CHAPTER FIVE

THE IPKF EXPERIENCE IN SRI LANKA
AND AFTER

One of the first acts of Prabhakaran after the fighting operations commenced with
the IPKF was to involve the Tamil Nadu politicians and through them he intended
to involve the Tamils of the mainland. Prabhakaran always prized the support of the
Tamil Nadu politicians and the people of the state critical to achieving the Tigers' objectives. He knew he could not engage the IPKF in a guerrilla war without the help from Tamil Nadu. As already seen, the LTTE and its leader knew enough of the fault-lines in Dravidian politics in that state and in Union-State relations to pit one against the other to suit his convenience.

Within days of the commencement of combat operations, Prabhakaran's emissaries met the leaders of all Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu and handed over his letter seeking their co-operation to end the conflict. The LTTE had been keeping away from the DMK for sometime but at this stage the LTTE leader and his emissaries were eager to court the DMK's support. The Chief Minister and the charismatic leader of the AIADMK, MGR, was in his sunset days and chronically ill in distant Baltimore and was in no mood to defy the Central Government's foreign policy dictates. In opposition in the state as well as at the Centre, the DMK wanted a Dravidian cause to reclaim lost ground in state politics and hence was inclined to adopt a more extreme position in support of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. Thereby
they could tease the AIADMK in power in the state, defy the Central Government, energise their own cadre and mobilise the people in support of a Tamil cause. “Now I must support Prabhakaran because he’s the only person in the field”, Karunanidhi reported to have said. All what the LTTE wanted was to whip up Tamil sentiments in the state in their favour so that they could continue to use Tamil Nadu as a safe backyard to take on the IPKF. The Tigers found the DMK more convenient and moreover, the political dividend out of it, as in the wake of 1978 racial riots in Sri Lanka, would accrue to the DMK. It would therefore be a symbiotic liaison. The DMK tirade against the IPKF in Rajya Sabha was led by V. Gopalaswamy and in Lok Sabha it was N. V. N. Somu. Obviously the DMK wanted to use the anti-IPKF platform to convert chauvinist Tamil sentiment into votes.

The DMK promptly decided to have rallies across the state to condemn the alleged partisan attitude of Government of India. Regarding the death in custody of the LTTE men including senior leaders, the DMK leader charged the IPKF with not acting in a responsible manner. Prabhakaran also wrote to Rajiv Gandhi and copies of the letter were released to the press in Madras (renamed as ‘Chennai’). He accused that the IPKF, which came to the Tamil homeland to ensure protection, peace and harmony, was engaged in a total war and committing inhuman atrocities against the Tamil people. Prabhakaran wanted Rajiv Gandhi to send “a team of independent observers comprising representatives from international reporters, Amnesty International and Indian opposition parties to impartially investigate the allegations”


and also to call off the military offensive. He charged that it was uncharacteristic of a
democratic country like India to superimpose its will at the point of gun on a people
who have the democratic liberty to choose their political destiny. He also noted that
the offensive action to liquidate Tamil Tigers “who are none other than the true
representatives of the people is unfair and illegitimate”.3

Later the LTTE released 18 captured Indian soldiers in such a way as to
make it a media event. Prabhakaran’s open letter entitled *Indian Military Offensive*
explained in detail the Tigers’ point of view of the conflict. It observed that the
release of Indian soldiers was to honour the journalists “who have been preserving
and protecting the concepts of democracy”4 in India. The IPKF, which played the
role of a protector and peacemaker, was turned to an instrument of terror of war, the
letter accuses. Following the release of captured soldiers, India was constrained to
declare a unilateral ceasefire for 48 hours. It was an impressive propaganda victory
for the LTTE. It was intended to provoke a domestic reaction in India, especially in
Tamil Nadu, to ease the military pressure on the Tigers. The unilateral ceasefire was
an indication that there was no domestic consensus behind the Indian involvement
in Sri Lanka. It also suggested that there was total confusion as to the future course
of action.

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The objective of the IPKF operations was to disarm the Tigers. After being driven away from Jaffna, the LTTE was able to continue their armed struggle from jungle hide-outs. The nature of counter-insurgency operations by the IPKF had to change to take on a jungle-based guerrilla group that practised urban terrorism as part of its strategy rather than a wholly urban terrorist group. The strength of the IPKF had to be augmented to meet their changed needs. One assessment was that, being urban-based, the LTTE would be unable to persevere in the rural and jungle environment. Subsequent events proved this assessment wrong. Everyone underestimated both the chicanery and will power of the LTTE.

Whether the IPKF was prepared and equipped to commence military operations against the LTTE on 9 October 1987 is a moot point. The reinforcements were on the way and the existing strength was “grossly inadequate not only in terms of numbers of units and formations, but also because mobilization had not been declared and, consequently, units were under strength.” Militarily it was premature on the part of the IPKF to have commenced operations. It was a case of sound professional reasons being subordinated to political expediency. And what is politically expedient could be nebulous and shifting. Commanders owe it to their troops and must be able to stand up to the political leadership who may, for their own compulsions, be in a desperate hurry to show results. Montgomery in the

Second World War and Sam Manekshaw in 1971 are excellent examples of military commanders who refused to be hustled into battles without full preparation. Before committing Indian armed forces to combat operations in alien soil, the minimum that should have been ensured was that they were combat-ready and those who they were to fight were not getting moral and material sustenance from anywhere in India. It was an unpardonable folly on the part of the Indian leadership both political and military that this minimum requirement was not met.

Even before the LTTE was dispersed from Jaffna, they were able to bring about the image changeover and could get rehabilitated themselves as the committed freedom fighters of the Tamils. Increasingly the IPKF came to be perceived as an alien occupying force. The counter-insurgency operations by the IPKF further alienated them from the local people. In such a situation the IPKF could expect to get little help from the local population in their counter-insurgency operations. In any insurgency situation, the balance of advantage definitely lies with the group that enjoys the support of the local population. Even the best trained and equipped conventional armies had to suffer ignominy and defeat in their counter-insurgency roles among hostile population. About the mood and attitude of the Tamils in Jaffna, Lt. General S. C. Sardespande, who headed the IPKF in Jaffna, was forthright in his only press interview: “The majority of the people still support the LTTE. Our effort is to loosen that. Total eradication of this is not possible....They have no faith in India, in the Accord, in IPKF. They find something fishy in the whole thing. They

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think we are playing the Sri Lanka game." Though the Tigers might not win an election, they are widely admired as heroes whose stubbornness and sacrifices ultimately protected Tamil rights. The military prowess of the LTTE was the only insurance of the Tamils for their survival.

III

None of the assumptions on the basis of which the Agreement was hastily concluded proved right as the course of events subsequent to the signing of the accord would indicate. One of the basic assumptions was that the LTTE could be persuaded to accept the devolution package. For any reason if this could not happen, the Tigers could be disarmed within days through controlled military action. These assumptions on the part of India were proved to be based on wrong premises and assessments. It was also assumed at the time of the signing of the Accord that President Jayewardene would be able to take care of the strong reservations openly expressed by some of his own party bigwigs. It was thought that the President would be able to bring about the much-needed Sinhalese consensus to honour the commitments regarding autonomy in Tamil areas. These assumptions also floundered and large sections of Sinhalese were rabidly opposed to the Accord mainly on account of the presence of the huge Indian military contingent which they perceived as a slur on the

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7 M. R. Narayanswamy, Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas (New Delhi: Konark, 1994), p. 283. "The assessment was not shared by the Indian Government, which, in a rare show of displeasure, denied the remarks attributed to Gen. Sardesppande. IPKF commanders were asked to stay away from press." In fact, the remarks of Gen. Sardesppande were from his interview by UNI and carried by the national press. See The Hindu, 2 April 1988.

sovereignty of Sri Lanka. Almost every significant event after the Accord contributed to challenging the very role of the IPKF in Sri Lanka. Apart from those Tamil militant groups under India’s tutelage and rendered militarily impotent by the Tigers, all other sections of the population started perceiving the role of IPKF as increasingly untenable. The IPKF became the common enemy of all warring factions.

The IPKF was handicapped by deficiencies in numbers, with units operating at around 50 per cent of their authorized strength. They were unable to make use of artillery, mortars or aircraft in close support roles. They faced many logistical problems and were not battle-ready when the operations got going. Furthermore, there was the extremely important factor of psychological conditioning, whereby the fighting man develops an appropriate negative image of the adversary that he confronts and must, if necessary, kill. The IPKF went there to ensure that the Tamils get their just aspirations fulfilled and to be their guardians but ended up fighting them. This sudden role reversal was difficult for the fighting men to comprehend. The situation has a close parallel with the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 when the Chinese became the enemy for the Indian army, which was previously considered politically incorrect to even conceive of that possibility.

The influence of the Tamil Nadu factor on Indo-Sri Lanka relations was self-evident. The State Government’s continued provision of sanctuary to the LTTE in

Tamil Nadu greatly confused the IPKF. It is arguable that the long collaboration between the Governments of India and Tamil Nadu in providing sustenance to the Tamil militant groups could not be quickly snapped and hence some time was needed to wean them away and to wind up intelligence operations mounted from Tamil Nadu. This argument was too sophisticated for the IPKF personnel to understand, given their operational task of disarming the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Since Tamil Nadu constituted the strategic rear for the IPKF, the fighting soldier could be excused in believing that, while his political masters may be uncertain about their objectives, he was risking his life for their confusion. To add insult to injury prominent political figures in the country were decrying the IPKF as killers of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and lionizing the LTTE as great fighters.

The LTTE faced the IPKF from a position of advantage. Having mobilized the people behind them, the LTTE transformed itself for a rural insurgency role. The Tigers combined a high level of discipline with complete ruthlessness towards those who, in its eyes, were opposed to its only goal of Tamil Eelam. The LTTE's ruthlessness had been extreme while dealing with Tamils who could compromise on Eelam. To the Tigers, they formed the betrayers of the Tamil Eelam cause and hence deserve to be eliminated. The higher level of education and middle-class origins of the LTTE cadres ensured that they were better trained and displayed greater technical expertise and capacity for improvisation than guerrillas elsewhere in South

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Asia. They enmeshed more effectively with the politically conscious and deprived Tamil population in Jaffna and elsewhere. The innovativeness of the LTTE extended to the use of improvised and remotely operated mines and the use of human shields when opposing the IPKF, besides gaining access to superior infantry weapons and communication systems. The LTTE received a shipload of weapons, ammunition and explosives in September 1987 from Singapore. The Tigers prepared themselves to fight the IPKF even while professing brotherly feelings towards Indian soldiers. Another consignment reached them in February 1988.

Binding the LTTE cadres together was their common suicide pact, evocatively expressed by the cyanide culture. The cyanide capsule dangling from gold or gold plated chain is the movement's talisman. According to Prabhakaran the cyanide pill is "a symbolic expression of our commitment, our determination, our courage. This gives our fighters an extra measure of belief in the cause, a special edge." The cyanide capsule represents the extremely primitive psychology behind channelizing the energy of youth into a cult of suicide. The new recruit, mostly co-opted in their sub-teen years, are socially dead. Detached from their families, the movement becomes their hearth and home. Endowed with normal human brain and computer chips where their hearts should be, they make the best war machines

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11 Ibid., p. 12.


known to man. A conventionally trained army cannot match, cannot be expected to match this level of ultimate commitment.\textsuperscript{14}

In the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, India had originally intervened by using Tamil militants to broker a just deal for the Sri Lankan Tamils and preserve, thereby, the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka. The transformation of the IPKF’s role from peace-keeping to eliminating the LTTE carried the latent implication that India was subordinating Tamil interests to the need for safeguarding the entity of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, had the LTTE been crushed the earlier rationale of using them and other Tamil militants to lever an equitable deal for the Sri Lankan Tamils from the Sinhalese government would have disappeared. This confusion in objectives depicts the ineffectiveness of India’s Sri Lanka policy.\textsuperscript{15} This confusion antagonized the Tamils without befriending the Sinhalese. In fact, the Sinhalese felt bitter about the presence of the IPKF in Sri Lanka perhaps more than the Tamil militants who the IPKF was fighting.

IV

A direct consequence of the India-Sri Lanka Agreement and the presence of the IPKF in Sri Lanka was the resurrection of the JVP, “the shadowy group of Marxist origins”\textsuperscript{16} which “came close to achieving state power in late 1988 and mid-1989.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Chari, n. 9, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 16.

\textsuperscript{16} Time (Hong Kong), 28 November 1988.
Destroyed but not defeated with liberal assistance from foreign countries including India in 1971 by the ruling SLFP Government and pardoned by Jayewardene in 1977, the JVP fought the 1982 presidential elections like other political parties. Jayewardene won the election hands down having effectively neutralized SLFP and its leader after 1977. The SLFP candidate polled a respectable 39 percent. Rohana Wijeweera, the leader of the JVP came third having polled 4 percent of the votes. The election results indicated that the JVP by its adoption of parliamentarism had completely replaced the Left parties. Both the SLFP and JVP shared the same social base: rural Sinhala-Buddhist. The President's attitude towards the JVP changed suddenly after the riots of 1983, which comprised almost entirely assaults on Tamil civilians and their property in Colombo and elsewhere by Sinhalese mobs. The riots were attributed mainly to the JVP and along with two other Left parties, the JVP was declared a proscribed organization. The JVP, “until then a relatively quiescent group suddenly emerged as a violent champion of Sinhala extremism,” reorganized itself for underground existence with total power centred around Rohana Wijeweera. The resurrection of the JVP as a mass political force was triggered by the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict in July 1987. At the point when the Sri Lankan forces seemed about to take Jaffna itself, India stepped in forcibly and India-Sri Lanka Agreement was hastily concluded. JVP had alerted the Sinhalese as early as in 1971 about the dangers of Indian expansionism and Rohana Wijeweera appealed as a prophet to Sinhala-Buddhists in 1987. The accord permitted the Sri Lankan forces to concentrate on the


18 Time, 7 November 1988.
JVP. The Sri Lankan Police and armed forces generally shared the revulsion and hatred at what appeared to represent the realization of an old, deeply rooted and carefully nurtured collective Sinhalese paranoia about Indian expansionism and the vulnerability of Sri Lanka to betrayal by leaders who were not genuine Sinhalese-Buddhists. The JVP unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate the President within weeks of signing the Agreement. Since then the group had struck repeatedly against the ruling UNP killing local leaders and workers. The JVP campaign had virtually paralyzed the UNP in the south.

Although Sri Lanka approached China and Pakistan after Operation Eagle, neither country offered any military assistance. The US stand was made clear unequivocally. After the accord, US State Department spokesman Charles Redman said, "We applaud the statesman-like efforts and perseverance of these courageous leaders in achieving this accord."

All the countries which were friendly towards Sri Lanka were not convinced about Sri Lanka’s sense of grievance against India. The Soviet Union’s main reason for supporting the Agreement was that it was designed to counter separatism. It could be possible that all these countries shaped their responses towards the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka in terms of their internal situations and were conscious of the anomalies in supporting terrorist movements elsewhere while suppressing them in their territory. This logic maybe applicable even to India which, albeit unwittingly, was sucked into the quagmire, one misstep after another.

In 1971, there was hardly any separatist movement in India. If India had assisted to the partition of Sri Lanka obviously on the ground of the persecution of the religious and ethnic minority on the island then it would have not only legitimatised the external support to ongoing separatist movement in India but would also have encouraged many such other dormant or potential movements within this vast and plural country which has a plethora of religious beliefs, communities, castes, languages and regional feelings etc. It is worthwhile to note in this context that the Anandapur Sahib Resolution, in which lies the genesis of the demand for 'Khalistan' was conceived within months of Bangladesh being created.20 The Anandpur Sahib Resolution was adopted by the Akali Dal at the meeting held on 16-17 October 1973.21 The assertiveness that marked India's involvement it Bangladesh was conspicuous by its absence in Indian involvement in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Promoting subversion in neighbouring countries could lead to unintended consequences in the activist nation. The training and arming of militant groups for subversive activities in the neighbouring country could recoil and hit the country that extended the assistance. Evidence suggests that the arms and ammunition supplied


21 The resolution adopted by the Akali Dal at the meeting held at Anandpur Sahib on 16 and 17 October 1973 is generally known as Anandpur Sahib Resolution. A different version of Anandpur Sahib Resolution was put forth by the Akali Dal (Talwandi Group) at a World Sikh Convention in Anandpur Sahib in April 1981. Yet another version of Anandpur Sahib Resolution authenticated by Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, President of Akali Dal was issued in November 1982. See Government of India, White Paper on Punjab Agitation, New Delhi 10 July 1984 p. 5-6.
to Mukti Bahani in East Bengal in 1971 found way to the insurgents in northeast India. A hand grenade belonging to this batch was used to kill Union Minister L. N. Misra at Samastipur in 1974. Similar evidence is available to indicate that arms supplied to Tamil militant groups had reached Punjab terrorists. Again, in Sri Lanka a major share of the weapons with which the LTTE fought the IPKF was either supplied to them by India or captured by them from rival Tamil militant groups. It is estimated by military analysts subsequently that 60 percent of military hardware available with the LTTE including artillery and field guns were captured by it in tact from Sri Lankan armed forces. US arms supplied through training camps organised in Pakistan for Afghan militancy had sprouted the Kalashnikov culture in Pakistan's North West frontier.

The hierarchical militant or terrorist organizations have a tendency to splinter into community-based or personality-based groups, leading to internecine conflicts. Prabhakaran came out of TELO to form the LTTE and Uma Maheswaran walked out of the LTTE to found and head the PLOTE. The LTTE fought TELO and PLOTE not only in Sri Lanka but also in India. This indicates that such internecine conflicts by splinter groups have a tendency to spill over to the host country. These groups do establish friendly ties with indigenous militant organizations and political parties with similar ideological predilections and can be used by these indigenous groups to further their partisan interests. There have been reports about links

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22 The liberation army led by Mujibur Rehman that led to the birth of Bangladesh in 1971.

23 Chari, n. 9, p. 17.

between the LTTE and the People’s War Group (PWG) of Maoists revolutionaries. Marepalli Basavaraju, a functionary of PWG who surrendered to the police claimed that an LTTE explosive expert had trained the group in laying mines in 1989.\textsuperscript{25} Subsequent PWG attacks have shown a level of technological sophistication this Marxist-Leninist group did not have earlier. The LTTE’s established links with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) is another case in point. Again, the Tigers’ involvements in elections in Tamil Nadu and their interdiction in favour of the Tamils in Kaveri water dispute are examples of this development.

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An appraisal in April 1989 by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India found that the IPKF had been able to restore law and order in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka which formed a united province. “Provincial Council, Presidential and Parliamentary elections have been held with overwhelming turnout of voters. Devolution of authority to the local Tamil population has been more extensive and far-reaching than ever before.”\textsuperscript{26} In the Annual Report 1988-89 of the Ministry of Defence it is mentioned: “India’s basic objectives in sending its forces to Sri Lanka was to preserve its democratic setup and territorial integrity threatened by various militant groups and to ensure that the legitimate aspirations of its Tamil

\textsuperscript{25} Manoj Joshi, “On the Razor’s Edge: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam”, \textit{Strategic Digest} (New Delhi), September 1996, pp. 1391. The PWG is the largest and best-armed group active in large and poverty-stricken areas of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh. They have been involved in a long, though low-key insurgency against the Indian state in a region that is not only poor, but heavily forested.

\textsuperscript{26} Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, \textit{Annual Report 1988-89}, p.2
minority were not neglected in the governance of that country. These objectives have been achieved in a large measure.” It is to the credit of the IPKF that it created objective conditions whereby political initiatives could be launched to solve the ethnic crisis. The IPKF was not meant to achieve a military solution to the ethnic problem. The near normal conduct of various elections, the progress in providing relief and rehabilitation of displaced population and the restoration of essential services go to the credit of the IPKF. These were considerable successes in the direction of establishing civil administration in the war-ravaged zone. Some of these points find highlighted in the statement made by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Parliament on 9 November 1987. All these successes came to naught when the IPKF was withdrawn on demand. A senior IPKF officer lamented thus: “Within days of our vacating areas the NEPC (North Eastern Provincial Council), CVF (Citizens Volunteer Force) and ACVF (Additional Citizens Volunteer Force) disintegrated and disappeared. We felt sorry; we felt we had let them down; we felt the pangs of futility. Apart from mounting a great military enterprise to achieve a political settlement, what exactly stood to our credit?”

The period of engagement of the IPKF also worked against its advantage. The inability to eradicate the LTTE insurgency and the prolongation of its military operations created a situation where the IPKF’s indefinite deployment proved an

28 The full text of the statement by the Prime Minister was carried in The Hindu, 10 November 1987.
embarrassment. The IPKF is not the first time Indian armed forces were sent abroad on military campaigns. Barring Indian armed forces' participation in various UN peacekeeping missions, Indian armed forces were sent to East Bengal in 1971 and the Maldives in 1988. The clarity of goals in military operations in East Bengal and the Maldives differentiates them from the IPKF operations in Sri Lanka. The IPKF was the chief instrument of India's foreign policy on Sri Lanka in 1987-90, but remained adrift with the confusion in objectives that marked the decision-making process during the period. From Bangladesh and the Maldives, Indian armed forces pulled out once their mission was accomplished. The stays were short and pull-out sudden and before anyone could think about making a demand for withdrawal. In Sri Lanka, with the IPKF getting involved in counter-insurgency operations, the extrication became difficult and uncertain as counter-insurgency operations especially those arising out of intractable ethnic conflicts have long life cycle and no easy solutions. The human and material costs of IPKF operations in Sri Lanka became a topic of domestic criticism in India.

Admittedly India-Sri Lanka Agreement was concluded hastily with large sections of Tamil and Sinhalese population in Sri Lanka opposed to it. What was offered through the agreement was a simplistic solution to a very complex problem. It is equally true that the Agreement was entered into without conditioning Indian public opinion in its favour, a necessary pre-requisite for such an aggressive interventionist foreign policy to succeed. Subsequently when the peacekeeping mission by the IPKF failed, its change over to peace enforcement role was almost overnight and arbitrary. Indian public opinion that was not even ready to accept a
major peacekeeping role for its armed forces in a neighbouring country, was certainly not enthused by its peace enforcement role that involved heavy casualties and overstretching of meagre resources in a drought year. “No particular effort was made either to elicit or educate Indian public opinion before the signing of the Agreement and it was perceived in large sections of the elite as of a piece with the general pactomania that afflicted the Rajiv Gandhi era: a sensational form of governance, distinguished by presenting the country with agreeable surprises that became a pervading compulsion.”

VI

During the Christmas week 1987, MGR passed away in Chennai leaving the issue of his succession unsettled. MGR had acted as a bridge between the Central Government and the various Tamil groups. Prabhakaran during his days in India was very close to MGR. The ensuing political developments in the state calculated to claim a share of MGR’s legacy kept all political parties busy. The criticism of the IPKF operations against the recalcitrant Tigers in Sri Lanka that did not assume the form of mass hysteria in the state, despite efforts to that effect by political parties. The public opinion in Tamil Nadu as disclosed by surveys conducted during that time indicated a preference for the settlement of the ethnic problem within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. The result of the opinion polls was interpreted to show that it was in affirmation of the Central Government’s policy on Sri Lanka. But the fact of the matter was that the people of Tamil Nadu were, by and large, fed up

30 Chari, n. 9, p. 20.
of the Sri Lankan militants and their propensity to indulge in violence. The Choolaimedu shooting, when an EPRLF cadre opened automatic fire on local residents at this busy Chennai city area, marked a turning point. Sri Lankan militants appeared to have taken Tamil Nadu for granted until then. But the hospitality began to wane as Tamil militants, referred to simply as “Tigers” irrespective of their group affiliations, began to be criticized for high-handedness, spiraling prices of real estate, drug trafficking, and looking down upon the local Tamils as weaklings.31

President Jayewardene was the Guest of Honour in New Delhi at the Republic Day Parade 1988 and was in the Capital till 30 January. With serious dissidence within UNP and the terrorist campaign by JVP in the South targeted at UNP leaders, Jayewardene had to put the party in order for it to face the Presidential and Parliamentary elections within about a year apart from the provincial elections slated for April 1988. The swelling numbers of the IPKF and its prolonged stay had created a grave psychosis in Sri Lanka. The purpose of Jayewardene’s visit to New Delhi was partly to evolve a time frame for the early return of the IPKF. The Sinhalese perception of the India-Sri Lanka Agreement, especially the letters exchanged at the time of signing it that addressed India’s security concerns was that the Accord was an unequal treaty; there was lack of reciprocity in the obligations and commitments. Jayewardene proposed to redress some of the inequities in the Accord by replacing it with an India-Sri Lanka Friendship Treaty. The proposed treaty of friendship and cooperation was to be modeled on the Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971.

31 Narayanswamy, n. 7, p. 214.
which could include reciprocal obligations. But having burned to its fingers somewhat the Indian Government wanted to take its time before entering into a broader and more binding agreement.

Apparently at the initiative of the dissidents in the UNP government, Colombo decided to hold direct and secret talks with the LTTE. The objective was to ultimately sideline New Delhi, its partner in the India-Sri Lanka Agreement, a kind of “extreme bypass surgery to cure the island’s terminal ethnic problem”. If the operation was a success, Colombo could ask the IPKF to quit the island rather than leave that option with New Delhi. Sri Lankan Ministers Lalith Athuluthmudali, the severe critic of the Accord and Gamini Dissanayake, an ardent supporter of it took the initiative. Simultaneously New Delhi started holding its own direct, secret talks with the LTTE to broker a political settlement. Natwar Singh, Minister of State speaking to the press during his Oman trip confirmed that the Indian government had never lost contact with the LTTE. The Indian initiative was aimed at thwarting a secret deal between the Tigers and Colombo which could be a source of embarrassment for the IPKF and New Delhi. The Indians wanted the LTTE to take part in the postponed provincial council elections. During this period the IPKF kept a symbolic pressure on the Tigers without going all out to get them. With Colombo and New Delhi desperately wooing Prabhakaran, the LTTE came to a position to dictate its terms, without laying down arms. The LTTE could play one against the

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other to its own advantage. As a consequence, the LTTE received enhanced support in terms of increased operational intelligence, arms and occasional sanctuary from Sri Lankan security forces under the directions of Minister Lalith Athulathmudali with the connivance of Prime Minister Premadasa. Minister Athulathmudali was unfazed about it and thought that India had no right to object to Sri Lankan political leaders interacting with the LTTE to overcome a tragic domestic situation. His complaint, on the other hand, was that the Indian intelligence operatives were in touch with the LTTE when the Indian Army was fighting them.\(^3\)

The MGR succession issue got temporarily over with the breakup of the AIADMK between his actress-wife Janaki and actress-screen-lover Jayalalitha. Tamil Nadu politics was again back to reckoning in the Sri Lankan crisis. The overwhelming body of political opinion in the state was for a cease-fire by the Indian Army. This was not only the line of the critics of Congress (I) like the DMK and the Janaki-Veerappan faction of the AIADMK, but even Jayalalitha and her group of the AIADMK, which was the only ally of Congress (I), had raised the demand for cease-fire. More aggressive critics of the Centre demanded the outright withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu was scheduled to go for the polls shortly and the presence of the IPKF in Sri Lanka could become an election issue.

\(^3\) Ibid., 31 March 1988.

While the Indian obligations to make the Accord work turned messy and half-done, the Sri Lankan obligations including legislative measures ran into serious problems. The relatively non-controversial Agreement provisions like lifting of emergency, scrapping of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the resettlement of refugees had long since been upset. The Provincial Council Bill did not satisfy even the moderate TULF. Regarding this, eminent jurist and social activist and a former judge of the Supreme Court of India V. R. Krishna Iyer commented thus:

Two make-believe bills were introduced and passed in Parliament with a small amendment caused by the Supreme Court decision requiring a referendum. Without going into the details of the legislative exercise at this stage, one may confidently assert that they fell far short of the aspirations of the Tamils. Indeed, there is no legislative sanction yet for bringing the north and the east under one umbrella. This is relegated to a later presidential direction. It is all a game of hide-and-seek.36

A straightforward legislation by constitutional provision was consciously avoided to merge the two provinces to make it the Tamil homeland. Prime Minister Premadasa had openly stated that he was opposed to the merger. President Jayewardene was also not for it. The legislative process was, therefore, just a gimmick. The thirteenth amendment to the Constitution empowers the President to declare an emergency in any part of the country for a wide range of reasons. In the past, Jayewardene had often made use of the emergency powers. The Tamils feared that the Thirteenth Amendment would make Tamil autonomy permanently subject to Sinhalese vote.

The LTTE, as usual, voiced their strong protests against the two bills: the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the Provincial Council Bill. According to them these laws propose creation of an island-wide administrative structure rigidly controlled by the centre with limited distribution of political authority to all the provinces of Sri Lanka. "Provincial Councils are thus reduced to local administrative bodies serving to the dictates of the state. They do not enjoy any autonomous powers of their own. The institutions of the centre ... are invested with sweeping powers to interfere and control the functions of the Provincial Councils."  

VII

In September 1988, President Jayewardene issued an executive order merging Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern provinces. Jayewardene then scheduled the elections for the newly merged province to be held in November and the IPKF declared a five-day unilateral cease fire. This was intended for the LTTE to lay down their arms and take part in the elections. Jayewardene also announced his retirement in January and declared the presidential elections to be held in December. The UNP selected Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa as its candidate to succeed Jayewardene. Premadasa's principal opponent would be the former Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike of the SLFP. The irony of it all would be that both the presidential candidates were stubbornly against the India-Sri Lanka Agreement and the presence of the IPKF. Therefore, irrespective of the outcome of the elections, the political equations were destined to change substantially. In the meanwhile, the discovery of

Surface-to-Air missiles (SAM-7) in the possession of the Tigers and the LTTE's propaganda offensive that those weapons were given to them by India and they were trained by the Indians put New Delhi in a tight spot. A strong denial would be tantamount to officially accepting training and arming the militants by India. However, the manner in which Indian Air Force transports and army helicopters were flying over Jaffna without protection from ground-fire was sure enough indication that SAM-7s were not part of the weapons the LTTE got from India but were part of the later consignments sourced from elsewhere.

With the countdown to the presidential elections started, the IPKF intensified its Operation Checkmate to force the Tigers for a negotiation. The IPKF was under greater pressure than ever before to either smash the LTTE or face a major diplomatic embarrassment. The Indian Government was aware of the futility of holding provincial council elections without the participation of the LTTE in a climate of fear. Some spectacular military successes by the IPKF alone would neutralize the effect of non-participation by the Tigers. The Indian Government had assured the public that the IPKF would not withdraw from the island even after the elections, if held without the LTTE. The Tigers issued stern warning to all those associating themselves with the polls. But three other pro-Accord militant groups, namely, the EPRLF, TELO and the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) went ahead with the preparations for elections ignoring the LTTE threat.

The elections were held in October-November and the IPKF came in for much praise for the smooth conduct of elections. In the first round of elections in October, the EPRLF and ENDLF combine’s 36 candidates were elected unopposed as most others had failed to file their nominations. In the second round of elections to 35 assembly seats held on 19 November 1988 with popular participation in near normal conditions, the EPRLF and ENDLF combine posted victory in 15 seats thus establishing their majority of 51 members in the 71-member North East Provincial Assembly. “A record 60 percent of the seven lakh voters turned out.”39 The elections were a military success, a success-of-sorts for the Accord. The LTTE had been marginalized militarily and, for the time being, politically. The long-term political implications were uncertain with the Tigers not taking part and not being able to thwart it. The elected candidates were known for their pro-India stance and were dependent on the IPKF for their survival. The EPRLF Secretary-General Padmanabha was nervous: “The IPKF’s role is not over with the elections. It has to ensure total peace in the east and the north and get more powers for the provincial government.”40 However fragile and fleeting were the political institutions born out of it, the massive turnout at the elections and the poll results underscored the availability of a peaceful political alternative to the terror and violence of the LTTE.

The EPRLF, which was shattered by the Tigers two years ago by killing 400 of its cadre, wreaked vengeance on the LTTE by aligning with the IPKF to identify the Tiger suspects arrested. After the EPRLF won a majority in the provincial

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
council vote having been the only significant Tamil party to defy the Tiger orders and contest the elections, the Indian troops openly armed, deployed and sheltered the members of the front.\(^{41}\) The presidential elections were slated for 19 December. The JVP called for a boycott of elections and intimidation of voters. “With Tamil Tigers controlling the North, the IPKF the East and JVP the Sinhala-majority provinces, it is a Lebanon-like situation that makes politics irrelevant.”\(^ {42}\)

On the issue of the presence of Indian Army, the UNP, SLFP and JVP shared the same position publicly that the foreign forces should be sent back. The ruling party planned to maintain the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, notwithstanding the fact that its presidential candidate Premadasa had opposed it tooth and nail from the start, but would like to send home the Indian forces as soon as possible. The SLFP originally maintained it would abrogate the pact and eject the Indians, but was not inclined for any unilateral changes. Both parties knew that the Sri Lankan army was not equipped to fight both the Tamils in the north and the JVP elsewhere.\(^ {43}\) During electioneering Premadasa vowed to replace the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord with a more favourable and equitable friendship treaty. Bandaranaike, on the other hand, promised the annulling of the Accord and the withdrawal of the IPKF within 24 hours of her taking over.\(^ {44}\) Though Premadasa’s public posturing was anti-Tamil, he had quietly opened a dialogue with Tamil and Muslim leaders. Bandaranaike, on the

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\(^ {41}\) *Time*, 19 December 1988.


\(^ {43}\) *Time*, 19 December 1988

\(^ {44}\) *India Today*, 15 January 1989
contrary, had sent her son Aruna through the jungles to meet the LTTE underground barely a week before the elections. Both the presidential candidates were acutely aware of the power of terror and violence in Sri Lankan politics.

VIII

The presidential election was marked by widespread violence. Premadasa won the elections with 50.43 percent of the votes cast, marginally above the mandated 50 percent requirement for the winning presidential candidate. The voter turnout at 55.32 percent was the lowest in 35 years and so was the victory margin. In a solemn and elaborate ceremony, Premadasa was sworn into office at the Temple of Tooth, the most sacred Buddhist shrine in Kandy. In an address to the nation from the temple balcony, he offered to withdraw of 3000 of India’s 70,000 peacekeeping troops stationed in the northeastern province immediately. President Premadasa was informed through diplomatic channel that (1) India would be quiet willing to withdraw the IPKF as soon as the remaining portion of the devolution package in the Tamil areas is implemented by the Sri Lankan Government; (2) India, however, will not agree to an abrupt and total withdrawal of the IPKF on the basis of preemptory demands of Premadasa. Indian armed forces would be withdrawn from Sri Lanka in a phased manner. India will not accept a situation where in public

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Time, 2 January 1989.
perception an impression may be created that the Indian Army was abruptly expelled or withdrawn; (3) respecting Premadasa’s concerns about his own political image and sensitivities, the first contingent of the IPKF would be withdrawn from Sri Lanka some time by March 1989; (4) while India would be willing to discuss the objections which Premadasa may have about certain provisions of Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, the question of modifying the agreement extensively or nullifying it just does not arise. Rajiv Gandhi would be willing to have such discussions with Premadasa; and (5) the Sri Lankan Government should not obstruct or disturb the functioning of the Tamil Government in the North-Eastern Province.48

In the elections to the State Assembly in Tamil Nadu held in January 1989, the DMK posted an impressive victory winning in 146 seats out of the 232. It was a stinging set back for Rajiv Gandhi and his Congress party which could win only 26 seats. The DMK was committed to the National Front, a broader opposition alignment at the national level headed by Viswanath Pratap Singh, a former congressman and cabinet colleague of Rajiv Gandhi, who had walked out as Defence Minister, on protest, on the issue of lack of transparency in shadowy defence deals. In Tamil Nadu, Rajiv Gandhi and his cohorts were led away by the results of privately commissioned opinion polls that indicated the virtual melting away of support for the two factions of AIADMK, both of which claimed MGR’s political legacy in full measure. The polls predicted that Congress was running neck-and-neck with the DMK.49 This foreknowledge fouled up seat-sharing dialogue with the

48 Dixit, n. 35, p. 281.
49 Time, 6 February 1989.
Jayalalitha faction of AIADMK and Congress strategists decided to face the elections without support from any of the Dravidian parties.

The Sri Lankan problem or the presence of the IPKF in Sri Lanka was not an election issue at all. In fact, the outcome of the State elections was indicative of the manner in which the forces that were opposed to the Congress Government at the Centre would group together and consolidate their strength to fight the elections to the Parliament that were less than a year away. Back in power after more than a decade in the wilderness, Karunanidhi was determined not to repeat his mistakes in the past. This showed in the restraint with which he, as Chief Minister, commented on the Sri Lankan issue. Contrary to the unilateral fears aroused in Colombo that a DMK victory would encourage a fresh round of conflict in the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka, Karunanidhi displayed a sense of realism by merely stating that he would discuss the subject with New Delhi and do his utmost to bring about complete peace in the region. This was the pragmatic realization that the Sri Lankan question was a non-issue in the state election and that the people of Tamil Nadu were exasperated by the reckless behaviour of the Tamil militants. As Chief Minister of the state and the leader of the DMK, a strong constituent of the National Front, it became Karunanidhi's responsibility to ensure that the irresponsible elements in his party were not taken away by the development across the Palk Strait. This sense of caution on the part of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister did not obviously make the LTTE overtly happy.

In the elections to the Sri Lankan Parliament held on 15 February 1989, in the north, east and the Wanni area, the main contenders were a grouping of four parties, the TULF, EPRLF, TELO and Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) contesting under the TULF umbrella, the Tamil Congress, the Democratic People’s Front of PLOTE and the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) contesting as independents. EROS denied their connections with the LTTE, but maintained the rigid stand on the need to include the LTTE for setting up a legitimate leadership for the Tamils. The elections boycotted by the JVP and the LTTE were marked by large scale violence, especially in the Sinhalese south. The UNP emerged victorious taking 125 seats in the expanded 225-member Parliament. TULF won 10 seats and the independents fielded by EROS were successful in 13 constituencies.\(^5\)

Premadasa had always opposed the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord that brought Indian troops into the country. As President, he should be able to send them home as quickly as possible to defeat the JVP. The IPKF had helped his cause by making some token withdrawals, but the Tamil Tigers had reared up again, making it plain that the peacekeeping force had not yet finished its job. But in a surprise move, the Tigers agreed to hold talks with the Colombo government, citing their common interest in removing Indian troops from Sri Lankan soil. Since Sri Lankan officials had admitted that the Army cannot fight the JVP and the Tigers simultaneously, the IPKF had earlier seemed likely to remain for some time. That reality prompted the Tigers to accept Premadasa’s offer of secret talks, though the nature of the proffered

negotiations was never publicized and remained unclear. President lifted the ban of the LTTE. The Tigers, more or less neutralized militarily, heightened its propaganda offensive against the IPKF and the Government of India. They bitterly criticized the creation of the Tamil Volunteer Force which was to police North-Eastern Province. The Tamil population in North-Eastern Province remained noncommittal about the creation of the merged North-Eastern Province and the establishment of a Tamil Government in the region.

IX

The motivation for President Premadasa to start the correspondence with New Delhi for the total withdrawal of IPKF was the secret talks Colombo had initiated with the Tigers. Premadasa had a simple, street-smart solution to Sri Lanka’s ills. By reaching an accommodation and truce with the Tigers, Premadasa thought he could ask the IPKF to withdraw and once the IPKF was out of the country, the JVP, with no cause to fight, would be rendered irrelevant and wither away. Fighting with their back to the walls, the Tamil Tigers also wanted desperately the IPKF to leave and for this tactical goal the Tigers were more than willing to talk on a single point agenda. The politico-diplomatic initiative would enhance the leverage of the militarily much


53 Dixit, n. 35, p. 284.

54 Premadasa Government was so anxious to show that it was not pro-Indian that it had officially renamed two popular vegetables. Bombay onions, which are mainly grown in Sri Lanka are to be called Sri Lanka big onion. Mysore dal, which are lentils from Turkey will be known as red dal. *The Economist* (London), 10 June 1989.
weakened LTTE. There was an obvious common ground for the two parties to agree and, therefore, “a devil’s pact”,
berief of fine print and finer detail, was imminent.

When a powerful car bomb exploded in a crowded Trincomalee Market on 14 April 1989 killing more than 50 people, the blame was on the EPRLF because by that time the LTTE had turned into an ally in the minds of the Sinhalese. The LTTE had started negotiating with the President for a peaceful political settlement of the ethnic question. The events as unfurled subsequently disclosed the manner in which the devils’ pact was put together. Anton Balasingham, the LTTE theoretician, flew into Colombo from London with his Australian wife Adele and were received by Sri Lankan officials and put up in Colombo as state guests. Balasingham met Premadasa on April 27 and lavished praises on the President. Balasingham made it clear that the main issue bothering his group was the IPKF. The Indian Army, he stressed, should be sent back. On 4 May, Balasingham flew under heavy security in a Sri Lankan air force helicopter to a predetermined spot at Mullaitivu, where some 50 LTTE militants received him. He returned to Colombo with Yogi and eight other LTTE members. All of them stayed in Colombo’s plush Hilton International hotel. The guerrillas were provided round-the-clock security by the Special Task Force (STF). The LTTE members had their private guards too and were in radio contact with Prabhakaran. On 1 June 1989, President Premadasa publicly asked India to pull out its army by the end of July 1989. A confidential dimension of the whole matter was that during the interim period between March 1989 and until the expected

55 Ibid., 1 July 1989.
56 Narayanswamy, n. , p. 300.
withdrawal of the IPKF by July 1989, the Sri Lankan Government will provide the LTTE with arms and requisite intelligence to resist the IPKF. Premadasa also conveyed them that he would ensure the removal of the EPR LF-led Tamil Government in the North-Eastern Province and ensure the conferment of governmental authority on the LTTE on the basis of discussions which he proposed to have with it.57

President Premadasa wrote to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to this effect on 2 June 1989.58 Premadasa indicated that the matter of utmost importance in Sri Lanka was the presence of the IPKF, which had become a deeply divisive and resentful issue. It was his promise both at the presidential polls and the parliamentary for the withdrawal of the IPKF. He had been President of Sri Lanka for five months and was unable to meet his commitment to the people of his country. He is stressed the need for total withdrawal of the IPKF by 31 July 1989, the second anniversary of its induction. He linked this as a condition for the holding of SAARC summit in November “in a climate of tranquility”. The deep patriotic and nationalist sensitivities of the people of Sri Lanka would dampen their enthusiasm in welcoming regional dignitaries “with foreign forces on our soil”. Premadasa alluded to their earlier proposals for an Indo-Sri Lanka Friendship Treaty and the need to have the treaty in place in order to further strengthen relations between Sri Lanka and India. The letter was sent through the Foreign Secretary of Sri Lanka.

57 Dixit, n. 35, p. 287.
Rajiv Gandhi replied to this letter on 20 June 1989. Reiterating India’s commitment to preserving the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka, Rajiv Gandhi recapitulated the circumstances that led to the near breakup of Sri Lanka and the induction of the IPKF, which, at heavy odds and cost performed well enough to safeguard the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka and to restore democracy in Sri Lanka’s north and east. He reminded that India and Sri Lanka had a commitment as per the Agreement that the just and democratic aspirations of the Tamils in north-east were met. The autonomy for the Tamils as promised in the Accord had not materialized as yet. Rajiv Gandhi wanted the two countries to agree on a schedule for the full implementation of the Accord and the withdrawal of the IPKF as a parallel exercise. Rajiv Gandhi agreed to hold discussions on the proposed Friendship Treaty.

President Premadasa in his letter dated 29 June 1989 informed Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of the announcement of complete cessation of hostilities by the Tigers against the Sri Lankan Government and their agreement to settle problems through the process of negotiation. The President wanted to be ensured that the IPKF did not take any offensive action against the LTTE, which would prejudice the negotiations underway. Premadasa again wrote on 30 June 1989 in reply to Rajiv Gandhi’s letter of 20 June 1989. Premadasa disagreed with Rajiv Gandhi’s contention that the withdrawal of the IPKF was linked to the devolution of powers to the provincial council. His logic was that the IPKF came to

58 The full text of the letter is part of Annexure VIII.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
Sri Lanka at the request of the Sri Lankan President and should be withdrawn when the President made such a request for withdrawal. He maintained that for the political settlement of the ethnic problem all legislative measures were taken and the delay in its implementation was occasioned by the inability of the IPKF to ensure cessation of hostilities. Citing the election manifesto of both UNP and SLFP the President argued that 95 percent of the Sri Lankan electorate had mandated the withdrawal of IPKF. The majority of voters who elected him to power also approved the proposal to conclude the Friendship Treaty with India.

Rajiv Gandhi in his reply dated 30 June 1989\textsuperscript{62} contended that the LTTE's announcement of cessation of hostilities with Sri Lankan forces made no sense as the Sri Lankan forces had been confined to barracks since 30 July 1987 as per the terms of the Agreement. The LTTE commenced the surrender of weapons on 5 August 1987 and the process was yet to be completed. As per the Agreement India was the guarantor and as such the IPKF had the mandate for ensuring the physical safety and security of all communities in the north-east. Premadasa in his letter of 4 July 1989 refuted this and marshaled the figures to show that the LTTE continued killing Sri Lankan police and army personnel till June 1989 when they announced the cessation of hostilities.

This exchange of letters between the two Heads of Governments started with the salutations and diplomatic niceties befitting their lofty positions gradually

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
slipped in its tone and tenor to an acrimonious debate without a moderator. The sanctity of personal correspondence between Heads of Government was lost when they chose to release it to the press and blamed the other for that. The flurry of diplomatic mail produced no tangible benefit to the two Governments. The Tigers, however, had the last laugh.

X

The Tigers had yet another reason to feel happy. The Government of Sri Lanka provided them with enough military hardware to resist the IPKF till the time they were sent back. The Indian military intelligence reported that Colombo was supplying arms and ammunition to the LTTE under the President’s orders. The decision was prompted by the LTTE claim that the IPKF had stepped up its operations since the Tigers opened peace talks with Colombo. Sri Lankan Minister Shahul Hameed would later admit: “By providing arms and ammunition to LTTE, we made them feel that we had taken them into our confidence.” The weapons given by the Sri Lankan government to the LTTE included a dozen truckloads of mainly mortars, grenades and T-56 rifles and ammunition. These supplies came from Colombo and were delivered at predetermined points in Vvuniya, Amparai and Trincomalee with the STF acting as the conduit. Hard cash, Pajero jeeps, Nissan pick-up vans, cement, batteries, flashlights and handcuffs followed. The LTTE had estimated the gains of the peace talks with the Sri Lankan Government thus: (1) It

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62 Ibid

63 Dixit, n. 35, p. 303.
has placed its case before the President and his top managerial advisors and aides for the first time. (2) It has improved its image, locally and internationally – locally the Tigers are “our boys”, meaning Sri Lankans, compared to foreign forces (3) Has scored a major success in its main tactical objective – isolate and hammer the IPKF politically, by mobilizing Government and Sinhala opinion against the IPKF, and put the two Governments at cross purposes. (4) Thus it proved its political maturity to its critics.  

On 13 July 1989, the LTTE assassinated the TULF leader Amitralingam and party MP Yogeswaran in Colombo hours before the former was to meet a visiting Indian Government delegation. Amitralingam was a staunch supporter of the Accord and a firm believer that the IPKF should stay put in Sri Lanka till the time the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils as laid down in the Accord and guaranteed by India were met. The moment the TULF decided to contest the parliamentary elections in February that year keeping EPRLF, TELO and ENDLF under its umbrella, Amitralingam became a marked man. In the eyes of the LTTE, he became a betrayer of the Tamil Eelam cause by aligning with India’s quisling groups and had to die. Three days later, PLOTE Chief Uma Maheswaran was gunned down by an alleged renegade member of his group on a Colombo street.

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64 Some of the weapons seized from the LTTE cadres arrested later in Tamil Nadu presumably belong to this batch as those arrested confessed to the investigators about the military assistance the LTTE got from President Premadasa.

65 “LTTE Gains”, LTTE Pamphlet.
Rajiv Gandhi lost the elections and Viswanath Pratap Singh succeeded him in December 1989. One of the first major foreign policy decisions was to announce the withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka. The Government of India announced in January 1990 that the withdrawal of the IPKF would be completed by 31 March 1990.\footnote{Dixit, n. 35, p. 291.} In the negotiations Sri Lankan Government had with the LTTE, it was agreed that once the IPKF withdrew fully, the LTTE would take over law and order responsibilities in the North-Eastern Province, till new elections were held. Immediately the LTTE commenced regaining control both in Jaffna and in the eastern areas of Sri Lanka as the IPKF pulled back from these areas and concentrated in Trincomalee for its departure.\footnote{Time, 12 February 1990.} The Provincial Government of EPRLF Chief Minister Varadaraja Perumal just ceased to exist. A shipload of EPRLF and TELO cadres and their families, refused entry in Tamil Nadu by Chief Minister Karunanidhi on reasons of security, was sent to refugee camps in Orissa.

On 24 March 1990 three Indian Naval vessels - INS Trishul, Dunagiri and Anjadeep - set sail from Trincomalee port with the last contingent of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), a week ahead of the deadline. Sri Lankan Navy band played ‘Auld Lang Sync’ and Sri Lankan Minister Ranjan Wijeratna waved farewell.\footnote{The Hindu, 25 March 1990.} The distant gunshots and flares by the advancing Tigers were also in celebration. In stark contrast, the mood of the IPKF was, understandably, not celebratory but one of confusion and bitterness. Drawn into a no man’s war doomed to a no-win
conclusion, the IPKF could only be seen to be doing its job and losing, in that process, more men than any other peacekeeping mission. This defining moment was to become symbolic of the end of direct Indian intervention in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

The brief camaraderie of convenience between Colombo and the LTTE in 1990 was solely with a view to get the IPKF out and it was just the case of two rivals coming closer together against a perceived common enemy. 'Events have a tragic momentum of their own and finally New Delhi was caught in the crossfire and roused the indignation and anger of both communities finding itself confronted with Sinhala chauvinism and Tamil militancy.' The joint communiqué by New Delhi and Colombo issued on 18 September 1989, had envisaged the “de-induction” of the IPKF by the end of the year and provided for the setting up of a Peace Committee, a Security Co-ordination Group and an Observer Group. With the Rajiv Gandhi government giving way to the VP Singh government in New Delhi in December 1989 these cosmetic provisions meant to prevent a diplomatic embarrassment were rendered redundant. After some initial exchanges, it was unambiguously decided that India would withdraw the IPKF completely before 31 March 1990. With no obvious success to be laid at the IPKF's door, its withdrawal eased the immediate financial and military burden on India without offering any improvement in her long term interest.


70 The Hindu, 19 September 1989.
This pullout, by one of the most disciplined and best trained armies of the world, after nearly three years of “peace enforcement”, a role for which they were neither trained nor equipped is one of the saddest in Indian military history. The new order in New Delhi learnt to put aside the Accord and to feel comfortable perceiving the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka as its internal problem. “Now it is for the Sri Lankans to defend their country’s integrity and also to protect the Tamils in that island,” said Indian Prime Minister V P Singh at the ceremony to mark the homecoming of IPKF. The V P Singh Government, which had a preoccupation with the image rather than the substance of the policy, had hardly any time to address itself to the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka before it gave way to the minority Chandrasekhar Government in New Delhi installed with the support and blessings of the Congress Party. The Chandrasekhar Government spelt out quite unequivocally the principles that would guide India’s policy towards Sri Lanka. The four parameters which could guide India’s dealing with Sri Lanka were (1) India will not be a party to a process of political disintegration of Sri Lanka; (2) India will not allow foreign forces to interfere in Sri Lanka; (3) India’s armed forces will not be sent again to Sri Lanka; and (4) Indian territory will not be allowed to be used as a base for terrorist activities directed against Sri Lanka. The Chandrasekhar government chose to dismiss the Tamil Nadu State Government on the ground that the state government was guilty of facilitating free run in the state by the LTTE. The gravamen of the


72 The Hindu, 25 March 1990.
charge against the Madras government was that it was supporting the LTTE and giving it sanctuary in Tamil Nadu, and permitting the spread of its arms culture to other disaffected parts of India, such as Assam. But for this political skirmish substantially involving issues concerning Centre-State relations, the ethnic strife in Sri Lanka did not figure prominently in the political affairs of India after the pullout and until May 1991.

At the farewell function for the IPKF, Minister Ranjan Wijeratne had announced that President Premadasa would initiate steps soon for finalizing a friendship treaty with India. 'Let us live as good neighbours in perfect peace and harmony', the Minister wished.74 The friendship treaty did not materialize but India-Sri Lanka relations did improve. Unfortunately, the price that had to be paid for that was very heavy. Minister Ranjan Wijeratne, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and President Ranasinghe Premadasa, in that tragic sequence, fell victim to cleverly and cunningly executed Black Tiger operations. Lording over Sri Lanka's North-East where the writ of Sri Lankan Government had ceased to run with the exit of the IPKF, the LTTE temporarily got de facto Tamil Eelam sans legitimacy. The sequence of these macabre events and how they shaped the destiny of the region is the theme for the coming chapter.

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73 *The Times of India*, 13 January 1991.