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## Why could we not defeat LTTE for 25 years?

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All members of the security forces, past and present, and all citizens of this country no doubt are happy and celebrating the defeat of the LTTE, the most ruthless terrorist organization in the world, that had been a scourge not only to our country but the world for the past three decades.

Some Western nations must be unhappy that the lever they utilized to destabilize our nation is no more available for them. Locally, the stooges of those powers with vested interests too are unhappy since their peace wagon has got bogged down and off road for ever and they are unable to enjoy the free rides anymore. I have observed many of the past Commanders of all three forces who failed to achieve victory when they were at the helm of power also were among them to achieve their goals through peace means. Many a writer, including some armchair Generals has written to the press and come live on TV to tell us how the current Commanders have won the war, but none has explained why past Commanders could not or would not win the war when the LTTE was much weaker and was not well-established. If they won, perhaps, we would have saved the lives of thousands of youth of both sides and billions of rupees of our National wealth. That included the personal properties of our citizens of the North and South, and the valuable infrastructure facilities. When the North and East was burning, the retired Generals, Admirals and Air Marshals were discussing at various forums how to solve the National problem through peace negotiations, rather than advising the Commanders how to win the war in which they were inextricably engaged in. To me, it looked awkward, discouraging and meaningless in that needy hour. Let us see why those Commanders failed to forge an end through military means when they were in power. First and foremost was the unnecessary political interference which came in many forms. Some politicians with connections with the security of the country had vested interests and were working towards achieving their aims of making money through purchase of arms and equipment for the Army, Navy and Air Force. Some Security Force Commanders who did not have the backbone either kept quiet and said yes to whatever the deals approved by the politicians, with the connivance and support of the bureaucrats in the Ministries. They too amassed wealth here and abroad. The troops in the front lines had to bear the brunt of it by getting killed using sub-standard arms and equipment and flying in obsolete aircraft bought through questionable shady deals. Some top brass were hauled before the High Courts after their retirement and were even arrested and kept in remand. Others who still had the political backing either escaped through their cunning manoeuvring of technical points or using their ill-earned wealth by bribing politicians of the era. Thousands of troops sacrificed their lives in the arid battle fields like Pooneryn and Mullaitivu or plunged into the sea in aircraft that did not have even anti-missile protection. Next, political interference was the denial of required manpower, arms and equipment to the Operation Commanders, quoting that the government did not have sufficient funds. Whenever there was a respite in the war, the process of recruiting and continuous training of troops were abruptly stopped which is against all principles of maintaining combat readiness even during peace time. Once the war resumed, the field commanders were ordered to manage with what they had until the recruitment and training was complete to launch them to battle. This is what the President clearly understood through the wise counsel of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the battle hardened brother of His Excellency. Gotabaya never subjected the Service Commanders or the front line Operational Commanders to such humiliating predicament and maintained the clear cut aim of defeating the LTTE and relentlessly worked towards achieving that aim despite opposition from many quarters as well as adverse international pressure. I am certain that the Service Commanders also insisted on their own requirements forcefully without wilting to the pressure of the financial constraints which the past Commanders did not do. I have observed that when the senior service officers were getting professionally qualified and matured towards the end of the careers, their aim was to become the Head of the Service which is quite natural. The way they set about achieving it was not in keeping with the prime interests of the country. Invariably, many past Commanders of Services became `yes men` so that they approved anything the politicians wanted done irrespective of whether they were correct or not and injurious to the National interests. Coming back to the political interference, at one stage, a politician planned the operations to win the elections. He insisted that an objective or an area be captured before the Provincial Council Elections. The Operational Commanders short of time, manpower and equipment either reluctantly agreed knowing that the operation would fail. The Service Commanders never intervened and advised the politicians not to pursue it, since they did not want to lose the command and the ambassadorial appointment they were dreaming of. Those Operation Commanders who did not want to sacrifice their principles as well as the troops who disagreed with the political big-wigs were sidelined and sent out of the service, sometimes ignominiously. Old school, clanism and favouritism affected the operational efficiency of the Services. If a Service Commander's successor was from the same Regiment or same clan or the same school and of the same colour, well, he was the one to command the service and he was trained and groomed accordingly without taking into his consideration IQ or combat efficiency and professional competency. He was groomed in such a way that he naturally became an `yes man` as happened to our administrative bureaucracy, which is at the bottom of the administration mess today. This was what ailed the services which contributed to the failure of past Commanders, who almost ended up with Diplomatic appointments. Only a few obviously corrupted ones were denied this perk. Commanders of this calibre never had the determination and the National aim of defeating the LTTE on top of their career agendas. Their aim was to command the Service and end up an Ambassador and to hell with the Nation. The handing over of weapons and money to the LTTE by the highest political authority in the country was one of the biggest blunders that was unopposed and approved by the Army Commander and a Secretary of Defence who too were Three and Four Star Generals, both of whom knew that it was wrong and injurious and detrimental to the National security. The same duo approved even a worse blunder of handing over 600 policemen in the East to the LTTE, who drained them of their blood, butchered and buried them in mass graves. How could a Commander of this calibre and their front line Operational Commanders win the war when they supported the enemy which amounted to treason? Those top brass are basking in the glow of glory

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with medals and honours now. What a shame. I believe the above facts would suffice to show readers why the war was not won for 25 years, under the corrupted, bias and inefficiency of politicians, and Service Commanders. I must congratulate and admire the present Service Commanders and the frontline Operation Commanders who were not malaised with the plagues enumerated above but received unstinted support and encouragement from the Commander-in-Chief of Services as well as his brother, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, that won the historic victory for Sri Lanka. This account is incomplete without a word of praise to General Sarath Fonseka, who is not a favourite of a group or a clan but a valiant soldier who achieved his aim through determination and perseverance. He is rewarded for choosing front line Commanders who joined the Army in the infancy of the LTTE and grew up getting battered and hardened along with the growing LTTE which grew almost to a conventional Army with air and sea wings. Giving credit to international situation and their attitude towards Sri Lanka for annihilation and defeat of the LTTE to me is belittling of valiant achievement of Sons of Sri Lanka. Courtesy: lankanewspapers.com