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## Lessons from Sri Lanka

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Defeating the enemy on the battlefield By Peter Leitner and Rajika Jayatilake Sri Lanka recently emerged victorious from one of the world's longest-running conflicts, once termed an "unwinnable" war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), also known as the Tamil Tigers.

The LTTE is considered one of the deadliest terrorist groups, having invented the concept of the modern-day suicide bomber and carried out the murder of two sitting heads of state. In addition, the Tamil Tigers pioneered use of female suicide bombers, homemade minisubmarines, ultralight aircraft and "warehouse ships" pre-positioned on the high seas to resupply terrorist operations on shore. These homegrown terrorists held Sri Lanka hostage through brutal acts of terror for almost three decades, demanding a separate state for ethnic Tamils in the north and east of Sri Lanka while building a vast global terror network. Many more than 70,000 people were killed and at least 300,000 wounded. In U.S. terms, that would be the equivalent of 1.25 million dead Americans with 4.3 million wounded. The human suffering and economic dislocation is staggering yet is somehow ignored consistently by those abroad who profess to cherish democracy and the dignity of man. As the self-appointed global leader in the war on terrorism, the United States could learn some significant lessons from Sri Lanka's victory. Here are our top nine:

- Perhaps the most important lesson is the debunking of the widely held belief that terrorism cannot be quelled militarily. The Sri Lankan military demonstrated that professionalism, strategy, discipline and unswerving commitment can beat terrorism. All too often, the greatest obstacle to military success is the starry-eyed interference by third parties insisting that only diplomacy and negotiation can bring a true end to terror-based conflicts. History has demonstrated repeatedly, and Sri Lanka has just underscored, that negotiation is doomed in the face of an implacable enemy with an absolutist agenda seeking to create change by ruthless use of force.
- Terrorist outfits are highly opportunistic. They excel in politically manipulating third countries as they engage in hollow cease-fire arrangements to buy time, regroup, rearm and initiate surprise offensives. Even in defeat, terrorist operations may continue by initiating violence inside nations that house their exiles and their remaining power base.
- The terrorist support structure dies hard. Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger terrorists were, and still are, backed by an extraordinarily sophisticated, wealthy and highly educated business and professional class. Actively preventing expatriot supporters of defeated terrorist organizations from funding, supplying or otherwise supporting the creation of follow-on entities that will resume the violence -- albeit under different names, with different faces -- must cap victory on the battlefield. This means, in the Sri Lankan case, that the United States, Canada, Australia, Great Britain and the rest of the Commonwealth are the front-line states in ensuring that their territories will not be used to reignite LTTE's failed but extraordinarily bloody terrorism.
- Terrorist movements rely upon the apathy of third countries toward the suffering that groups operating on their soil cause in distant nations. The hypocritical and self-serving attitude apparent in the commonly expressed "they are engaged only in fundraising here, not violence" not only rationalizes inaction, but also cripples international support for counterterrorism moves deemed vital to host nation interests.
- Even the most sophisticated and creative terror organizations make bad decisions and demonstrate self-defeating behavior. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by LTTE operatives in India brought a profound backlash that saw India effectively bar its soil from being used as a staging area for operations inside Sri Lanka. Once denied physical sanctuary in neighboring countries for combatants, logistics and training activities, terror/insurgent movements are severely crippled.
- Historical animosities do not yield to the wide-eyed "split the difference" mentality that is the hallmark of Western diplomatic and political naivete. Such an approach alienates all parties to a conflict and results in self-deception while exposing the incompetent middleman's own population to attack. Conflicts rooted in history are complex and should not be reduced to simplistic equations.
- If elected Western leaders actually believe their own rhetoric that all civilized nations must cooperate in this global war on terror, they must actively support the anti-terrorist initiatives of fellow democracies around the world. Ideological movements, religious cults, political insurgencies and cults of personality that employ terror to push their agenda should be eradicated as quickly, as universally and as completely as possible. Even leaders who hold fast to "pragmatism" as a political creed need to be reminded that the incubation and development of terrorist activity in far-off lands will come back to haunt their own citizens sooner rather than later. The Tamil Tigers' terrorist activities went largely ignored by the West for decades. But the techniques they developed have killed thousands in unrelated terror attacks around the world. For instance, use of "boat bombs" was copied by terrorists in the October 2000 attack on the USS Cole in Aden Harbor. Western ambivalence toward this long-running tragedy has been costly.
- Sri Lanka's war was complex and challenging, spawning several dimensions of terrorist activity. The war was fought on the ground in Sri Lanka, while propaganda and funds for weapons were handled by LTTE supporters living in the West, and weapons were acquired from Southeast Asia and Central Europe. Although the United States designated the LTTE as a foreign terrorist organization in October 1997, it was not until November 2007 that it banned the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization as an LTTE front organization. Until then, in the guise of charity, LTTE activists were collecting funds and transferring them to the Tiger war chest. Canada proscribed the LTTE in April 2006 and banned the World Tamil Movement (WTM) in June 2008. The banning of these front organizations was a major blow to LTTE terrorist operations.
- Even after the unequivocal military defeat of the LTTE, its overseas supporters defiantly keep the separatist dream alive despite annihilation of most of LTTE's leadership and the death of founder Velupillai Prabhakaran. If unchecked, they may well transform that dream once again into virulent terrorism, and this time, the Eelam War may well be fought locally - by the diaspora in the West. Courtesy: [washingtontimes.com](http://washingtontimes.com)