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## Cut it off and kill it

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by: DAYAN JAYATILLEKAA patriot would feel a thrilled quickening of the heart at the news that a spearhead of the Sri Lankan armed forces is nearing Kilinochchi. A traitor would not. A realist would know that there's a long way to go before the war is won and many a pitfall to avoid. A fool would not. I am in no position to venture an opinion as to whether our Wannai offensive has reached a point of irreversibility, and we have checkmated the LTTE. I do know however, that there are several things we have to watch out for. The IPKF once dominated all the areas we are seeking to recapture from Tiger control, but that did not prevent the LTTE from prevailing. The difference between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the IPKF is, however, obvious. The IPKF was under the constraints sourced in the influence of Tamil Nadu. The Sri Lankan security forces operate under no such constraints. Even more basically, the IPKF had India to go back to, but the Sri Lankan forces have no country to retreat to.

The war is not won by the Sri Lankan state nor lost by the Tigers so long as Prabhakaran remains alive, just as the war in Afghanistan was not won so long as Osama Bin Laden, Ayman Al Zawahiri and Mullah Omar stayed alive. Instead of finishing the job in the Tora Bora Mountains, the US-led allies diverted their attention needlessly and heedlessly, to Iraq. We must be wary of the efforts by the LTTE to mislead, delay and divert. The Tigers will use any intermediary—both sincere and insincere—adopt any guise and any combination of carrots and sticks, to confuse us so they can escape and live to fight another day. In 1995, when Operation Riviresa was nearing completion and Jaffna was about to be liberated, an approach was made using an eminent religious intermediary to permit the people to evacuate. This was agreed upon without due heed to the possibility that the LTTE would exfiltrate together with the people. This cunning exodus of the LTTE to the Wannai in the wake of Riviresa was followed the very next year by the overrunning of the Mullaitivu camp. This had its more dramatic antecedents, though. In 1987, Prabhakaran's escape from Operation Liberation was facilitated by Indian intervention, itself catalysed by pressure from Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.G. Ramachandran. One year later, IPKF jawans were dying at LTTE hands, and a few years later, Shri Rajiv Gandhi was blown to bits on Tamil Nadu soil by an LTTE suicide bomber. In his effort to retrieve Sri Lankan sovereignty from the IPKF presence, President Premadasa also contributed to saving Prabhakaran from the IPKF, and paid the supreme price at Prabhakaran's hands on May 1st 1993. A Sri Lankan Soldier in Northern BattlefieldTherefore, what should Sri Lanka's attitude and policy towards the Tiger army now trapped in its own lair except for the occasional foray, be? It should be that of Gen. Colin Powell, the topmost US military officer during Gulf War One —Desert Storm—which was under the operational command of Gen. Schwarzkopf. When asked about his strategy for fighting and defeating the Iraqi armed forces, Powell replied: "First we cut it off; then we kill it." That, rather than territorial acquisition, must be the primary goal of strategy. This is not to say that the liberation of territory is insignificant. Here two distinctions must be drawn. The first is between primary and secondary. The primary goal of strategy must be "the annihilation of the living forces of the enemy", which is North Vietnam's General Vo Nguyen Giap, anticipating and practicing decades before against the French and US forces, what US commander Colin Powell was to articulate more crisply decades later during the Gulf war: cut it off and kill it. The second distinction that we must observe is between war and politics. In politics, unlike in war, the territorial consideration is of primary significance. The reunification of the national territorial space by the Sri Lankan security forces under the political leadership of President Mahinda Rajapakse (assisted by Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse), building on but going far beyond the contributions of his two elected predecessors, is an achievement of historic proportions. That assertion is not a jingoistic hurrah but a simple, literal application of the late Edward Said's interpretative recapitulation of Antonio Gramsci, (among other things), the finest political scientist of the last century: "On the other hand, far more than Lukacs he was political in the practical sense, conceiving of politics as a contest over territory, both actual and historical, to be won, fought over, controlled, held, lost, gained." (Edward Said, 'History, Literature and Geography', in Reflections on Exile). This may come as something of a surprise to the Sri Lankan intelligentsia, a noisier one of whose number recently opined that an obscure Trotskyite trade unionist named Ted Grant, not a single of whose writings are taught in the Political Science courses of any university of my acquaintance on four continents, was a superior political thinker than Carl Schmitt, who is present in any serious scholarly debate on political theory. Schmitt's seminal work was pre-Nazi takeover, during the Weimar Republic, and decades later in the 1960s, while his Nazi affiliation is as relevant to his status as a political thinker as Martin Heidegger's was to his status as a philosopher. Carl Schmitt's major contribution to the field of political theory was nothing less than to define the essence of "the political". I digress, but not too far. The liberal intelligentsia is continuing to foster, even at this late hour, a dangerous myth, namely that the Sri Lankan state has been pushed to devolve power due entirely or primarily to the military campaign of the Tigers and that with the weakening of that factor, the poor Tamils will be left naked to their enemies. This not only fails to correspond to the facts, but what is worse, the facts line up to contradict that assertion. The military campaign of the Tigers and other Eelam guerrilla groups in the early 1980s did not push the Sri Lankan state into devolving power, as plainly evidenced by the APC of 1984 and the GOSL stand at Thimpu in 1985. In the 1990s, the Tigers conventional or quasi-conventional military capacity did not squeeze any reform of the Sri Lankan state, be it under Premadasa or Chandrika. They merely pushed back the latter's proposed reforms by generating a Southern backlash. The LTTE's proto-state, which a Colombo political science academic recommended be accorded parity of status, did not scare any radical or structural reform out of the state. Sri Lanka's Defence Secretary, Mr. Gotabhaya Rajapakse visits Northern Battlefield with Army Chief, Lt. Gen. Sarath FonsekaThe allied notions of Tamils enjoying self-respect because of the LTTE, and the fear of the Tigers preventing a repeat of July '83, belong in the same trash-can of nonsensical argumentation. Be it devolution or deterrence, there was and is one factor at play, and that is most certainly not Prabhakaran or the LTTE. The repeated renewal of the war by the Tigers has left the Tamil people in unprecedented

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disarray and decline, with their self-respect dented by the kind of security measures that any country imposes against suicide bombers drawn from one identifiable community. As for deterrence, the citizenry have taken everything the Tigers can throw at them by way of terrorism and are prepared to take more, until victory. What the Colombo columns and Diaspora-driven drive fails to recognise is the massive fact that is responsible for all the positives attributed to the LTTE: India. The Sri Lankan state was well on its way to dealing with the Tigers' military capacity during Operation Liberation in 1987, when it was rudely interrupted by its neighbour. Devolution was the result. When the Sri Lankan parliament endorsed the 13th amendment and actually held Provincial Council elections, the military power of the Tigers which so enthralled the Tamil (and Sinhala pacifist) intelligentsia was being suppressed by the IPKF — so the LTTE was not the propellant or source of those reforms. It's not Kilinochchi; it's Delhi, stupid. Troops of the IPKF disembarking in Chennai in March 1990 on their return from Trincomalee. This too has to be understood dialectically. The fact of that devolution was the result of Indian pressure while the (provincial autonomy within a unitary state) limits of that devolution were the result of Sri Lankan counter-pressure. Therefore, Tamil pressure on India and Indian pressure on Sri Lanka cannot yield reforms beyond a certain point, and that point is the limit imposed by public opinion. Unrealistic commentators argue that the followers of the two major parties accept that which is laid down by the party leaders, but this view is a snapshot of the conduct of the parties' loyalist base, not in any way a reading of public i.e. broad national opinion. This is why leaders such as President Chandrika, who brought forward advanced ideas of state reform, did not and could not implement those ideas. That is also why the majority voted against a bipartisan elite consensus in favour of federalism and in favour of a frankly unitary platform at the Presidential elections of 2005. Liberal opinion on Sri Lanka, be it Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim, local or foreign, has to ask itself whether we need yet another enlightened proposal for reform which remains on the drawing board, or a realistic proposal which is supported by public opinion polls and has a chance of making it past the Parliament, the courts and a referendum, if needs be. What is most prudent in the short term is an APRC proposal that does not require that risky third step of a referendum — given the axiomatic character of the absence of bipartisan consensus in Sri Lanka. If the Indian factor has its limits, what then is the internal lever in post-war Sri Lanka, which can deliver realisable reform in the field of interethnic relations? Is there one? Contrary to the "culture of complaint" (again Edward Said, citing Robert Hughes) of Colombo's cosmopolitans, there is indeed. The electoral marketplace, the value and weight of minority votes in a system of proportional representation and elections at four tiers of the polity, from municipal to presidential. In a word, democracy. \*\*\*\*\* (These are the personal views of the writer) (Courtesy : Sunday Island )