CHAPTER VII
THE ROLE OF INDIAN PEACE KEEPING FORCE

In the previous chapter frequent references have been made to the presence of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (I.P.K.F) in Sri Lanka, and some of its activities there. The present chapter attempts a more detailed account of its origin, and its undeniable role in the complex and confusing drama of ethnic conflict in the Island. It is necessary because, the presence of the I.P.K.F and its changing roles, which were not envisaged to the beginning, have come in for sharp criticism in Sri Lanka as well as India. It is important, therefore, to take an unbiased view of it, since it has played no mean part in the Indo-Sri Lankan relations in recent times.

The sixth point in the annexure to the Rajiv - Jayawardene Agreement concluded with the statement, "an Indian Peace-Keeping contingent may be invited by the President of Sri Lanka to guarantee and enforce the cessation of hostilities if so required". 1

The Indian Cabinet had decided to intervene in Sri Lanka even in April, 1987. The armed forces were brought into the

picture a month later An informal core group was created in New Delhi under K Natwar Singh, the Minister of State for External Affairs. It consisted of the Chiefs of the Army, Navy and Air Force, the Cabinet Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Foreign Secretary, members from Prime Minister's office (PMO), the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and from the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). This group met almost daily and the Vice-Chiefs of the Army Staff rather than the Chief attended most of the meetings. Other ministers and officials were invited as and when needed. It was later formalised with a slightly altered composition. The various Directorates were ordered to prepare detailed plans to implement the decisions of the Core Group. Even in June the specific mission to be assigned to the armed forces was not clear. There seemed to be two distinct options regarding it for which plans were being drawn:

1 To physically separate the Sinhala and the Tamils in the North East of the Island.

2 To protect President Jayawardene from any attempt on his life in case he agreed to the Accord under discussion and faced severe domestic opposition.

The later plan was fanciful because there were already approximately one hundred Indian para-commanders in Colombo and well known to the Sri Lankan security forces. Further all
important buildings in Colombo were heavily guarded. For this and other reasons the latter option did not become operative. At the same time Indian reconnaissance flights over the Island were stepped up. The Directorate General of Military Operations (DGMO), in the Army Headquarters at New Delhi created a new cell for dealing with Srilanka called MO-SL, SL standing for Srilanka. Since the points role of the armed forces in the Island was unclear the MO-SL made plans ranging from the landing of a small ceremonial peace keeping force to a multi-division expedition to impose a Cyprus-like solution on the Island, i.e., to partition the country into Sinhala and Tamil portions as the Turks had done in Cyprus in 1974.

Finally the brief given to Lieutenant General Depinder Singh, the Commander of the Pune based Southern Army (Command) and Major General Harkirat Singh, the General Officer Commanding 54 infantry division, was to disengage the Tamil militants (i.e., the LTTE) and the Srilankan Army, clear the minefields, booby traps, etc., and to physically interpose between the two opposing forces. This task was to be completed speedily and with minimum force, preferably using small numbers of men. The 76 Infantry Brigade of the 54 Infantry Division was moved by rail from Pune to Madras and readied to cross into Srilanka by sea. This movement of troops was picked up by the international news media and added further pressure on the Srilankans.

2. Ibid., p. 121.
to quickly finalise the accord. Brigadier De Silva, Senior Sri-Lankan Army Officer in Jaffna, was appointed as the Liaison Officer to Major General Harkirat Singh. On 30 July, 1987 came the orders to move into Srilanka as soon as copies of the Accord became available. A single copy finally arrived at 130 P M. But there was little in it about the specific role of the armed forces. The two remaining brigades were therefore airlifted into the Island.

On reaching Srilanka these men were dispersed into penny packet units to interpose themselves between the opposing forces in Srilanka. This deployment of the army in "penny packets" went against the grain of conventional military teaching which emphasises concentration of power to maximize its effectiveness. However, since no fighting was anticipated, the maximum concentration of force was ignored. Heavy weaponry was, likewise, left behind in India. All the same, two precautionary measures were taken, two platoon sized penny packet sub-units (about seventy men in each) were organised, one platoon to attack and the other to hold the ground in case fighting broke out. The other precaution was to issue the men more than just their pouch of ammunition. About, 8,000 (three brigades) were thus moved into Srilanka. They received a delirious welcome from the Tamils, reinforcing the view that little fighting was to be expected.

3 Ibid., p 123
4 Ibid., p 124.
The Indians deployed the 91 Infantry Brigade in Jaffna, the 47 Infantry Brigade in the Mannar - Vanuniya - Mullaitivu region, and the 76 Infantry Brigade in the Trincomalee Batticaloa - Amparai area. These men little realised that they were to fight on behalf of the Sinhalese. Destruction was obvious everywhere, especially in Jaffna and Vadamarachchi. Despite death and destruction, there was relative prosperity among the Tamils. Electronic goods were easily available and gold was comparatively cheap. Most soldiers felt that they were going to be in Sri Lanka for sometime only, and few anticipated a shooting war. The troops also sympathised with the lot of the Tamils: drinking water and cereals were in short supply; filth, litter, and debris lay everywhere. However, there was no starvation, or epidemics. Electricity and industrial activity had been virtually non-existent for at least six months. The people were short of ready cash since banks and post offices had not functioned for several months.

Despite scarcity conditions, the Tamils gladly welcomed the Indian troops and gave them hospitality with whatever resources they had. Numerous meetings and rallies were held. The Indian military personnel were repeatedly garlanded and profusely thanked. It was obvious that the Tamils were welcoming the Indians as their saviours and trustworthy friends.

---

Under the terms of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement the Government of India was to expedite repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from Tamil Nadu. Their number was estimated at around 1,30,000. The process of sending them back in batches of about 500 each under United Nations supervision began. They were given an initial settlement grant of Rs 2,000/- per family along with three months rations and kitchen utensils. The homeless were provided upto Rs 15,000/- per family under a housing scheme. Training centres were established to impart vocational training, loans from the Sri Lankan industrial, agricultural and fisheries ministries were also arranged. But this huge Indian undertaking turned out to be a failure because 90,000 of the refugees were still in India when the IPKF withdrew from the Island in March, 1990.

On the island itself the IPKF found several thousand locally displaced persons as a result of the years of Tamil - Sinhala strife. These Tamils, who were fully aware of the facts in their country, were less willing to return to their original villages than even the refugees from India. Ironically, the IPKF had also created refugees; about 90,000 Tamils took shelter in various camps in and around Jaffna during the IPKF - LTTE battle for the peninsula. The largest such concentration was at the Nallur Kandaswamy temple where as many as 30,000 men, women and children, who were quick to return to their homes after the battle, because of the conditions under which they had to live.

7 Ibid., p 130.
WITHDRAWAL AT LAST

To the annoyance and disappointment, the Government of India found out that the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government were holding secret negotiations. At a public meeting on 1 June, 1989, jubilantly Premadasa echoed the LTTE's demand that the IPKF be withdrawn. He even fixed a day for it - 29 July, 1989 - the second anniversary of the now visibly tattered Accord. So in a bizarre turn of events the IPKF achieved only restoring peace between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government. However, the Indians still refused to leave on the ground that the withdrawal of the IPKF required the concurrence of both Governments. They pointed out that the Sri Lankan Government had failed to proceed with devolution of power to the Tamils and so the IPKF had no choice but to stay on. But these arguments were not quite tenable since the IPKF went to Sri Lanka on the invitation of its President and secondly the Accord did not specifically call for India to guarantee the devolution of power to the Tamils. All the same as a result of high level talks in September, 1989, a ceasefire between the LTTE and IPKF was arranged and the withdrawal of the IPKF fixed for 31 December 1989. Privately the Indians made it abundantly clear to the Sri Lankan powers that this date of withdrawal was only a tentative one. The army therefore, drew up plans for an independent brigade to be permanently stationed in Trincomalee with the back up force/about a division in Madras.

Ibid., p. 133.
Meanwhile the Indian-supported EPRLF was further strengthened by providing them with weapons, training, and money. A Citizen Volunteer Force (CVF) was mooted with the concurrence of the Srilankan Government in Colombo, but few volunteers were forthcoming. College youths were therefore conscripted, which led to strikes and boycott of colleges. Even then its projected strength was successively raised to 7,000. Another paramilitary force, the Tamil National Army (TNA), also called the North Eastern Militia (NEM) or the Associate Citizen Volunteer Force (ACVF), was raised by the EPRLF and other militant organisations without the concurrence of Colombo. The TNA was a small, heavily armed and well trained force comprising the hardcore EPRLF and allied guerrillas, but still they were no match for the LTTE. 9

At the time the high-level talks in the September, 1989 talks, under Indian pressure a Security Coordination Groups (SCG) was formed. The Charter of the SCG was maintenance of law and order in the North-Eastern Province and the strengthening of the administrative machinery there. By late 1989 political changes had taken place in India and Rajiv Gandhi was replaced by Vishwanath Pratap Singh as Prime Minister, who was record favouring an early, and essentially unconditional withdrawal of the IPKF. Ironically even Rajiv Gandhi now in the opposition supported the IPKF's withdrawal and urged that

---

the new Government ought to "bring the boys home" by 31 December, 1989. In the process his repeated stand of linking the IPKF's withdrawal with meaningful devolution of power to the Tamils by early 1990 remained effectively unheeded.¹⁰

The rate of withdrawal of the IPKF was slow enough to make it obvious that the process could not be completed by the date fixed. The IPKF blamed their delay on the lack of serviceable jetties in Sri Lanka. But both the Sinhalese and the LTTE knew that sooner or later the IPKF would have to be withdrawn. The fall of Rajiv Gandhi's Government made the withdrawal sooner than later. The last day of March, 1990 was fixed for the completion of the withdrawal. As the Indians withdrew, the LTTE moved in with the connivance of the Colombo Government and established an administration that included high "Taxes." These "taxes" notwithstanding, business activity picked up emphasising the support and confidence that the Tigers enjoyed among the Tamil population. Dixit's successor as India's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, L.L Mehrotra, philosophically shrugged off the Tigers' coming back with the words, "To the extent that this arrangement is acceptable to the Sri-Lankan Government and the people of the North - Eastern Province it is acceptable to us." ¹⁰

The Indian Peace Keeping Force returned home to Madras by 24 March, 1990, not to triumphant scenes of welcome. Instead, ibid., p. 149.
the entire process of withdrawal was subdued, even surreptitious. The EPRLF Government had already collapsed but not before making a declaration of an independent Tamil country of Eelam the one eventuality that the Indians had set out to prevent by sending the IPKF to the island. However, nobody took serious note of this ridiculous declaration from a defunct Government whose members fled to India and elsewhere. So after 967 days in Srilanka at the cost of a reported Rs 300 crore and at a loss of 1155 lives with three times as many wounded the Indian Army was home. P.S Suryanarayana observed in the Indian Express. "No local citizen from among the Srilankan Tamils had willingly come forward to bid a fond farewell to the departing Indian soldiers.

Few newspapers carried editorials about the return. Only the Statesman did. In somebre tones it looked at the future and said. "Had the (Tamil) internecine conflict occurred earlier... India could then exercise some authority to restore peace. Now that India seems to have become an even greater enemy for the Tamil Tigers than the Sinhalese administration, they will leave no stone unturned in ferreting out and exterminating their rivals. This situation has been made more complex by the shelter that India has given on humanitarian grounds to the EPRLF and its allies since this will provide an opportunity to the LTTE and even Colombo - to accuse New Delhi of continuing
to interfere in Sri Lankan affairs." Regarding the role of the military, the editorial observed, "the display of military prowess has been offset by the unfortunate casualties which the IPKF suffered while performing its thankless task and also by the fact that, in the final analysis, it failed to put down the LTTE which seems to have emerged stronger than ever."

The Generals in command rationalised their failure with grandiloquent phrases. One described it as the first ever commitment of the army as an instrument of the nations geopolitical foreign polity, thereby rendering the objective as political rather than military. He added that such a military commitment at home (e.g. combating insurgency in India) must eventually succeed or else the country would disintegrate. At home other structures of the state like financial institutions, educational facilities, bureaucracy and the police would strengthen the military. In addition, time would not be a constraint. However, for the military committed in another country time immediately would become a constraint and the other supporting structures of state such as the bureaucracy, police etc., would not be in the hands of the intervening power. In addition, international pressures, the press and other forces would retract one's ability to manoeuvre. In such a situation success for the intervening power could only be limited, and on a reduced scale. Another General said success in support of lofty principles of state was different from success in achieving a barrow military objec-
A third General reiterated the truth that it was not possible to find a purely military solution to a political problem.

Other senior officers echoed similar observations and explanations. The reasons they gave for the IPKF going to Srilanka included the following: (i) to help a neighbour in difficulty, (ii) to help the Tamils, (iii) to prevent Pakistan and other foreign powers from moving into Lanka, (iv) to protect India's maritime interest including oil fields, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), etc., and (v) to reinforce the support given by the Tamils in India to the brethren across the Palk Strait.

These explanations are diverse, simplistic, or nebulous. Few seemed to have taken seriously the publicity stated aim of preservation of the territorial integrity of Srilanka. In fact since 1987 the popular Indian perception held that the IPKF went to Srilanka to guarantee the autonomy and survival of the Srilankan Tamils. Instead, the IPKF was soon engaged in a bloody fight with the Tigers which led to a confused and thankless war. On board the vessel bringing him home, Lieutenant General Kalkat described the IPKF's military operations as 'Blind man's bluff'.

The Indian withdrawal from Srilanka left the Tamils more bloodied than before 1987; at least 5,000 of them lost their lives during the thirtytwo months of Indian intervention on the Island. In addition the rest of the Island suffered from
a marked upsurge of violence which could partly be blamed on the Indian presence in the north-east of that country. But why did the Rajiv - Jayawardene Accord fail? According to a former Secretary in the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting it failed because it was signed at the Government level without first seeking adequate acceptance of the LTTE.

It has been the experience of all those who have to deal with guerillas that in general, they don't talk but fight, unless the other party ready to accept their demands. From the start the LTTE was a reluctant negotiator with both the Indian and Srilankan Governments and has continued to remain so. In general, guerillas make poor allies, especially allies of foreigners, for they lose credibility with their own people. The LTTE continued to thrive whereas the EPRLF which was backed by India withered even as the IPKF was withdrawing from the Island. This is not to say that the guerilla movements cannot be beaten.

Post-colonial separatist insurgencies have conspicuously failed. However in the case of Srilanka, India's surrogates like the EPRLF could not succeed. If India's national security were truly at stake, as it was thought when the IPKF was sent, then the Indian Army should have stayed in Srilanka. At the same time other means, political and diplomatic, economic and cultural, should have been fully used as instruments of the national policy.
The Tamils in Sri Lanka numbering some 3 million and 50 million Tamils living in Tamil Nadu in India, which is ruled by an opposition party, have made centre-state relations very delicate in the federal context. The Tamil question is too deeply intertwined, therefore, in Indian and Sri Lankan domestic politics to permit any meaningful intercession by third parties. Consequently, India's attempts to insulate this issue from outside intervention have been construed unfairly.

Public assessments of the ethnic conflict have rarely mentioned that the Sri Lankan Tamils considered themselves to be more pristine, pure and wise than their cousins across the Palk Strait in India, that their language was much less Sanskritised, their caste system less rigid. Most importantly, they felt that they could take on the Sinhalese on their own without outside help. Therefore, it appeared to be a unilateral Indian bureaucratic decision to intervene in Sri Lanka.

The historical and geographical compulsions for intervention in Sri Lanka are fraught with other dangerous implications; for Indian forces cannot simply be despatched to a foreign country because people of Indian Origin settled there are under subjugation. Also, if proximity to India is the overriding consideration then the whole of South Asia falls under this ambit for future Indian military intervention. Obviously, the time has come for Indian policy makers to identify the fundamentals of the country's national interest and to frame a policy.
Reference has been made in the earlier pages to the fact that the Government of India secretly gave the LTTE chief a considerable sum of money, while living to persuade limits to accept the Accord. It has also been pointed at that he blatantly went back. Hence the question, why did he on his work entered into a secret money deal with India at the time when July 1987 pact was signed. At that time in all probability did not expect that Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardene would so quickly come to an agreement and therefore was unsettled. The only way he could hope to regain his political poise was to bide his time and let the events unfold themselves. It was in this context perhaps that Prabhakaran asked India for monetary compensation, little expecting that India would so readily agree to pay. When the payment did come his way, he received it gleefully for what it was worth. But it appears that his hard line lieutenants who were always suspicious of India's real intentions over the Sri Lankan Tamil question did not like it, and were angered by it.

Therefore, he could not but harden his attitude towards India. Indeed, according to a leading Indian politician, who had intimate contact with the Tigers, Prabhakaran's post-accord anti-Indian activities could be traced to the pressure from the hard-liners in his entourage.

The opportunist Tamil Tigers unscrupulously invented the argument that the Indian payment had nothing to do with
the question of their accepting the July Accord. The payment was received in the context of the proposal for an interim government, which was outside the purview of the main agreement between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardene. The Indo-Tiger money transactions could not, therefore, be viewed in the context of the Accord at all. The Tigers even contradicted Natwar Singh's assertion that their leader had agreed to fall in line with the Indian position while finalising the deal. But as seen already, Prabhakaran first gave the impression of endorsing the Rajiv Gandhi - Jayawardene pact, only to confound India subsequently by trying to gamble on a strategy of easing the IPKF out of Sri Lanka itself.

Apart from pressure exerted by the hard-liners, Prabhakaran was anything but happy at the quick manner in which Rajiv Gandhi wanted to settle the Sri Lankan Tamil problem, without giving the Tigers a monopoly over political power in the proposed new dispensation. It was not beyond his penchant for political mischief to have tried to hoodwink Rajiv Gandhi by appearing to accept the imminent Indo-Sri Lankan accord. And, there was no better way to do so, from his point of view, than by seeking and accepting payments as compensation for the 'taxes' the Tigers were collecting by them and were now in jeopardy. Prabhakaran doubtless, went ahead with certain actions hoping that something would turn up in his favour.

11. Ibid., p 95
As noted already, his very gamble of a war with the I P K F was based on the hope that the people of Tamil Nadu would rise in revolt against the offensive launched by the I P K F.

He certainly did not receive money from India a straight quid pro quo for an acceptance of the Accord. After all, he had earlier received payments from the then Tamil Naadu chief Minister, M G Ramachandran, not to speak of assistance from Delhi itself for "military training" long before the July accord. It is, therefore, easy to see that Prabhakaran was primarily playing a game with India while accepting money from Delhi. Why then did India agreed to make the payment to him, though secretly as a price for obtaining his consent for the Indo-Sri-lankan accord, despite the explanation given by the then External Affairs Minister of State. Even if the money was meant only to rehabilitate the Tiger cadres, Prabhakaran had sought it on the grounds that he could not retain their loyalty in the absence of any such compensation. This really shows that Delhi was keen to please Prabhakaran, so that he would fall in line with India's intentions in Srilanka. This was, at best, a subtle price for Prabhakaran's acceptance of peace in the Srilankan Tamil region, which was at the back of India's diplomatic mind in July, 1987.

Probably disgusted with Prabhakaran's antics and attitudes India chose to reveal in April, 1988, the secret money deal apparently to expose his pretensions and unscrupulousness.
But, in all this, Delhi itself came in for some adverse criticism, both in India and Sri Lanka. Whichever way one looks at it, the story of India's payment to Prabhakaran, in the context of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord of July, 1987 shows that India politically could not be a match to the disingenuous LTTE leader.

There are three aspects to India's Sri Lankan policy: first to protest the Sri Lankan Tamils, second, to demonstrate that she alone is capable of bringing peace to Sri Lanka; and third, but no less important, to establish herself as a regional power with her own geo-political interests.

How far has India fulfilled its role as the protector of the Sri Lankan Tamils? It is a bitter irony of politics that India, having honestly set out to protest the Tamils, she got bogged down in a war with the Tamil Tigers. Though the IPKF could free Jaffna from the Tigers' control by the end of October 1987, the continuing Indo-Tiger clash became a battle of attrition in both military and political terms. Her own intentions regarding the Sri Lankan Tamils came to be suspect. Militarily, despite her infinitely superior power India could not succeed in distancing the Sri Lankan Tamils from the insurgent Tigers and their menace.

For the enforcement of the 1987 Accord India undertook a major military role. It agreed to provide troops, on request
by the Sri Lankan Government. On the very next day of the Accord, some 6000 to 7000 Indian troops entered Sri Lanka in the Northern and Eastern provinces to assist in the implementation of the military aspects of the accord.

The IPKF initially was hailed as saviour of the Tamil interests in Sri Lanka and was considered as the apogee of peace in Sri Lanka. Even the Sri Lankan government acknowledged that some 2000 Tamil families in the Trincomalee district were resuf-fled and a number of demolished houses were rebuilt by the IPKF. But its subsequent failure became inevitable due to the delay in implementing the key clauses of the Accord.

There is no doubt that the IPKF undertook a very difficult task. Even those who bitterly criticise its role should bear this in mind. The best service rendered by the IPKF in Sri Lanka was the recovery of arms from the militants and the enforcing of general law and order. The most significant military undertaking by IPKF was to ensure the physical safety of all communities inhabiting the Northern and Eastern provinces. Because of its intervention in Sri Lanka, other foreign powers were presented from establishing themselves in Trincomalee. Thus a major super-power rivalry was averted. The cherished idea of dividing the nation into two was apparently hatted by the presence of the IPKF. It also prevented the intergroup clashes between contending militant groups such as EPRLF, ENLF, TELO, PLOT, and EROs and among Tamil Hindus and Tamil
Muslims above all the IPKF’s role firmly established India as a regional power to reckon with in South-Asia with geopolitical interests. Also, IPKF supervised the polls conducted to install a representative Tamil provincial government, the first of its since 1948 ethnic conflict. But all this was in the initial months of the stay of IPKF. But its role took a new turn when LTTE attempted to disrupt the provincial council elections held in November, 1988, by massacring 80 Sinhalese in Boonewaa village.

This particular incident made the Srilankan army and the IPKF to launch a joint attack on the LTTE which resulted in the death of hundreds of innocent Tamil civilians. Thus the Accord and the image of IPKF began to become unpopular in India as well as in Srilanka. Simhalese criticised the accord as having compromised Srilankan sovereignty by allowing the entry of the IPKF.

New Delhi itself did not seem to know how long the IPKF would be stationed in Srilanka. The return to power by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu in the January 1989 General Assembly elections gave a fillip to LTTE and complicated matters further. M. Karunanidhi, the Chief Minister, demanded

13. Saying 'No' to peace, News Week, October 24, 1988, p.18,
that India must resume a dialogue with the LITE.\textsuperscript{14} Premadasa, the new Srilankan President also began to insist on the withdrawal of the IPKF. The installation of the National Front (NF) Government after the IX Parliamentary elections of India had made things easier for the return of the Indian army. Karunanidhi negotiated with the militants of Srilanka. Finally the IPKF was totally withdrawn on 24 March, 1990.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, in the ultimate analysis even India's direct mediation did not succeed either in bringing about a political solution at the Sinhalese - Tamil conflict or in reducing the ethnic tensions in Srilanka\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14. Indian Express, Madras, February 14, 1989}
\textsuperscript{15. Indian Express, Madras, October 10, 1989.}
\textsuperscript{16. Indian Express, Madras, October 8, 1989.}