'Good leadership is the key behind current military success' says global terror expert

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Exclusive interview with Rohan Gunaratna by Udara Soysa of the Sri Lanka Guardian Professor Rohan Gunaratna is Head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research and Professor of Security Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at the Nanyang Technology University. He holds several honorary appointments including Member of the Steering Committee of George Washington University's Homeland Security Policy Institute and the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, Oklahoma. A former Senior Fellow at the United States Military Academy's Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point and at Fletcher School for Law and Diplomacy, he holds a Masters in international peace studies from Notre Dame, US, where he was Hesburgh Scholar and a doctorate in international relations from St Andrews, Scotland, where he was British Chevening Scholar. Invited to testify before the 9-11 Commission on the structure of al Qaeda, Gunaratna led the specialist team that built the UN Database on al Qaeda, Taliban and their Entities. He debriefed detainees in the U.S., Asia, Middle East, including high value al Qaeda detainees in Iraq. He served as trainer for law enforcement, the intelligence community, and the military. He served as counter terrorism instructor for GIGN, CTSO, D88, US NAVY SEALS, Swiss Federal Police, NYPD, and the Australian Federal Police. He conducted field research in conflict zones including in Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Colombia. Author and editor of 12 books including "Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror" (Columbia University Press), an international bestseller, Gunaratna is also the lead author of Jane's Counter Terrorism, a handbook for counter terrorism practitioners. His latest book with Michael Chandler, former Chairman of the UN Monitoring Group into the Mobility, Weapons and Finance is "Countering Terrorism: Can We Meet the Threat of Global Violence?" A litigation consultant to the U.S. Department of Justice, Gunaratna was United States expert in the Jose Padilla trial. Q. How do you see the latest developments in Northern theatre? A. The LTTE has taken a severe beating. The LTTE is moving in three directions: the LTTE is planning for the large scale infiltration of Colombo to mount suicide attacks, internationally to tarnish Sri Lanka's image by misusing the word genocide, and radicalizing the displaced Tamils and recruiting them to their rank and file. Q. What made the changes in the ground for the Sri Lankan Armed forces and Tamil Tigers? A. Government understood that fighting terrorism is a collective effort. Unlike previous defense secretaries, Gotabaya Rajapaksa understood the importance of working with everyone. He built a first rate team drawing the leaders within the army, navy, air force, intelligence, police, foreign ministry and other government agencies and got them to work together. During the past two years, sustained pressure was applied on the LTTE crippling the LTTE support and operational networks. It was good government leadership that made the LTTE suffer. Q. How do you see the 2002 CFA signed by GOSL and LTTE? Do you believe that LTTE benefited from it? A. LTTE made use of each and every ceasefire to regroup and re-supply as a group. The LTTE cadres and leaders made use of every ceasefire to rest, recuperate, collect intelligence and strike back. Q. Do you believe that government forces can capture Prabhakaran alive or eliminate him? A. If the same degree of pressure can be maintained on the LTTE for two years, the LTTE can be dismantled. Q. Do you believe that a military defeat of LTTE is evident? A. Yes, but it is essential for government to continue to work with everyone. This includes the diplomatic missions, the NGOs, the human right lobby and other actors who have been traditionally mislead or sympathetic to the LTTE. Q. What do you believe are some strategic mistakes that LTTE committed during post- 9/11 environment? A. Prabhakaran failed to seize several golden moments to talk peace and enter mainstream politics. The LTTE never addressed the core issues but discussed peripheral issues to buy time to strengthen itself militarily. The LTTE under Prabhakaran will never bring any relief to the Tamils. Prabhakaran has only brought suffering, death and destruction to the Tamils. Q. How do you see the developments in Eastern province? A. It is paramount for government to work with the international community to develop the east. Working with the Muslim, Tamil and Sinhala population in the East, government should make the East a model for the North. Q. What specific challenges are ahead of the government of Sri Lanka within next ten years? A. On the economic side, government should review the existing investment incentives and make Sri Lanka the most attractive nation in the world for foreign investment. On the science and technology and IT side, government should make Sri Lanka the technology hub of Asia by inviting the best brains back to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's greatest untapped resource is its expatriates. On the governance side, Sri Lanka must give new powers to the anti-corruption commission and stamp out corruption. No country can develop without corruption. Leaders who are corrupt should deserve severe penalties. On the security side, it is essential for the government to build a world class security and intelligence service that warns government of threats ahead of time. The fight against the LTTE has been historically mismanaged. Government should reduce the size of the military but invest in building more elite forces like the special forces, commandos and airborne troops. On the social side, government must create programs to integrate the LTTE surrendees to the nation’s mainstream. Government should give land to every military and police officer and encourage them to start industries and business from agriculture to farming. Q. What do you believe as the ideal political solution for the country? A. Sri Lankan leaders must affirm and inform all communities that every religious and ethnic community will be treated equally. The majority community, the Sinhalese, can afford to be more generous to the minorities. If all ethnic and religious groups are treated equally, there will be no anger, resentment and no support for violence. Those who preach and practice hatred should be persecuted. Government must educate all its citizens that the national security of the nation rests on maintaining communal and religious harmony. Q. How do you

see the US and Indian involvements in current context? A. The government of India trained the LTTE from 1983 to 1987. Today, India has realized the blow back effect of funding, arming, and directing terrorism in the neighbourhood. Sri Lanka must manage its relations with India by posting its most senior and able diplomat to Madras. We must invite all the leaders of Tamil political parties in India to visit Sri Lanka. The US is the most generous nation on earth. US has helped Sri Lanka immensely in the past and continues to help us. As the first country in the region to develop a market economy, Sri Lanka must work closely with the US. Sri Lanka must strike strategic partnerships with the US, EU, China, India, and Pakistan. Q. What reactions do you expect from Tamil Diaspora within the next few months? Do you think that they have a major impact on Sri Lankan theatre? A. The primary duty of a Sri Lankan diplomat is to advance Sri Lanka's national interests. Currently its national security interests are challenged. As such, every diplomat should spend a third of his time countering the evil propaganda of the LTTE. The diplomats should explain to the Tamils overseas not to be carried away by the LTTE black and grey propaganda. Sri Lanka must appoint an ambassador for counter terrorism that will advice all missions on strategies and approaches to counter terrorist propaganda, keep foreign governments briefed and to ensure that the true face of the LTTE is publicized. As the LTTE is a banned group, Sri Lanka should work with and assist foreign governments to prosecute those who work for the LTTE in their countries. Q. What suggestions do you have for Sri Lankan political and military machinery? A. Governance is a monumental challenge. Every Sri Lankan political leader must understand that they must conduct themselves properly to earn the respect of country and the international community. A leader must know to lead himself, then to lead others and eventually to lead leaders. This is the challenge of the hour. The LTTE rank and file is demoralized and government must create a pathway for them to disengage from the LTTE. Government must announce amnesties for those LTTE members and leaders that abandon the LTTE. Government should promise them jobs and care for their families. Government should request for international assistance to rehabilitate those LTTE fighters that disengage from violence so that they will be useful to build the nation. Courtesy: Defence.lk