy was a "governance reform agenda in key institutions, particularly the security services, to strengthen underlying conditions for a lasting peace". The FCO said:

“UK security forces have acquired expertise (principally from Northern Ireland and UN Peacekeeping operations) in policing conflict zones in a way that reduces tensions and violence. In 2001 the UK government established the Security Sector Development Advisory Team (SSDAT) as a centre of excellence for UK supported Security Sector Reform (SSR) activity, as part of its Global Conflict Prevention Pool activity. The SSDAT have a broad range of expertise on Policing, Justice, Defence and Intelligence and Security. They are available to provide practical support to the Peace Building Strategies objectives in Sri Lanka”.⁴

It continued to detail that the UK experts would be involved in:

- Development of policy and training in peacekeeping operations, civil military relations, international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict;
- Support of initiatives to help develop civil oversight of defence policy and military activity in order to promote transparency and accountability;
- Support for improved civil-military co-operation at regional, national and local level, with more effective co-operation between civilians, security services and government institutions;
- Educational and bilateral exchange activities with Sri Lankan defence force personnel to develop Security Sector Development skills;
- Improving English and Tamil language capacity of the police, military and judicial sector to enable enhanced communications with all sectors of society, and increased access to the services of national and local government; and
- Work with the Sri Lankan Police to support their development of a community based policing programme.

An earlier version on the FCO website also confirms that work with the Sri Lankan military was firmly on the agenda. “In April 2006, GoSL [Government of Sri Lanka] formally requested UK assistance with Sector Security Transformation (SST) in the following areas: Higher Defence (MOD) Management, Security Policy Development and Intelligence, and Policing”.⁵

Colin Martin OBE, who was Defence Advisor at the British High Commission in Colombo from 2004-2007, has since claimed that during his tenure that he:

“represented MOD on the UK Government Tri-Department (MOD/FCO/DFID) sector security reform, capacity building and governance initiatives with the Sri Lanka Government and instigated a comprehensive training and development programme for the Sri Lankan Armed Forces”.⁶

A Freedom of Information request by the author [ANNEX 1] obtained a list of all the courses provided by the UK MOD to the Sri Lankans in 2007. Also at this time, one of President Rajapaksa's sons was trained as a naval officer by the Royal Navy in Britain.⁷

Around April-May 2008, Martin's successor as Defence Advisor, Lt Col Anton Gash, “held talks with Jaffna security forces commander Major General G A Chandrasiri on the current security situation and then visited the Northern Naval Command in Kankasenthurai and Palaly air base”.⁸

Another UK MOD evaluation report confirms that, well after the ceasefire had collapsed, SSDAT were still active in Sri Lanka in April 2008, possibly even as late as March 2009, providing advice on ‘Security Sector Reform’.⁹

The list of military training in the Annex notes that Britain allocated one Sri Lankan officer a space on a two-week “International Intelligence Director’s Course” in July 2007 at the UK’s Defence College of Intelligence, which was “seen as a key requirement in an effort to modernise Sri Lanka’s capabilities and an opportunity to engage with senior Sri Lanka military”.



L-R: Lieutenant Colonel A. S. Gash, Major General G A Chandrasiri, Lieutenant Colonel Dan Rex and Wing Commander Andy Lee, 2008

There are more traces of British support for the Sri Lankan intelligence agencies in this period. The Libra Advisory Group, a private ‘development consultancy’, was set up by members of the SSDAT in 2007.

One of Libra’s co-founders, Peter Wilson, described his role in the SSDAT as their “Intelligence and Security Consultant”, working “on reform of intelligence services, National Security Councils and Ministries of Interior in Iraq, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina”. Peter Wilson’s online CV is ambiguous about where he acquired the skills to be an ‘Intelligence and Security Consultant’ (“His early career was with the British Diplomatic Service,

specialising in national security matters”¹⁰ - there are strong indications that Wilson is a former MI6 officer). Libra’s work in Sri Lanka involved “design and implementation of a programme to support Security Policy Making in Sri Lanka” and “designing [a] police reform programme for UK government” to carry out in Sri Lanka.¹¹ Wilson planned to deliver a workshop in April 2007 to address “capability building including operational and management training” of the Sri Lankan Special Branch (SB) and State Intelligence Service (SIS). The “end state” would be an “enhanced” SB and SIS. In February 2008, Peter Wilson was planning a “security reform seminar” for Sri Lanka with Sanjaya Colonne, a Sri Lankan defence advisor appointed by Mahinda Rajapaksa’s administration. The seminar was to be paid for by the British government.¹²

It should be noted that several SSDAT members, particularly those who joined Libra, merge UK counter-insurgency doctrine with their euphemism of ‘Security Sector Reform’. Andrew Rathmell, (ex-Chief Planner for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, Libra co-founder), wrote numerous publications where he used the terms ‘counter-insurgency’, ‘peace-building’, and ‘security reform’ almost interchangeably.¹³ In 2010, Peter Wilson himself chaired a Libra Advisory Group 3-day conference titled “Ending internal conflict: comparative approaches to stabilisation and counter-insurgency”. The programme explained that “Western nations have invested considerable effort in developing doctrine and capabilities for ‘whole of government’ approaches to stabilisation and counter-insurgency (COIN) interventions in support of broad state- building and peace-building objectives. However, insufficient attention has been paid to the experiences of the developing nations who are at the forefront of confronting these challenges in the absence of an international security presence”.¹⁴

As well as these one-sided military measures, Britain also put political pressure on the Tigers during the ceasefire. After banning the LTTE domestically, Britain also worked with the Americans to secure a European-wide terrorism ban on the movement. When Britain held the EU Presidency in the second half of 2005, travel restrictions were placed on LTTE members.¹⁵ This paved the way for a full ban in

May 2006. Swedish military officer, General Major Ulf Henricsson, who was head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) from 1 April to 31 August 2006, has slammed this decision. The SLMM was the observing body of the ceasefire agreement between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan Government. Henricsson said that the possibility of a negotiated solution during the internationally mediated peace talks was finally destroyed because of “high pressure from the US and Great Britain” to pass the EU ban, which gave the Sri Lankan government “carte blanche” to fight the Tigers.¹⁶

Now that the evidence of genocide in Sri Lanka is becoming irrefutable, Britain has managed quite successfully to create the impression that it opposed the excesses carried out by the Rajapaksa regime and that it is actually on the side of the Tamil people who have faced this terrible assault. In March 2014, Britain and the USA pushed through a resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council purportedly¹⁷ to put pressure on the Government of Sri Lanka for its war crimes in 2009. This political attempt to pacify the Tamil Diaspora by intervening in a relatively powerless UN body like the Human Rights Council, five years after the massacre at Mullivaikal, cannot hide the fact that Britain deliberately opposed action taken in the UN Security Council, in late February 2009, when the Sri Lankan state's genocidal intent was clear.



Sir John Sawers (left) with David Miliband, former UK foreign secretary

Britain has a privileged position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and could have scheduled a resolution against Sri Lanka then. However, Sir John Sawers, the UK permanent representative to the UN, said in late February 2009 that the:

“LTTE is a terrorist organization proscribed by many countries including the UK. They are cornered and under pressure and the solution to the current situation is the LTTE laying down arms and allowing civilians to freely move and for political process begin.

We have received an interesting briefing from Sir John Holmes [a British diplomat, then UN humanitarian coordinator]. The IDP situation in transit camps is not as concerning as once feared. The problem is those trapped by the LTTE. UN Secretary General and his team can continue to remain engaged in this humanitarian situation and assist the process. The United Kingdom was in favour of receiving a briefing on Sri Lanka humanitarian aspect but **the UK has a clear position that Sri Lanka is not on the agenda of the Security Council and it is not that kind of situation** and the briefing was therefore received informally under other matters.”¹⁸[Emphasis added]

On 16 June 2009, weeks after the end of armed conflict in Sri Lanka, it was announced that Sir John Sawers would be the next chief of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (MI6).¹⁹

Throughout the final six months of armed conflict, the FCO was secretly deepening its ties with the Sri Lankan police, even as Foreign Secretary David Miliband publicly demanded the Sri Lankan government to allow greater humanitarian access to the displaced Tamil civilians. The FCO sent a



Sanjaya Colonne, advisor to Sri Lankan MOD, (centre) with head of political section of UK High Commission in Sri Lanka (left).

delegation of senior Northern Irish police commanders to Colombo as “critical friends” in February 2009, at a point in the conflict when even hospitals had been shelled by Sri Lankan forces.²⁰

A month after the LTTE surrendered amidst thousands of civilian casualties, the FCO had a meeting in Belfast on 18 June 2009, with Sanjaya Colonne, an advisor to the Sri Lankan MOD. The only information about this meeting is that the intention was to agree future UK assistance with Sri Lanka’s police development. In response to Freedom of Information requests, the FCO has refused to “confirm or deny whether it held any

other information falling within the scope of the request”, which asked for a copy of the meeting’s minutes.²¹ So the decision behind this dubious security liaison remains wrapped in secrecy.²²

Notes

¹ R v Arunachalam Krishanthakumar, June 12, 2009, available http://www.tamilnet.com/img_publish/2011/08/CHRISHANTHAKUMAR_sr_12jun09.pdf (accessed June 22, 2014)

² Hansard, House of Commons Debate, April 25, 2006, Column 1031W available <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/vo060425/text/60425w18.htm> (accessed June 22, 2014)

³ Louise Bell, The Global Conflict Prevention Pool - A joint UK Government approach to reducing conflict (London, FCO, August 2003), 29, available <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/global-conflict-prevention-pool.pdf>

For Defence Review start date, see Eleanor Pavey and Chris Smith, Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Security Sector Reform in Sri Lanka, in *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments*, eds. H. Born and A. Schnabel, Lit Verlag, Munster 2009, pp. 189-210 http://www.ssrnetwork.net/document_library/detail/5608/post-conflict-reconstruction-and-security-sector-reform-in-sri-lanka (accessed June 22, 2014)

⁴ FCO, Global Conflict Prevention Pools, Sri Lanka, August 2007, <http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20080205132101/www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front/TextOnly?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1062157895923&to=true> (accessed June 22, 2014)

⁵ LinkedIn, Colin Martin OBE, <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/colin-martin-obe-fcml-chartered-mcipd/17/a86/211> (accessed June 20, 2013)

⁶ Sri Lanka Daily News, Sri Lanka’s flag flies high at Dartmouth, January 14, 2008, <http://archives.dailynews.lk/2008/01/14/fea01.asp> (accessed June 22, 2014)

⁷ Sri Lanka’s Daily Mirror Print Edition, May 7, 2008, and Tamil Guardian, British military delegation visits Sri Lanka’s military in Jaffna, April 30, 2008, <http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=1707> (accessed June 22, 2014)

⁸ FCO, Global Conflict Prevention Pools, Sri Lanka, March 2007, (accessed June 22, 2014) <http://web.archive.org/web/20070804013454/http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1062157895923>

⁹ UK Defence Statistics 2009, Chapter 7 - Sustainable Development, Military Aid to the Civil Authorities and Conflict Prevention, Table 7.8 MOD support to the UK's Conflict Prevention Initiative: examples (excluding operations) of activities undertaken in 2008/09 <https://web.archive.org/web/20110610150040/http://www.dasa.mod.uk/modintranet/UKDS/UKDS2009/c7/table708.html> (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁰ OneLeap, Peter Wilson, <https://platform.oneleap.com/peterwilson> (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹¹ Libra Advisory Group, Libra projects in South Asia, <http://web.archive.org/web/20110224084500/http://www.libraadvisorygroup.com/projects/south-asia.html> (accessed June 22, 2014) It is worth asking what continuity there was between Libra's initial work in 2007 and the Police Service of Northern Ireland's later visit to Sri Lanka in 2009.

¹² Slideshow 'Intelligence Reform and the Security Sector, Peter Wilson, Intelligence and Security Adviser, Security Sector Development Advisory Team, GFN-SSDAT Practitioners' Course, Birmingham, 12 March 2007' and FOI request to the FCO by the author ref 0502-14. In a phone call with Peter Wilson, he refused to comment on his work with the Sri Lankan police and intelligence agencies.

¹³ Powerbase, Andrew Rathmell, http://www.powerbase.info/index.php/Andrew_Rathmell and see for example, Andrew Rathmell, Reframing Security Sector Reform for Counterinsurgency - Getting the Politics Right, Libra Advisory Group 2010, <http://web.archive.org/web/20100828084736/http://www.libraadvisorygroup.com/assets/docs/ReframingSSRforCounterinsurgency.pdf> (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁴ 1041th Wilton Park Conference, Programme, Ending Internal Conflict: Comparative Approaches To Stabilisation And Counter-Insurgency, July 2010 <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/wp1041-programme.pdf> (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁵ BBC Sinhala, Tiger travel ban welcomed, October 3, 2005, http://www.bbc.co.uk/sinhala/news/story/2005/10/051003_children_euban.shtml (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁶ Ulf Henricsson, Generalmajor Ulf Henricsson antwortet, March 2007, http://www.friedenfuersrilanka.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19&Itemid=27 and International Human Rights Association Bremen, The peace process calls a halt to the genocide, http://www.ptsrilanka.org/images/documents/peace_process_halts_genocide_en.pdf (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁷ Examination of the UNHRC resolution reveals that although it heeds the Tamil Diaspora's call for an independent war crimes investigation, the conditions are laid down to fatally undermine such a probe. The resolution protects the Sri Lankan position that the unitary structure of the state is sacrosanct, and refuses to describe the victims as Tamils. It conceals the racial character of the crime and reduces a genocidal assault against the Tamils to a war on terror marred only by excesses on both sides.

¹⁸ Daya Gamage, U.N. Ambassadors unanimous LTTE laying down arms, releasing civilians to Sri Lanka government, Asian Tribune, February 28, 2009, <http://www.asiantribune.com/node/15821> (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁹ Matthew Russell Lee, Follow up: As Sawers Becomes Top UK Spy, New Light on Secrecy, Sri Lanka and Sudan Strategy, Inner City Press, June 17, 2009 <http://www.innercitypress.com/unmi6sawers061709.html> (accessed June 22, 2014)

²⁰ Adrian Rutherford, Top PSNI men advised forces of bloody Sri Lankan regime, Belfast Telegraph, October 15, 2013, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/top-psni-men-advised-forces-of-bloody-sri-lankan-regime-29659207.html> (accessed June 22, 2014)

²¹ Author's correspondence with Information Commissioner's Office, March 3, 2014, reference FS50512890, see also Phil Miller, Community policing or counter-terrorism: What was Britain doing in Sri Lanka?, Open Democracy, April 1, 2014 <http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/phil-miller/community-policing-or-counterterrorism-what-was-britain-doing-in-sri-lanka> (accessed June 22, 2014)

²² The Belfast police officers involved, Duncan McCausland and Gary White, have since retired. It should be noted that both men were then appointed as directors of Ineqe, a Belfast-based security company. Ineqe's CEO is Jim Gamble, a former head of RUC Special Branch in Belfast.

5. Epilogue: The geo-political context

Why then is Britain so keen to suppress the Tamil Tigers? What interests does Britain have in Sri Lanka?



Dr Chris Smith

Very little, according to Dr Chris Smith, associate fellow at Chatham House, Britain's premier foreign policy think-tank. Smith has argued that "Sri Lanka is, by and large, a country without a great deal of geo-political significance ... This does not mean that Sri Lanka lacks significance but, in relative terms, major powers have been afforded the relative luxury of treating the conflict and the behaviour of both parties on its merits, more than on the potential cost to, for example, supplies of strategic materials or arms sales. Rumours that external powers are quietly scheming to control or gain access to either Trincomalee harbour or future oil reserves should be treated with considerable scepticism."¹

(Trincomalee is a unique deep-water harbour in the Tamil dominated North-East of Sri Lanka. The LTTE desired it as their capital.)

However, several influential British statesmen appear to take a different view of Sri Lanka's importance to the UK. Admiral Horatio Nelson, that British naval hero, described Trincomalee as the finest harbour in the world. In July 2011, Britain's then Defence Secretary Liam Fox made an equally instructive comment in a speech in Colombo. Talking about the threat to international shipping posed by the Somali piracy, Fox said:

"As an island nation, maritime security remains of fundamental importance for the United Kingdom, just as it does for Sri Lanka. International action is gathering pace with multi-national forces already operating in the Gulf, off the Horn of Africa and elsewhere. The UK has also applied to join the Regional Co-operation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against ships in Asia. We recognise the challenge is a global one. **Sri Lanka is located in a pivotal position in the Indian Ocean with major international shipping routes between the Far East and the Gulf within 25 miles of your coast. In Trincomalee, Sri Lanka has a formidable strategic asset in this struggle that has yet to be fully realised.** So there is significant potential, for Sri Lanka to play a greater role, in issues such as counter piracy."² [Emphasis added]

Another well-regarded British statesman, Winston Churchill, was also conscious of Sri Lanka's strategic importance to Britain's control of international sea lanes. The island was used as the Royal Navy's East Indies Station during the Second World War and repulsed a Japanese invasion attempt in 1942, thus preventing the island being transformed into a bridgehead for an Axis invasion of India. Winston Churchill, commented in 1945 that:

“the sighting of the Japanese fleet had averted the most dangerous and distressing moment of the entire conflict. Ceylon's capture, the consequent control of the Indian Ocean and the possibility of a German conquest in Egypt would have closed the ring, and the future would have been bleak”.³

Churchill's view of Ceylon as a platform for control of the Indian Ocean re-appears as an American concern during negotiations at Independence for the UK-Ceylon defence agreement. The US expressed



Liam Fox (front left) arriving for his speech in Colombo. It was Fox's association with his unofficial adviser, Adam Werritty (purple tie at rear), that led to his resignation, not his support for the Sri Lankan government. (Photo from UK FCO)

interest in sharing some of the remaining UK military installations, owing to Ceylon's geo-strategic importance.⁴ For example, Ceylon granted America access to Royal Navy oil storage tanks in Trincomalee in 1949. Further research into British Admiralty records from this period reveal that the US also wanted to install its naval staff in a Royal Navy communications station at Welisara, 10 miles north of Colombo, because of:

“substantial US [oil] tanker traffic from the Persian Gulf to the Pacific and the US requirement in peace-time is primarily to cover the gap in their communications system which exists in the Indian Ocean as the US Navy has no W/T [wireless] station between Aamara in the Red Sea and the Pacific”.

Although the British wanted to accommodate the American's request, it is not clear from the file whether the Ceylonese ultimately agreed to it. Regardless, it does illustrate how the American's strategic assessment of Ceylon's geographical position in the Indian Ocean closely mirrored those of the late British Empire.

To give another example, the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt's Suez Canal Zone on 29 October 1956 occurred when tense negotiations about the withdrawal of Royal Navy facilities from Ceylon were still ongoing. In a top secret file, the Admiralty wrote to the Commonwealth Relations Office⁵ on 10 October 1956 about “the use of the Ceylon bases in the event of hostilities over Suez”, to:

“emphasise that from the naval point of view it would not be acceptable to be denied the use of Trincomalee for fuelling, ammunitioning and storing after hostilities [with Egypt] had commenced. We might well bring destroyer reinforcements from Singapore and these could not reach Aden without refuelling at Trincomalee”.⁶

British planners were also acutely afraid of too much Indian influence over the island. Ceylon had been run as a “fortress colony” in the British Empire, with a loyal Sinhalese population and a unique deep-water harbour (Trincomalee) offering naval domination of the Bay of Bengal in the event of Indian unrest.⁷ During negotiations for independence, a document was produced jointly by the Chief of the Air Staff, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and Vice Chief of the Naval Staff that warned:

“There is always danger of India (especially Congress India) interfering in the Ceylonese internal politics and promoting discontent among the powerful Indian minority [i.e. the Tamils]. The extent of this danger depends upon the future constitutional set-up in India. This danger is superimposed upon the problems of racial differences, anti-European feeling, communism and labour unrest which by themselves are liable at any time to cause internal disorders. Such disorders, however provoked, would have a serious effect upon the working of our [military] service establishments.

Although the Ceylon Government should be responsible for internal security, in the event of the situation becoming beyond her capacity to control and our defence interests being threatened, we should reserve the right to introduce forces, and to take action as necessary to protect our interests.”⁸

As we have seen, Britain did “introduce forces, and to take action as necessary” when communist or “Indian minority” movements (i.e. the Tamils) threatened the Ceylonese/Sri Lankan state. When the JVP, a Sinhalese anti-capitalist party, staged an uprising in 1971, British concerns over Trincomalee harbour and international shipping served to justify supporting savage repression of the rebels.⁹

In his speech before the court, the captured JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera highlighted the fact he was accused of waging war against the Queen of England:

“The charges made against us are grave. We have been charged with the breach of Sections 114 and 115 of the Penal Code. According to the writ issued to you by the then Governor General, and also according to the indictment served on us, the period at issue is that between the beginning of 1968 and the end of 1971. It is said that during this period we “conspired against the Queen’s Government”. It is said that during the period we conspired criminally to overthrow the Government of Ceylon. It is said that we have “waged war against the Queen” or have a betted such act.”¹⁰

When challenged in the House of Commons about the appropriateness of arms sales to Ceylon in April 1971, Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home insisted that, “mediation is not required by the Ceylon Government, who are determined, if they can, to eradicate these extreme insurgents in their country”.¹¹ In a letter to the Foreign Secretary on 27th April, Tam Dalyell MP argued, “It is not good enough for the Ceylon Government to take the attitude that ‘mediation is not required’. If we make available helicopters, I do not see why we should accept the brush-off. Further, what on earth is meant by your use of the word ‘eradicate’? We really should know a good deal more before supporting any move to ‘eradicate’ anyone, even ‘extreme insurgents’ with the use of British arms.”

A memo from the Head of the FCO’s South Asian Department to senior civil servants on the same day made clear why moderation was not necessary: “From the point of view of both British commercial interests in Ceylon and our general politico-strategic interest the right course is to seek to preserve our influence by maintaining a generally helpful and sympathetic posture; by continuing, as Mr Mackintosh



Cover of top secret files of communication during the Suez crisis in 1956

[British High Commissioner in Colombo] advises, to supply such arms and equipment as we can and as we consider to be genuinely needed by Ceylon.”¹²

This confirms a critical point of connection between the propagation of counter-insurgency doctrine and the UK government's view of its geo-strategic interest. A month after the rebellion began, Whitehall planners seemed to have made a simple calculation. The insurgent JVP was more to the left of Mrs Bandaranaike's government, and therefore less susceptible to British control. Ceylon, with its strategic location at the heart of Indian Ocean shipping lanes, could not be allowed to become a base for hostile powers. This is an early indication of the concern that Dharmaratnam Sivaram, the Tamil journalist and military analyst, was to later argue – that UK and US policy towards Sri Lanka is dominated by the island's strategic location, to the extent that savage counter-insurgency campaigns are necessitated to maintain Western interests.

The situation in Ceylon was discussed by the most senior British security chiefs, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), on 6 May 1971. Assessment Staff in the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Defence prepared a secret memo for Prime Minister Edward Heath about the uprising's implications for British interests [ANNEX 2]. It noted that Ceylon had “a central position in the Indian Ocean through which many of the United Kingdom's and Western Europe's vital trade routes pass”. The briefing was produced at the Prime Minister's request, a month after the uprising began. Whitehall planners highlighted Trincomalee's strategic significance in the Indian Ocean for the security of shipping lanes vital to free trade. It is unlikely that its meaning would have been lost on Heath, around the time he was approving of the British security service's (MI5) role as counter-insurgency advisers in Ceylon.

The Whitehall line about British geo-strategic interests in Ceylon forms a consistent thread running throughout their files for 1971. For example, a diplomatic report from the British High Commission in Colombo dated 8 July 1971 titled ‘Ceylonese Futures’, commented that:

“Protection of our local interests is not our only concern. We have a broader interest in Ceylon's political and economic stability and our policies must also take account of her strategic importance”.

[...]

“I recognise that the protection of our local interests in Ceylon is not our only concern and that we have a broader interest in the country's political and economic stability and in the maintenance of good relations with it. Our policies are bound to depend a good deal upon our view of Ceylon's strategic importance in the Indian Ocean and our judgement of the implications for us of expansion in the influence of China or Russia”.¹³



Alec Douglas-Home

The Foreign Secretary prepared a draft memo for the Cabinet and Defence Overseas Policy Committee, dated 5 October 1971, which expresses this idea most succinctly:

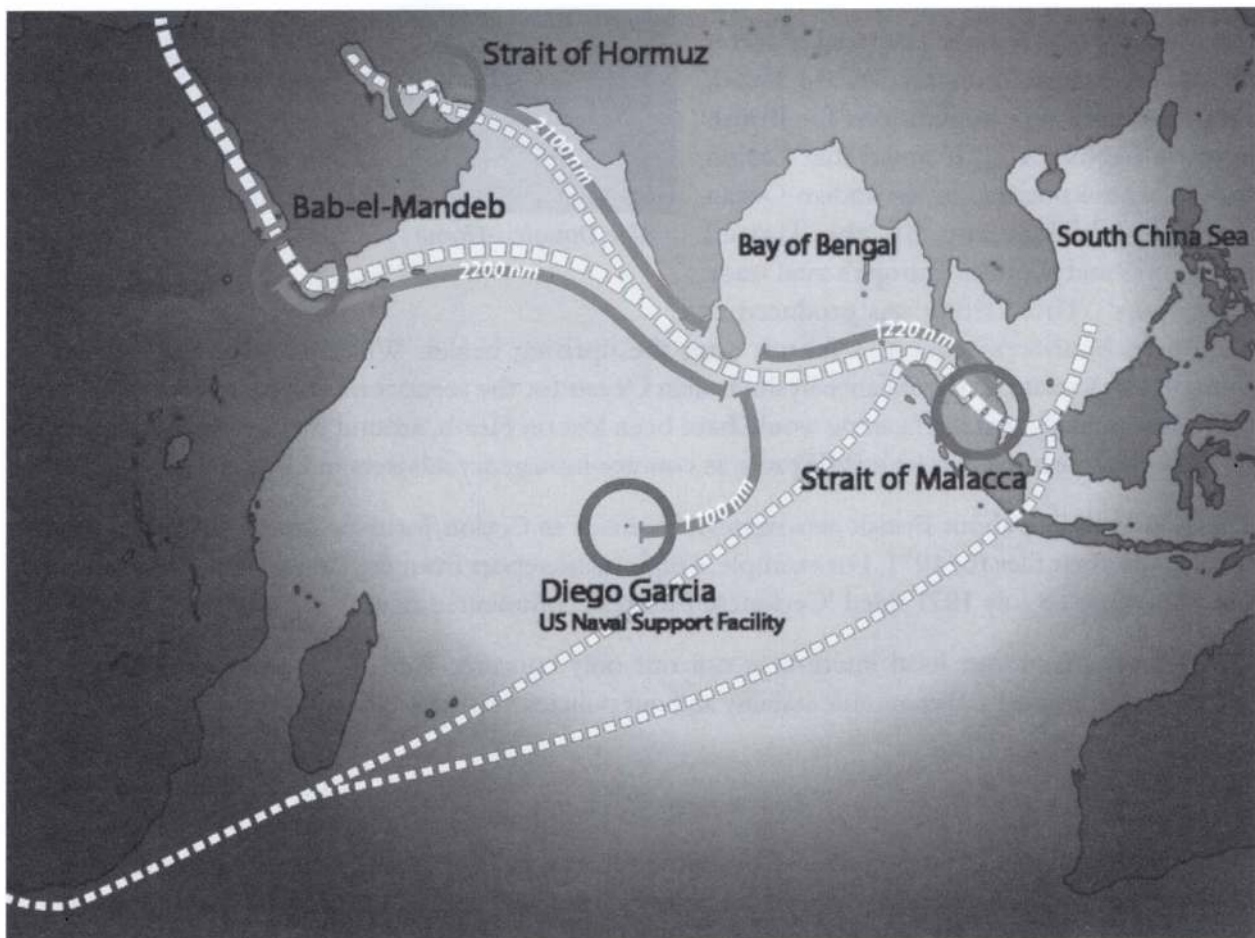
“So far as the security of the Indian Ocean shipping lanes is concerned, our interest is that powers hostile to us should continue to be denied the use of bases in Ceylon”.

“Britain’s interests in Sri Lanka are wider than the commercial and economic relationships. The country’s geographical position in the centre of an ocean through which an important part of our trade passes gives it a strategic position which should not be ignored”

“In formulating our future policy towards Ceylon we should therefore consider the cost of an actively hostile Ceylon. In terms of its effect on stability in the sub-continent and on security of the Indian Ocean shipping lanes, this could be damaging to important British interests. My conclusion, therefore, is that we must continue to do what we can to maintain a satisfactory bilateral relationship with the Ceylon Government. This will entail a willingness on our side to

go on supporting the Ceylon economy at about the present level of our aid disbursements so long as the Government’s policies towards British investments make this possible”.¹⁴

Britain’s geo-strategic concerns over Sri Lanka resurfaced in an FCO file from January 1977, titled *The British Interest in Sri Lanka*. The British High Commission in Colombo lamented how “successive decisions



Map of Sri Lanka’s central position in the Indian Ocean with Sea Lanes of Communication, maritime choke points and Diego Garcia

on nationalisation and on the taking over of facilities by the government of Sri Lanka have greatly reduced our commercial stake in the country". However, the document warned that:

"Britain's interests in Sri Lanka are wider than the commercial and economic relationships. The country's geographical position in the centre of an ocean through which an important part of our trade passes gives it a strategic position which should not be ignored".¹⁵

British business interests in Sri Lanka declined during the 1970's, as firms such as Shell and Leyland withdrew and negotiated compensation for nationalisation programmes. However, this file suggests that geo-strategic interests remained paramount, at a time when the Tamil armed struggle was beginning. Further access to British government files is restricted by the Public Records Act, which keeps Whitehall documents classified for thirty years. However, there is no reason to believe Britain's geo-strategic assessment of Sri Lanka has changed, as Liam Fox's comments in 2011 would indicate.

Notes

¹ Dr Chris Smith, *The Civil War in Sri Lanka and the Role and Influence of the United Kingdom*, in *International Dimensions of the Conflict in Sri Lanka*, 2008, p99

² Liam Fox's speech at the Lakshman Kadirgamar memorial lecture on July 9, 2011, available here: <http://dailymirror.lk/top-story/12346-looking-forward-to-llrc-report-fox.html> (accessed June 22, 2014)

³ Marc Montgomery, 'The Canadian who saved Ceylon, and to some extent, the war', *Radio Canada International*, April 4, 2014, <http://www.rcinet.ca/en/2014/04/04/the-canadian-who-saved-ceylon-and-to-some-extent-the-war/> (accessed June 22, 2014)

⁴ UK National Archives, DO 35/2408 title '1948/49 Ceylon: USA request for facilities to set up a Naval Communications Section in Ceylon, and for the appointment of a US Naval Attaché'.

⁵ At this time the Commonwealth Relations Office was the British Government department dealing with foreign policy towards Ceylon.

⁶ DO 35/6571

⁷ A text detailing the colonial period will be available on the www.ptsrilanka.org website by July 15, 2014.

⁸ 'Defence Requirements in Ceylon', Document prepared for the Cabinet June 9, 1947, marked 'Top Secret', reference CP (47)179. Available http://www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2013/12/1947_06_09-CAB:129:19.pdf (accessed June 22, 2014)

⁹ For details of the British backing of this repression, see Phil Miller, *MI5 in Ceylon – the untold story*, November 5, 2013, www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/phil-miller/mi5-in-ceylon-untold-story (accessed June 22, 2014)

¹⁰ Rohan Wijeweera, final submission before the Criminal Justice Commission November 2, 1973

¹¹ Hansard, House of Commons Debate, April 26, 1971 vol 816 cc33-4, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1971/apr/26/ceylon>

¹² UK National Archives, FCO 37/787

¹³ UK National Archives, FCO 37/789

¹⁴ UK National Archives, FCO 37/790

¹⁵ UK National Archives, FCO 37/1898

6. Conclusion

Reflecting on all the evidence above, it is worth asking at what point does Britain become an active party to a conflict? Was Britain a combatant in a war on the other side of the world which on the surface had nothing to do with it?

We have now seen the top secret document prepared by the Chief of the Defence Staffs on the eve of independence in 1948 that warned: "Although the Ceylon Government should be responsible for internal security, in the event of the situation becoming beyond her capacity to control and our defence interests being threatened, we should reserve the right to introduce forces, and to take action as necessary to protect our interests."

And when the situation did seem to spiral out of control, we now know that British security experts lamented "the depressing picture of apparatus and morale in the security forces tackling the Tamil problem". A former MI5 director was dispatched to advise Sri Lanka on the "total reorganisation of the intelligence apparatus". Shortly after Black July, the future head of the FCO during Mullivaikal, Peter Ricketts, told Downing Street that, "The Sri Lankan security forces have proved woefully inadequate in dealing with Tamil terrorist activities". His letter gave tacit approval for British mercenaries to operate in Sri Lanka.

Despite all these British covert military interventions during the 1980s, and more formal efforts in the 1990s, the LTTE still managed to fight the Sri Lankan state to a standstill by 2001. With a balance of power established on the island, and the tantalising possibility of an internationally-backed negotiated settlement for shared sovereignty between Sinhalese and Tamils, the British (with its ally the USA) embarked on a series of well-coordinated actions to upset the parity of status internationally. Beginning in 2001, through UK law, it banned one party to the ceasefire agreement at the very onset of the negotiating process, then again at EU level from 2005-2006, and finally standing by this position at the UN Security Council in 2009 even as the true scale of the horror became clear.

Perhaps the question is, can Britain fight a dirty war and keep its hands clean?

Annex 1

UK military courses for Sri Lanka in 2007



Ministry of Defence
Main Building (04/B/41)
Whitehall
London SW1A 2HB
United Kingdom

+44 (0)20 7218 9000

IPP-Sec@mod.uk

Our Ref: 06-06-2013-094628-008

12 Aug 2013

Dear

Thank you for your email of 11 July 2013 where you requested information as follows:

"I request an overview of what training and development programmes for the Sri Lankan Armed Forces that the UK MOD facilitated their participated in during 2007. I expect that an overview would include the aims, objectives and desired outcomes of the training and development programme provided, as well as their date, course title/reference number and location."

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence and I can confirm that information in scope of your request is held. The information you requested is enclosed in tables 1 and 2.

It is a matter of UK government policy to offer training to our allies and other countries which share our goal of securing a more peaceful world. In most cases international personnel will have the opportunity to train alongside British service personnel and civilians. Further information on International defence training can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/international-defence-training-idt>. Our training establishments run many hundreds of courses and by clicking on the links on that page you will be able to access online course details for all three services.

Enclosure:

1. Number of Sri Lankan students trained in the UK by year.
2. Overview of training and development programmes.

Year	Organisation	Number of Students
2006/07	Army	4
	Land Warfare Centre	2
	Royal Navy	4
	Royal Air Force	1
2007/08	Army	4
	Land Warfare Centre	2
	Royal College of Defence Studies	1
	Royal Navy	1
	Royal Air Force	1

Table 1. Number of Sri Lankan students trained in the UK by year.

Ref Number	Course Title	Course Provider or Location	Overview of Aims and Objectives
SRL6004	Army Commissioning Course at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for 1 student from 10 Sep 06 – 17 Feb 07.	Royal Military Academy (Sandhurst)	Aims and objectives and further information can be found at http://www.army.mod.uk/training_education/24475.aspx
SRL6005	RN Young Officers' Course at BRNC Dartmouth for 1 student 12 Jun 06 to 8 Jun 07.	Britannia Royal Naval College (Dartmouth)	Aims and objectives and further information can be found at http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/Careers/How-to-Join/Royal-Navy-Officer-training
	RN Young Officers' Course at Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth for 1 student 03/01/07 to 07/12/07.		
SRL6006	Initial Officer Training at Royal Air Force College Cranwell for 1 cadet from 9 Oct 06 – 1 Jun 07.	Royal Air Force College (Cranwell)	Aims and objectives and further information can be found at http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/Careers/How-to-Join/Royal-Navy-Officer-training
SRL7001	Support to Sri Lanka Defence Review. New impetus to the Review in 06 when Sri Lanka asked UK to assist. This serial provides for continuation work in 07/08.	N/A	
SRL7002	High-Level Political-Military Visits both from, and to, the UK - to be detailed when known	N/A	Aspiration for New Sri Lanka CDS/Defence Secretary to visit UK.
SRL7004	Initial Officer Training at RAFC Cranwell from 19 Nov 07 – 12 Jul 08.	Royal Air Force College (Cranwell)	See above. Place and funding confirmed on 3 Sep 07
SRL7005	Army Commissioning Course at RMA Sandhurst for 1 student.	Royal Military Academy (Sandhurst)	See above
SRL7008	Defence Diplomacy Scholarship Scheme: Managing Defence in the Wider Security Context, in the UK from 10 Mar – 25 Apr 07.	Joint Services Command & Staff College (JSCSC) in Shrivenham	The 7 week UK residential Managing Defence in the Wider Security Context course introduces international students to the principles and practices underpinning good governance, leadership and management of the defence and security sectors. The course is held annually. A one or two week Export variant can be delivered and is conducted on either a national or regional basis.

SRL7009	A short term training team ¹ of Central Flying School instructors to carry out instrument assessment ratings.	Sri Lanka	The Central Flying School will assess student pilots and aircrew. A report would be produced which grades the crews on parameters such as flight safety, airmanship, rules of the air and radio procedure.
SRL7010	Marker for Ground Defence Training for Security of Colombo International Airport. Dependent on progress in 06/07.	Sri Lanka	The Sri Lankan armed forces require a STTT to deliver airfield defence following a previous attack on the international airport. Running this course will help the UK to maintain & strengthen our relationship with Sri Lanka in order to satisfy our overall objectives.
SRL7012	International Intelligence Directors' Course for 1 officer for two weeks from 2 – 13 Jul 07.	Defence College of Intelligence	Seen as a key requirement in an effort to modernise Sri Lanka's capabilities and an opportunity to engage with senior Sri Lanka military.
SRL7013	On an opportunity basis to provide an attachment of Sea Riders with Royal Navy ships.	Sri Lanka	Blue water experience for young Sri Lanka Navy Officers. The Royal Navy will also gain experience of operations within this part of the world.
SRL7014	International Peace Support Briefing Programme in UK for 2 students for 2 weeks 22 Oct 07 – 31 Oct 07.	UK	Sri Lanka will become a major UN PSO contributor. The UK needs to be involved in shaping and training their capability. An important course to shape Sri Lankan thinking and improving international recognition.
SRL7015	Short term training team to deliver Formation and Unit preparation training for UN/PSO deployments. Phase 4 of PLAN.	Sri Lanka	During this course the training for UN Peace Support Operations. Individual and collective training, including public info and Rules of Engagement. In addition Sri Lanka PSO instructors need opportunity to visit OPTAG during unit collective training periods.
SRL7016	Short term training team to provide International Humanitarian Law / Law of Armed Conflict Course	Sri Lanka	To cover obligations of International Law.
SRL7017	International Sub Lieutenant (Executive) Course for 1 officer for 18 weeks.	UK	Essential career development module. To train junior officers in the duties and responsibilities of an Officer of the Watch and to provide a basis for further warfare training.
SRL7018	Royal College of Defence Studies and associated English Language Training if required to for academic year 2007/8.	Royal College of Defence Studies (Seaford House)	The RCDS Course is an annual course for Officers of OF5 (Colonel and equivalent) rank and above. Language training begins in July and the main course runs from September to July of the following year. There are up to 55 places available for International students.

¹ The delivery of International Defence Training to support Military Tasks may require an integrated training solution. Non-operational Short-Term Training Teams (STTT) is options for the delivery of in country training. A typical training solution to meet the stated requirement is likely to be preceded by a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and scoping visit. Where deployment of a STTT is appropriate, the training must be integrated with any training provided by an overseas-based British training team or UK based course.

SRL7019	Advanced Command and Staff Course (ACSC) at the Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC) to run from 6 Aug 07 – 17 Jul 08.	Joint Services Command & Staff College (JSCSC) in Shrivenham	Selected officers at OF3/4 level (Major and Lieutenant Colonel, or equivalents) attend the Advanced Command and Staff Course (ACSC). The pre-course begins in August and the main course finishes in July of the following year with two weeks leave at Christmas and Easter. For those officers who so choose and have the necessary ability, successful completion of the ACSC, together with a small amount of additional work and an examination, gains accreditation for a Masters Degree in Defence Studies from King's College London.
SRL7020	Advanced Command and Staff Course Overseas DS Course to run from 29 Oct – 9 Nov.	Sri Lanka	This is an export version of the course described at SRL7019.

Table 2. Overview of training and development programmes.

Annex 2

Britain's Interest in Trincomalee Harbour, 1971

The Ministry of Defence prepared this secret memo for Prime Minister Edward Heath in May 1971.

'Soviet Military Assistance to Ceylon: The Consequences of a Grant to the Soviet Union of Naval Facilities at Trincomalee'.

“There has so far been no precise parallel with the present situation in Ceylon, where Soviet military assistance has been invoked by the Government in power to help in dealing with insurgency. The closest parallel is the Nigerian civil war situation, but this did not involve the active participation of Soviet personnel nor did Soviet military assistance in that case lead to a military presence. In the Middle East the Russians now have varying degrees of military presence in Syria, Iraq and Algeria – as well as the UAR– and their behaviour there suggests that once they have established a toe-hold they will seek to exploit it to the maximum and be correspondingly difficult to dislodge. In the case of Ceylon we cannot yet conclude that they will see their interest in maintaining a military presence or that they will be allowed to do so by the Ceylonese.

2. H.M. Forces no longer make any use of Trincomalee nor have any plans to do so. The Soviet Navy has already shown that it can operate for extended periods in the Indian Ocean – and elsewhere – independently of shore installations. However, the use of facilities at Trincomalee would be of considerable advantage to the Russians in that they would thereby be able to make greater use of their naval units deployed in the Indian Ocean by reducing their dependence on distant Soviet ports and extending their time on station. (Vladivostock is about 13 days steaming from Ceylon at 15 knots [17mph]). The Soviet Navy would not – at least in the first instance – be looking for a naval dockyard as such, with its elaborate infrastructure. The use of a sheltered anchorage, which could be used for replenishment, refuelling and minor repairs would be sufficient for the purpose and only basic shore facilities and accommodation would be needed; such facilities at Trincomalee could be maintained with a minimum Soviet presence ashore.

3. Soviet use of Trincomalee would enhance the Soviet Navy's ability to deploy its units in the Indian Ocean in much the same way as the use of Egyptian ports has facilitated its operations in the Mediterranean. It would moreover make it easier for the Russians to maintain **a central position in the Indian Ocean through which many of the United Kingdom's and Western Europe's vital trade routes pass**. Moreover it might have a particular attraction for them if they failed to get the facilities they are seeking in Singapore and Mauritius.” [Emphasis added]

[Source: The National Archives, FCO 37/810]

"For decades Eelam Tamils have agonised over the question 'why is our plight ignored by the entire world?'. Focusing specifically on the post colonial period Phil's painstaking work starts to uncover the answer. This is a must read for all Eelam Tamils."

Dr N Malathy, author of A Fleeting Moment in My Country

"Fascinating, factual and extremely well researched; shining a welcome light on another dark corner of Britain's history of dirty counter-insurgency campaigns."

Paul O'Connor, Pat Finucane Centre

"This forensic examination of Britain's complicity in the Sri Lankan government's violence and terrorism against the Tamil people, over decades, is vital reading. Phil Miller uncovers a litany of documents that detail London's enthusiasm for training and arming the very thugs who are now accused of committing crimes against humanity in the final stages of the country's brutal civil war. This is an essential work that deserves a wide readership."

Antony Loewenstein, independent journalist, Guardian columnist and best-selling author of My Israel Question, The Blogging Revolution and Profits of Doom

"Phil Miller's report Britain's Dirty War against the Tamil People is a concise, accurate historical portrayal of the post-colonial conflict in Sri Lanka. My own brief experience as a training officer for KMS in 1986 revealed British support for a Sinhalese regime that controlled all media north of Anuradhapura. British instructors often taught with integrity but had no control over military policy or field commanders. I quickly became aware of the Sinhalese policy of extermination and resigned. On returning to UK in 1986 I was approached by a person claiming to represent the Foreign Office who prevented me by coercion from training the Tamil Tigers. It is regrettable that even now it is a struggle for journalists to reveal the truth about this once vibrant country, I hope that Phil's report is a catalyst for an international investigation into the actions of the Sri Lankan Government since 1982."

Robin Horsfall, former SAS soldier, author of Fighting Scared