CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing chapters, it naturally follows that the conflict in Sri Lanka is basically about the non-fulfillment of the nationalist aspirations of the indigenous Tamils on the island who form a distinct ethnic minority. While Tamil nationalism has a history longer than that of independent Sri Lanka, the nationalist sentiments of the Tamils became pronounced only after the island nation got independence from the British colonial rule. From a perceived position of privilege during colonial times, the Tamils, as an ethnic group distinct from majority Sinhalese, found their position slipping by and falling to the lowly levels of a voiceless minority.

The ethnic conflict started like any other form of political dissent, which is natural in any healthy democracy. The conflict went through various stages and phases and took a long time to turn into a separatist agitation. Beginning with peaceful political pressure, it gradually took on the overtones of a civil disobedience movement. Nearly two decades later, it started sprouting violent outgrowths. The violence and terrorism at the early phases was sporadic and meant largely to publicize their cause and to fund more violence. At this stage, the militancy had no long-term strategy independent of the popular front of the Tamil liberation movement, which
was essentially non-violent. Because of its linkages with the political movement, terrorism at this stage was a serious security problem but not yet, a political problem.

The sporadic acts of terrorism grew into a full fledged rural insurgency against the state security forces and sporadic, yet systematic terrorist attacks against the state’s infrastructure targets after 1983. By then the various militant groups came under India’s patronage. This was the stage of exponential growth for various groups. This underscores the importance of support and assistance from outside the country’s borders to sustain the growth of insurgency and terrorism.

II

As a political phenomenon, terrorism defies universally acceptable definition. Even after the appalling incidents of terror in the US on 11 September 2001 that shook the conscience of humanity, the cliché ‘one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter’ stays relevant. The dilemma whether the Tamil militants, especially the LTTE, are ‘freedom fighters’ or ‘terrorists’, has to be settled. President Jayewardene and his Government called them only as ‘terrorists’. India referred to them only as ‘militants’ may be because Jayewardene called them ‘terrorists’. Moreover, India has to accommodate the sentiments of the fellow Tamils in Tamil Nadu, or may be that India never intended them to take to terrorism. After Jayewardene, even his party and President Premadasa refused to call them ‘terrorists’ but continued to book cases under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) against them. Needless to add here that the Tamil militants never liked them to be called ‘terrorists’ because
they believe that they are freedom fighters. Media generally does not refer to them as 'terrorists'. Anyone who called the Tamil Tigers 'terrorists' earned their wrath.

This confusion of semantics gave away when Anton Balasingham, the ideologue of the LTTE spoke in the BBC documentary film *Suicide Killers*, shot in Jaffna during August 1991, that the Tigers do not claim credit for all their operations. He further elaborated on this to mean that they take credit only for operations against military targets. This admission makes it obvious that the Tigers do not claim credit for their operations against non-combatants and infrastructure targets. It was a deliberate decision to make a distinction between military and civilian targets and the Tigers were conscious that their attacks on civilians, for which they would not claim credit and thereby own up, were acts of terrorism. Perhaps no other militant outfit in business in the world practices the black art of terrorism with such conceptual clarity between terrorist and non-terrorist violence as the Tigers do. The reason is not difficult to find: they want to be known as freedom fighters and not terrorists. Admittedly, the Tigers are militant freedom fighters who practice unadulterated terrorism as one strategy in their wider liberation enterprise and as a short-cut method to achieve their short-term objectives and long-term goals. And on this count, the Tigers had been singularly effective and they could out-kill all other Tamil militant groups. In so being, the Tamil Tigers also seem to follow Regis Debray's idea of the use of terrorism: if terrorism is subordinated to the fundamental struggle in the countryside, it has a strategic value from the military point of view; it immobilizes thousands of enemy soldiers in unrewarding tasks of protection in the city. The business of protection and security in Colombo and in the urban areas of
the South-West Sri Lanka spawned out of Tamil terrorism. Regarding the degree of violence, the Tamil Tigers are in perfect agreement with Carlos Marighela's idea of "greatest cold-bloodedness".

The terrorism is primarily meant to be the 'propaganda of the deed'. A guerrilla war with the Sri Lankan security forces in Jaffna would not have created the publicity the Tamil militants got in terrorist missions against infrastructure targets and non-combatants in Colombo. But for the spectacularly successful terrorism front, the long and prolonged guerrilla war by the Tamil militants in North-East would have been contained by the security forces by now or would have been long forgotten by all excepting the family members of the soldiers fighting and dying there. Thus the tactical advantage of Tamil terrorism is that it has provided the platform for the unelectable Tamil minority political opinion in Sri Lanka to get noticed internationally. Clearly the number of people killed or injured in acts of Tamil terrorism would be a lot less compared to army casualties in the counter-insurgency operations in the North-East. A terrorist act is an international media event; a guerrilla war when prolonged ceases to be news. The propaganda value of Tamil terrorism is out of proportion to the physical damage or the number of people killed.

The fact that the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka has a legitimate grievance against the state got carried across the world, thanks to Tamil terrorism. Sri Lanka's awful human-rights record in the 80s had also substantially contributed to the world taking note of Tamil grievance. The feeling of the international community that the
to transcend the neglected voice of the deprived Tamils from the tropical jungles of Sri Lanka across international borders needs no further proof.

As an ethnic group, the Sri Lankan Tamils met all the pre-conditions for a conflict. The Tamils are a socially mobilized population with a distant past and a distinct graphical area of occupation. The Tamil Tigers had been able to silence all the rival Tamil militant groups and political group affiliations by pursuing their ruthless strategy of annihilation and established control and authority over the Tamils. Their extremely authoritarian leadership is intolerant of any kind of protest or dissidence. The political mobilization and the social cohesiveness of the Tamils are thus the products of violence and terror suited to continuing the conflict and not in resolving it. On this count, the Tamil Tigers' approach to terrorism is as a weapon of psychological warfare: to create a climate of panic, to destroy public confidence in Government and security agencies and to force community and terrorist cadres into obeying the movement's leadership.

The concept of 'new' terrorism that arose out of the new form of terror put to practice by the PLO since the late 1960s is understood primarily as a Cold War phenomenon. Once the new terrorism took roots, many of the world's simmering and intractable conflicts involving ethnicity and religious fundamentalism took to it like duck to water. The terrorism of the Tamil separatism does not per se fit in with the Cold War logic; it did not melt away with the Cold War as it is an ethnic conflict independent of Cold War politics and with a pronounced terrorism front.
The approach to nationalism of the existing national states and their dominant ethnic group is a nationalism of order and control. But ethnic nationalism regards the nation as a community of genealogical descent, vernacular culture, native history and popular mobilization. There are many submerged ethnic minorities incorporated into the old empires and their successor states. The elite of such minorities turn to ethnic nationalism in its attempt to reconstruct their community as an ethnic nation. This is the politics of cultural revolt and this indeed is the inner source of Tamil ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Ted Robert Gurr in his classic study *Why Men Rebel* refers to relative deprivation as a gap between the value expectations and perceived value capabilities of a person vis-à-vis his economic situation, political power and social status in relation to other. He, thus, emphasizes the psychological aspects of agitations which conform to Lenin's view that it is the feeling of being exploited rather than the exploitation itself that makes a person a revolutionary. According to this theory, it is not just the poorer regions that develop nationalism. The rich regions may also be nationalist if they perceive relative deprivation within the state or political and/or cultural matters. Another aspect is that in the process of development some minorities have done better than the majority. Those who have done well feel that they could do much better if only their future was not tied with others in the structure of a single state. Those who feel deprived also seek the same solution: to have their own state so that, once free of their deprivers, they can develop better. The value expectations of the Sri Lankan Tamils remained constant but their value capabilities declined since the country attained independence. The nationalist
sentiments of the Tamils are, therefore, sustained by this sense of relative deprivation. It, therefore, follows that the Tamils have a genuine grievance of relative deprivation against the Sri Lankan state. The growth of militancy and terror was the natural outgrowth of the flawed response of the Sri Lankan state to the political dissent that arose out of the Tamil grievance.

III

The Tamil nationalist movement in Sri Lanka is almost exclusively that of the indigenous Tamils who traditionally inhabit the North-East of the island and form 12.6 per cent of the total population. The Indian Tamils who work in the plantations in the Central Highlands are not part of it; so also are the Tamil-speaking Muslims of Eastern province. A sizable Sri Lankan Tamil population is present in other parts of Sri Lanka especially Colombo. Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is spread across the world. While Sri Lankan Tamils living abroad are strongly supportive of the violent struggle for Tamil Eelam, the Tamils within Sri Lanka and living outside North-East appear not, but may also be for it emotionally.

The Sri Lankan Tamils are admittedly a deprived minority. Independence of the country and the birth of democracy saw this privileged and upwardly mobile group of the colonial times falling out of favour with the new ruling formation and getting marginalized in the electoral dynamics of the democratic process. The authoritarianism of the Sinhalese majority was calculated to make amends for the perceived privileged position of the Tamils under the British and thereby to correct
the imbalance. In that process, as it often happens, they went overboard and instead of correcting the mistakes of the past, a whole lot of new, unpardonable mistakes were committed to make this vibrant minority feel neglected, left out. The protest by the Tamils went through every stage of political dissent in a democracy and took almost two decades, from 1956 to 1976, to acquire a secessionist tenor and violent overtones. During these two decades, in order to win the decisive Tamil vote for victory at the hustings, the two competing Sinhalese political parties wooed them by turns. They were promised a lot and none of the promises were kept. The formal agreements arrived at, after due negotiations with their representatives, were thrown to winds. The Tamil showed tremendous patience from the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957 to the TULF’s Vaddukkodai Resolution of 1976 when they made the demand for secession for the first time.

The Tamils are a fiercely independent set of people and added to this was their relatively higher educational attainments and consequent presence in the elite sections of the society during colonial times and even until the mid-70s. As an ethnic group, they always lacked the social cohesiveness needed for any purposeful political action. Apart from class, caste and religion, their ideological predispositions and their liberal political outlook were strong divisive factors. When the Tamils decided to come under the political umbrella of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and resolved to demand a separate state for themselves through non-violent means, none took them seriously, not the least by the Sinhalese ruling elite. The TULF never slipped into violent ways for achieving its goal. The growth of militancy and terror was independent of the TULF and without its consent and blessings. The Sinhalese
Governments that had repeatedly failed to deliver what had been promised to the Tamils, failed also to take note of the subtle distinction between the non-violent separatist demand of the TULF and the violent ways of "the boys" to secure Eelam. While the militancy and terror grew, Sri Lankan Governments were successful only in choking the sane, sensible voice of the moderates. And this had the vicious effect of further fanning the violence.

There is nothing to indicate that the Tamil nationalist movement in Sri Lanka was inspired by the Tamil nationalist movement in Tamil Nadu in the 50s and 60s. The socio-political contexts that had thrown up these movements were vastly different. Their impelling reasons were diverse and none in common. There was no convergence at any time between the leadership of these movements. It is true that both the movements sprang out of two groups of people who share common ethnic bonds and the language. While E. V. Ramaswamy Naiker's (EVR) Self-respect Movement and its later manifestations in the form of DK and DMK were essentially social reformist movements aimed at attacking the iniquitous caste system and the language was more of a means of socially mobilizing the population. Later DMK successfully exploited the social cohesion brought about among the non-Brahmin Tamils as a short-cut means to political mobilization in the state. A perceived threat to Tamil language through the imposition of Hindi by New Delhi later provided them the opportunity for political action which led to their coming to power in the state.
The Sri Lankan issue concerning language was different. The legislation to make Sinhala the only official language was an act of majority authoritarianism and meant to satisfy the Sihalese-Buddhist chauvinism, at the cost of the Tamil minority. The Tamil sentiments were deeply hurt by the official language policy of the Sri Lankan state and its obduracy to implement the concessions to the Tamils subsequently agreed upon by successive Governments. The politics of language in Sri Lanka has little in common with the Tamil nationalist movement and the language agitations in Tamil Nadu other than that the Tamil language is the cultural marker for the ethnic identity in both cases.

As a minority, the Tamils had a reason to feel deprived and express their just grievances in the form of political dissent. The Sinhalese-Buddhist state had failed to address these problems in time and, on the contrary, by their flawed policies contributed to the growth of separatist sentiments among the Tamils. When such minority aspirations and sentiments were neglected, the militancy and terror sprouted as the natural outgrowth. In 1983 after the Tamil pogrom in Colombo, the earliest act of the Jayewardene Government was to rush through the Constitutional amendment prohibiting secessionist demands. That was solely with a view to ban the TULF, the largest political party in the opposition in the extended Parliament where the ruling party had two-third majority. By silencing the TULF, the Government took away the natural buffer between them and the militants. At the same time, the Government was not prepared to enter into any dialogue with the militants for fear that such a gesture would confer on them legitimacy. Solely due to these unrealistic policies of Jayewardene Government, there was no dialogue for a political settlement
between 1983 and the Thimpu Talks. And this had contributed to the militants taking intransigent postures at Thimpu and what happened there needed not be repeated. The ethnic problem was (and continues to be) an internal political problem of Sri Lanka and its solution had to be political. The responsibility for reaching an agreeable political solution is primarily with the Sri Lankan Government of the day and this had been lost sight of by the Jayewardene Government.

The LTTE and its leadership are committed to Tamil Eelam and have not renounced their demand anytime though they participated in peace talks several times. The demand for a separate state by the Tamil leaders was based on two factors: first the Tamils’ claim to nationhood and secondly their right of self-determination. The British united the Island under a unitary form of government in 1833 for the purpose of administrative convenience without the consent of the peoples concerned. Tamils have never surrendered their sovereignty and the Sinhala nation has not obtained sovereignty over them by conquest or consent. Therefore, they claimed that the sovereignty of the Tamil nation which existed in 1621 at the time of Portuguese conquest reverted to the Tamil community when the legal ties with Great Britain were severed in 1972, by adopting a new Constitution. The Tamil leadership maintained that the Tamils are a nation by every test of nationhood. Anton Balasingam, the theoretician of the LTTE, was critical of the wrong interpretation given by the Left leaders in Sri Lanka of Lenin’s stand on the right of self-determination. These Left leaders had proclaimed that the Tamils as a nation had the right to self-determination. But they argued that it did not imply the right to secession. Balasingam rejected the stand of the traditional Left leaders on the
national question and attempted to apply the Leninist principle of self-determination to suit the concrete conditions of Tamils' freedom struggle in Sri Lanka. The politico-military strategy adopted by the LTTE was devised in accordance with the specific conditions of the Tamil nation.

IV

For India the geography of Sri Lanka is of strategic importance. Sri Lanka lies at the centre of the maritime routes between Far East and Middle East and Africa. As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, in the India-centric region of South Asia, having no neighbour other than India places Sri Lanka geographically at a position of disadvantage. Added to this was the neighbourhood policy of India that came to be called "Indira Doctrine" that in the event of internal instabilities of a neighbour that require military and other forms of assistance, India should be consulted and used as a first resort. Hence, a thrust towards greater and visible autonomy vis-à-vis India is built-in Sri Lanka's India policy. The human geography and historical memories also temper Sri Lanka's policy response towards India. The Sinhalese-Buddhist who form three fourth of the Sri Lankan population are confined geographically to the South-West Sri Lanka. The Tamil minority in the North-East Sri Lanka share the language and religion of the 50 million Tamils in India's Tamil Nadu. A 23-mile shallow strip of sea separates Sri Lanka's North-East from Tamil Nadu. The collective historical memory of the Sinhalese is stuffed with frequent Tamil invasions from the Indian mainland. The Sinhalese majority is, therefore, found to be the victims of the syndrome inimitably referred to as the "minority complex of the majority". Indian
policy towards Sri Lanka cannot afford to ignore these fears, compulsions and prejudices of the island neighbour.

India has always stood firmly committed to the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Even when Indian assistance was available to the Tamil militants, Indian Government did not hold a contrary view. From the Indian strategic point of view, Sri Lanka is so geographically placed that India can never countenance the island breaking up into two unviable, strategically vulnerable states. Interests inimical to India would soon find a toehold in one or both the states. The relatively secure peninsular India would become vulnerable to threats from beyond the country's borders. Among the militant groups, only the LTTE had been able to read India's strategic intent and its keenness to address the security concerns in the region. This prompted the LTTE to steer their independent course and break away from India as their strategic goal of an independent Tamil Eelam never agreed with India's strategic commitment for a united Sri Lanka. All other militant groups and the TULF were agreeable to settle for regional autonomy. Normally almost all secessionist movements, however successful and militant they are, tend to settle for a certain degree of autonomy when offered to them. On the secessionist demand of the militarily successful LTTE, the opinion of international community has always been for a just political settlement of the ethnic divide within an undivided Sri Lanka. To this extent, India's strategic interest agrees with the opinion of the international community.
In addition to geography, India's multi-lingual and plural structure too dictated that New Delhi cannot be supportive of any secessionist demand anywhere, more so in its close neighbourhood. Unlike in the '70s when India supported the secessionist movement in East Pakistan, India in the '80s had to put up with a few secessionist movements within its borders. Punjab and Kashmir taught India how badly such secessionist demands can affect the very fabric and integrity of the country. Moreover, a Tamil Eelam in India's backyard can create problems in India's Tamil Nadu, which was the first state in the country to raise, through non-violent parliamentary means, the demand for secession. The LTTE's vaguely conceived and seldom articulated concept of a Greater Eelam includes Tamil Nadu in it apart from Tamil areas in Malaysia. Therefore, while being militant supportive, India was unequivocally for the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka. This was a case of mixed motives, that appear contradictory, that guided India's strategic thinking.

The 'Tamil Nadu factor' in the Indian response to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has to be understood in terms of the 'spillover' of its domestic politics into the neighbouring India. The blatantly discriminatory policies of the Sri Lankan Government towards the indigenous Tamils and the resultant racial riots up to 1977 did not provoke any reaction in Tamil Nadu and the people were generally indifferent to the plight of fellow Tamils in Sri Lanka. The ethnic conflict started figuring in Tamil Nadu only after the AIADMK, the breakaway faction of DMK headed by the charismatic MGR was voted to power in 1977. The DMK, in the opposition, took up the Sri Lankan Tamil issue as a plank to mobilize their lost political power. The ethnic conflict and the plight of the Tamil brethren in Sri Lanka
became an emotional issue in the competitive Dravidian politics of Tamil Nadu. Government of India had to perforce take the situation in Tamil Nadu for its policy on Sri Lanka since then.

The anti-Tamil riots in Colombo in 1983 mark a water-shed in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The riots provoked large scale reaction in Tamil Nadu and also sent thousands of refugees there. India became an affected external party in the conflict. Unconcerned about this, Sri Lankan leadership started looking to the West for security and assistance. Indira Gandhi was firm when she announced in the Parliament that the ethnic conflict was Sri Lanka’s internal matter and India stood for the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. This, however, did not stop Sri Lanka from courting interests against India’s security sensitivities. Therefore it became incumbent upon India to pursue the two-pronged strategy of being mediatory and militant-supportive. This strategy was meant to deny absolute victory for the Sri Lankan Government while, simultaneously, obstructing the establishment of Tamil Eelam. The military training and assistance to militants continued side by side with diplomatic efforts like Annexure C Proposals, talks at the level of Heads of Governments, Thimpu Talks and finally the December 19th Proposals. After the failed Thimpu Talks, the LTTE started steering its independent course.

India’s direct intervention in the ethnic conflict came at a stage when Sri Lankan forces had stepped up military operations against the Tamil Tigers. This was in the
form of rushing humanitarian aid to the besieged Tamil population in Jaffna. When
the fishing boats that carried the relief supplies were stopped by the Sri Lankan navy,
India used its Air Force transports to fly violating Sri Lankan air space and to
parachute down the relief supplies on 5 June 1987. Sri Lankan forces declared a
cease-fire immediately.

The India-Sri Lanka Agreement was signed on 29 July 1987. India’s security
concerns were addressed separately in the letters exchanged between the two Heads
of Governments. There was an uncalled for urgency in concluding the Agreement
between India and Sri Lanka. The circumstances indicate that President Jayewardene
was not overtly keen to sign the agreement that promised the merger of North-East
and regional autonomy for Tamils. In 1987 Jayewardene had two years left of his
Presidency and was ineligible under the Constitution to be re-elected. A substantial
and influential section of his party, the UNP, was vociferously opposed to it. All
other Sinhalese parties including SLFP were dead against it. As regards Tamils, the
LTTE was opposed to it while other militant groups and the moderate TULF were
for it. For any pragmatic consideration, among the Tamils only the LTTE mattered
at that time as only they had the military might. Therefore, the two major parties to
the ethnic conflict that had deteriorated to a civil war, were not willing to reach an
agreement and there was no genuine desire for peace and a durable settlement. India
becoming a signatory to the Agreement and guarantor to settle the conflict between
two warring groups in Sri Lanka defied logic and conventional wisdom. The Indian
decision to go ahead with the signing of the Accord even in the face of the LTTE’s
opposition to the terms of the Agreement in which they were not a party was
Agreement in which they were not a party was prompted by flawed intelligence assessments about their military might and commitment to their espoused cause.

VI

With the commencement of military operations by the IPKF to disarm the Tigers, the LTTE started playing politics in Tamil Nadu. From AIADMK, the Tamil Tigers shifted their allegiance to the DMK, which was in the opposition both in the state and at the Centre and hence better placed to whip up mainland Tamil sentiments in their favour. This strategic shift in loyalty coupled with a few tactical moves during early part of the IPKF operations like the release of Indian soldiers held hostage by the LTTE were deft maneuvers to discredit the IPKF and regain lost prestige of the Tigers. With the military and intelligence assessments floundering, IPKF was drawn into a civil war they were ill prepared to fight.

The 'Tamil Nadu factor' continued to cast its shadow over India-Sri Lanka relations. The State Government's continued provision of sanctuary to the LTTE in Tamil Nadu confused the IPKF. To add insult to injury, prominent public figures including those holding public offices started decrying the IPKF and glorifying the Tiger leaders in Tamil Nadu.

In the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, India had originally intervened covertly to empower the militants so as to broker a just deal for the Tamils and preserve the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka. The transformation of the role of the IPKF from
safeguarding the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. This confusion in motives antagonized the Tamils without befriending the Sinhalese, who felt bitter about the very presence of IPKF in their soil. Exploiting this sentiment, the JVP unleashed terror in the Sinhalese areas. Within months, the demand for the withdrawal of the IPKF started being aired from all quarters in Sri Lanka and also from Tamil Nadu, where after the elections Karunanidhi came to power. The sudden extrication of the IPKF from the counter-insurgency role was difficult as they were not able to carry out the task of disarming the LTTE. An inglorious snap withdrawal would have its effect on the elections to the Indian Parliament due in December 1989. On the positive side, the IPKF had been able to restore law and order in the North-East and carry through the Provincial Council, Presidential and parliamentary elections. The IPKF was not meant to militarily solve the ethnic crisis; but it did create objective conditions whereby political initiatives to solve the problem could be launched.

The 'devil's pact' the newly elected President Premadasa could reach with the Tigers was with a view to demand the withdrawal of the IPKF. The Tigers were militarily weakened by the IPKF and they were ready for the pretense of a dialogue with the Government to get the IPKF out and to enhance their leverage through politico-diplomatic initiatives. For their readiness to talk and settle the secret deal, the Tigers were rewarded with weapons and operational intelligence to fight the IPKF till the time they left. The distasteful correspondence between the two Heads of States was the immediate result and it produced no tangible benefit to the two Governments.
Rajiv Gandhi lost the elections and V. P. Singh succeeded him in December 1989. One of the first foreign policy decision taken by the new Prime Minister of India was to order the withdrawal of IPKF by 31 March 1990. As per the agreement reached with Sri Lankan Government, the Tigers were to take over law and order responsibilities in North-East, once the IPKF was pulled-out. The Provincial Government of Varadaraja Perumal ceased to exist. The IPKF withdrew as programmed and the LTTE virtually took over the North-East Sri Lanka. For all practical purposes, the ethnic crisis was back to the pre-Accord days. V. P. Singh Government, which dismissed the ethnic conflict as the internal problem of Sri Lanka, did not last long enough to articulate any clear policy on Sri Lanka. The minority Government of Chandrasekhar that came to power with the backing of Congress Party dismissed the Karunanidhi Government in Tamil Nadu on the ground that the state was being used by the Tamil Tigers as a safe backyard and they were helping and arming various disaffected Indian groups. The fresh elections to the Parliament were announced to be held in May 1991. The Congress Party alone articulated their policy on Sri Lanka in their election manifesto. The pre-poll surveys and analysis suggested that Congress Party would emerge as the single largest party though not a clear winner. All indications were that Rajiv Gandhi would be back in power. As Rajiv Gandhi and his Accord would not agree with the Tigers' strategic goal of Tamil Eelam, which they already got for all practical purposes though without legitimacy or recognition, the Tigers moved fast and made the pre-emptive strike. Rajiv Gandhi was killed. Though the Tigers got exposed for their cunning role in the ruthless assassination, the tactical advantage was theirs. The Congress
Government of Narasimha Rao did not follow the pro-active policy of Rajiv Gandhi on Sri Lanka.

VII

India entered the era of coalition politics at the national level in the 90s. A major political party taking help from regional and fringe political parties has to make a lot of compromises in policy making. On the contrary, the small parties who lend their support to keep the Government in power do so by exerting their influence on policy making far beyond their numerical strength and political influence. With no clear agenda on national issues, their influence disproportionate to their size could prove detrimental. The manner how coalition partners DMK, MDMK and PMK tried to influence foreign policy decision-making was discussed in the last chapter. This was when the Government of Sri Lanka, in the wake of the fall of their Elephant Pass Garrison to the Tigers, requested for help from India. The unreasonableness of the whole process was that MDMK and PMK are openly in support of the Eelam Tamils, their euphemism for the LTTE, which continues to be a proscribed organization in India. Moreover Tigers’ demand for Tamil Eelam is a demand for secession. As members of the ruling coalition at the Centre these political parties are acting in support of the secessionist demand of a militant group in another sovereign country. Nothing can be more unreasonable in a democracy.

As far as India is concerned, the system of coalition Governments at the national level has come to stay. In the 80s the Union Government had to
accommodate the sentiments and political compulsions of state Governments ruled by parties other than the party in power at the Centre. This was the case of the influence of Tamil Nadu in India's Sri Lankan policy in the '80s. The coalition politics has further complicated the issues and limited the choices of Government's response. The complexity in foreign policy decision making has its flip side also. In such a situation, a personal, highly centralized and aggressive style of foreign affairs management that had happened during Rajiv Gandhi years is unlikely to be repeated. The choice of action could be more pragmatic, restrained and consensual.

Rajiv Gandhi assassination is 12 years in the collective memory of the people of the state. More than the loss of logistical infrastructure in the state, what the Tigers really lost was the political space they occupied in Tamil Nadu politics by pitting one Dravidian party against the other. Prabhakaran considers that India is important for their struggle. The LTTE, being masters of manipulation, will continue in their efforts to regain their political space in Tamil Nadu politics.

VIII

Despite the strong disapproval of their terrorist ways by the international community, the firm indication is that the Tigers are still steadfast on their only goal of Eelam. Once they came to the dominant position, the Tigers through their strategy of annihilation of rival militant leadership became the most powerful group representing the Tamils. They always wanted to be recognized as the sole legitimate representatives of the Tamils. The Tigers' tolerance of the moderate Tamil leadership
ran out when they realized that the moderates were aligned with the militant groups enjoying the support of India and IPKF and fighting elections in a common plank. The Tiger leader wants the Tamils to speak in unison, in one voice for the Eelam. He has been able to silence all discordant voice. Virtually, the Tigers are the only Tamil group to reckon and without them no political settlement can be meaningfully settled. The Tigers, no doubt, are a force to reckon with but it is too good to be true that they are the sole, legitimate representatives of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Every evidence suggests that in a peaceful, democratic order the Tigers would find themselves and their ruthless ways fast becoming obsolete and irrelevant.

It is apparent from the foregoing that on Sri Lanka neither the aggressive hands-on policy of the Rajiv Gandhi years nor the non-involved hands-off policy by subsequent Governments especially after a long and famous hands-on involvement serves the long-term interests of India in this region. India’s Sri Lanka policy should be able to convey the message that India backs both the Tamil people of Sri Lanka and the sovereign Government of that nation but not the intransigent LTTE. India’s policy should also be directed to help alleviate the ‘minority complex’ of the Sinhalese majority who look up to India as the birthplace of their faith and forefathers, the same way the Tamils do. The policy priority for India should equally be to arrest the spill over effect of the ethnic problem into ethnically contiguous Tamil Nadu and thereby ensure the security of the region. It therefore follows that somewhere between the aggressively hands-on policy of Rajiv Gandhi years and the present day hands-off policy lies the realism that should guide India’s policy response to secure her long-term strategic interest in this region.