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The IPKF Experience in Sri Lanka

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The IPKF Experience in Sri Lanka

Dr. P. R. Chari

The Problem Defined

Any use of a state's armed forces to intervene abroad must be seen both in terms of its prevailing strategic vision and the role of the services as an instrument of national security policy. Historically, India's forces have been used in an interventionist role in three ways. During the pre-Independence period the British Indian Army was deployed in various theaters of conflict during both World Wars; they were also used in a number of other campaigns outside India to further Britain's imperial interests. Second, there have been many instances in the post-Independence period when the Indian armed forces joined in United Nations peacekeeping operations; these include the Congo, Gaza, Cyprus, Korea, Laos, and more recently, Angola, Kuwait, El Salvador and Somalia.¹ Finally, there have been forceful projections of Indian power, on behalf of foreign policy objectives, in East Pakistan, 1971, and the Maldives, 1988.

A cursory examination might suggest that the experience of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka falls into the third category. But there are important differences between the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka and that in East Pakistan and Maldives that essentially derives from the clarity of goals that informed the use of the Indian armed forces in the latter two cases, but was absent in the case of the IPKF. The IPKF was the chief instrument of India's political strategy in 1987–90, but remained adrift with the same confusion that marked its decision-making processes during this period. This confusion intermeshed with two factors then underlying Indo–Sri Lankan relations:

- The demands made by the minority Tamil population on the Sri Lankan government for a restitution of their preindependence share in employment and education opportunities, autonomy in the administration of Tamil-dominated areas in north and east Sri Lanka, a rightful place for the Tamil language in the administration, and so on.
- The Tamil–Nadu factor, which had a disproportionate influence on the Union government, played a very significant part in guiding the course of Indo–Sri Lankan relations, culminating in the IPKF deployment and, later, withdrawal from Sri Lanka.

While the IPKF's initial role was envisaged to be peacekeeping that changed with the passage of time to peace-enforcement and, thereafter, to peace maintenance.² Expressed differently, external intervention in civil internecine conflicts can include aid-giving to, or aid-withholding from, the participants; direct participation in the conflict; adopting a mediatory or sanction-applying or under-writing role; or, as happened with the IPKF in Sri Lanka, becoming the common enemy of all the warring factions.³

An attempt, therefore, to analyze the IPKF experience in Sri Lanka must address the fuller circumstances underlying its deployment in Sri Lanka and the framework in which it was required to operate, which was circumscribed by the Tamil demands in Sri Lanka and the Indo–Sri Lanka accord. A judgment is unavoidable as to whether the IPKF succeeded or failed in its mission since it could not accomplish its major tasks of disarming the most powerful and most radical of Tamil militant groups, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and bringing them into the political process. There are, besides, important lessons to be derived from this experience, both in the military and politico-military spheres that have general applicability to the regional and international context.

¹. Government of India, Ministry of Defense, *Annual Report, 1992–93*, p. 130.

². For the views expressed by Professor K.R. Singh see *Proceedings of Seminar on Indo–Sri Lankan Accord: Issues and Prospects* (hereinafter *Seminar*), School of International Studies (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 1988), p. 27.

³. K. M. de Silva ed. *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance* (New Delhi; Konarak Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1993), p. 38.

Finally, the IPKF experience must be placed within the larger framework of India's regional security dilemmas and the role it perceives therein for its South Asian neighbors, which could lie between two extreme belief systems. These are,

- that the boundaries of South Asia define India's security perimeter; consequently, any developments within its geographical confines adverse to its security interests requires corrective action through political and, if necessary, military instruments; or
- that a policy of strict neutrality with regard to developments in South Asian neighboring countries should be observed, unless they impinge directly upon India's security as, for instance, the flow of refugees into the country that occurred during the East Pakistan and Sri Lanka crises, and require that crucial actions be contemplated.

The truth in such matters lies between these extreme positions, but the manner in which this median point is reached bears speculative inquiry.

The Tamil Factor

We can now examine the Tamil demands that underpin their contention with the Sinhala majority population in Sri Lanka and the role played by Tamil-Nadu politics in exacerbating of these tensions. The gist of Sri Lankan-Tamil demands found expression in the principles enunciated and the preconditions set by their organizations during talks with the Sri Lankan government in Thimpu in May 1985. These comprised (1) recognition of a separate national entity for the Tamils; (2) respect for the integrity of the traditional Tamil homeland; (3) recognition of the right to self-determination for the Tamils; and (4) citizenship rights for all Tamils who have chosen to make Sri Lanka their home.⁴

These principles and preconditions were summarily rejected by the Sri Lankan delegation on several grounds: that they constituted a negation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka; that they are detrimental to a United Lanka; and that they were inimical to the interests of several communities and religions in Sri Lanka. More explicitly, the Tamil demands evolved into the expectation that the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka would be declared the traditional homeland of the Tamils; these areas would be merged into one province to be governed by a Tamil government; a co-equal status would be provided for the Tamil language, along with Sinhalese, in Sri Lanka; and a meaningful devolution of power would be made to the Tamils in areas of governance like finance, law and order, land, and land settlement.⁵

These demands embodied the sense of grievance nursed by the Tamils in Sri Lanka since its independence. Tamils constitute only 20 percent of Sri Lanka's population, but they had achieved higher literacy percentages and consequently secured a greater proportion of government jobs in comparison to the majority Sinhala population. Consequently, after independence the latter felt the need to provide greater educational, employment, and business opportunities to themselves, which led inevitably to the belief among many Tamils that they were being discriminated against. The actions taken by the Sri Lankan government, which resulted in this belief, included making Sinhala the official language, conferring a special position to Buddhism in the constitution, restricting the entry of Tamils into colleges, and encouraging Sinhala migration into Tamil-majority areas in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. Tamil resentments with regard to these steps, which were transparently directed against their interests, were aggravated by a series of anti-Tamil riots in 1958, 1961, 1977, 1978, 1979 and 1981, predating the especially brutal riots in 1983. These riots had the effect of forcing Tamil emigration and "cleansing" Sinhala dominated areas of their presence. The resulting situation has been pithily described:

Most Sinhalese believe that the Tamil minority has enjoyed a privileged position under British rule, and that the balance has of necessity to shift. The Tamils for their part would claim that they are now a harassed minority, the victims of frequent acts of communal violence and calculated acts and

⁴ Ravinatha P. Aryasinha, "The Follies of a Small State: The Political Response to the Indo-Lanka Accord in Sri Lanka," in Shelton U. Kodikara, ed., *Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987* (Colombo: Sridevi Printers Pvt. Ltd., 1989), p. 124.

⁵ J. N. Dixit, "IPKF in Sri Lanka," *United Services Institution of India Journal*, Vol. CXIX (497) (July-September 1989): 251.

policies of discrimination directed at them. These two conflicting perceptions lie at the core of the current ethnic crisis.⁶

The inability of the leadership in the two ethnic groups to evolve a *modus vivendi* to fulfill the expectations of the Sinhala majority population has, with the passage of years, encouraged the growth of separatist sentiments among the Tamils. The Sinhala majority itself has deep historical memories of Tamil invasions by expansionist Chola and Pandya kings leading to subjugation of their country. Later the introduction of Tamil plantation labor from Tamil–Nadu during the British colonial period led to a displacement of the local Sinhala and the establishment of a majority Tamil population in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, raising the specter of the Indian state of Tamil–Nadu and the Sri Lankan Tamils jointly dominating the island’s polity. It was noted by the late Dr. Urmila Phadnis, one of India’s most perceptive experts on Sri Lanka, that:

This leads to a complex situation of the majority community having a minority complex, in the shadow of India. Such a complex of subjective factors has manifested itself in a particularly exaggerated fashion because of the competitive politics as it has evolved in Sri Lanka.⁷

It was also perceptively noted by a Sri Lankan scholar that:

Both major communities have an ethnic consciousness with minority overtones—the Tamils seeing themselves as a minority within the country and the Sinhalese seeing themselves as a minority with the larger Tamil community of south India. This consciousness gives rise to perceptions of identity threat.⁸

The current ethnic crisis can be traced back to the general elections of 1977 that marked not only the resurgence of the centrist United National Party (UNP) under J. R. Jayawardene’s leadership, but also the appointment of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) as the main opposition party. This development was of some significance because TULF began its parliamentary career by urging creation of a separate Tamil Eelam. Although its stand was thereafter modified, the separatist cause continued to inspire its younger elements and the militant groups that emerged after the brutal anti-Tamil riots of 1983—these riots marked the great divide between the Tamil and Sinhala communities in Sri Lanka besides exacerbating intracommunity competitive politics that had been long festering within the two communities, and divided them further against each other.

The linkage of Sri Lanka Tamils in Tamil–Nadu politics was strengthened by the growth of Dravidian linguistic chauvinism and cultural revivalism associated with the rise during the early fifties of the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) Party in Tamil–Nadu, which split further into the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIDMK) parties. Their competitive politics, revolving around charismatic leaders, drew sustenance from their strident emphasis on the Tamil language as a means to combat the perceived Aryan dominance of the north–Indian political parties. A competitive concern for the “Tamil brethren” outside India, especially those in neighboring Sri Lanka, was integral to this manifestation of ethnic politics. No doubt, these sentiments were strengthened by the historical, cultural, linguistic, familial, and similar linkages existing between Tamil–Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils.

The commercial links cementing this relationship are of special importance. They stretch back into antiquity, but more recently have been based on fishing and smuggling activities.⁹ Significantly, the LTTE leadership largely belongs to the fisherman caste and, consequently, has strong ties with their counterpart community in Tamil–Nadu. It is, therefore, quite explicable that a vociferous section of the Tamil–Nadu leadership began pressing the Union leadership to intervene vigorously in Sri Lankan affairs and secure the rights of the Sri Lankan Tamils, despite the Union government’s initial reluctance to enlarge its extra-territorial responsibilities. Indira Gandhi is believed to have explained this problem to Hector Jayewardene, the President’s brother and special emissary, in August 1983 by drawing attention to walkouts being staged by Members of Parliament from south India who were demanding statements on the events taking place in Sri Lanka; to fasts

⁶ K. M. de Silva, ed., *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, p. 51.

⁷ Urmila Phadnis, “Sri Lanka: Stresses and Strains of A Small State,” in U.S. Bajpai, ed., *India and its Neighborhood* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1986), p. 267.

⁸ Karthigesu Sivathamby, “Tamil Militants,” in Ponna Wignaraja and Akmal Hussain, *The Challenge in South Asia: Development, Democracy and Regional Cooperation* (New Delhi/Newbury Park/London: Sage Publications, 1989), p. 257.

⁹ Lt. Gen. S.C. Sardeshpande, *Assignment Jaffna* (New Delhi: Lancers Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1992), pp. 155–6.

by legislators in Madras; and to protests organized by the Opposition leaders.¹⁰ It is also believed that State governments in Tamil–Nadu often acted independently of the Central government. The training and equipping of Sri Lankan guerrilla forces by Tamil–Nadu began, for instance, prior to the anti-Tamil riots in July 1983. Restrictions imposed by the Central government on the activities of these forces in October and November 1986 were nullified by Tamil–Nadu’s noncooperation. Furthermore, “Once a separatist movement emerged amongst the Tamils of Sri Lanka it was fostered, nurtured and protected by Tamil–Nadu.”¹¹

The Indian Union government was not unwilling, however, to use the Tamil–Nadu based militant groups for interceding in Sri Lankan affairs as part of its coercive diplomatic effort to channel the Jayewardene government into seeking a *modus vivendi* with the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. This effort was assessed in Colombo as blending Delhi’s mediatory effort with the dissuasive power of support to the militants to force Sri Lanka to accept a solution for its ethnic problem that met India’s strategic objectives. The Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India’s external intelligence agency, was apparently given the task to “penetrate these groups to limit their militancy, erode their external linkages, and bring them under Indian influence. In this task RAW secured the go-ahead signal to even provide military training, money, and arms to the Sri Lankan Tamil militants.”¹² This effort was intended to limit the perceived influence of foreign intelligence agencies in Sri Lanka, representing Israeli, Pakistani and mercenary interests, that were seeking to penetrate the Tamil militant groups in pursuit of their own objectives. An unintended consequence of these efforts by RAW was to widen latent differences between the Tamil militant groups and embed their differences and rivalries in Tamil–Nadu and at one remove, in national Indian politics.

The situation this created can be illustrated by noticing the changing support pattern for the LTTE over the years in Tamil–Nadu. Initially, it enjoyed the patronage of the Chief Minister, M. G. Ramachandran of the AIDMK, largely for the reason that the LTTE’s chief rival, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), was supported by the DMK and its leader M. Karunanidhi. In opposition, however, the DMK adopted a more extreme position in support of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka and shifted its support to the LTTE; whereas the responsibilities of being in power and the need to conform to the Central government’s foreign policy dictates persuaded the AIDMK, in office, to moderate its support for the LTTE.¹³ These shifts in support for the LTTE by the major State-level parties established its centrality in the rubric of Tamil–Nadu politics. Naturally, this sympathy for Tamil militant activity in Sri Lanka largely influenced the State government’s attitudes towards the Indo–Sri Lanka Agreement and the IPKF operations.

The Indo–Sri Lanka Agreement

The Tamil demands in Sri Lanka and the Tamil–Nadu factor in Indian politics congealed, providing both the backdrop to and the incentive for the Indo–Sri Lanka Agreement of 29 July 1987. The political and military developments that led to the Agreement cannot be discussed within the space of this paper.¹⁴ Our analysis is restricted to its strategic aspects and the compulsions that governed the IPKF’s deployment into Sri Lanka. An initial judgment is possible that the Agreement failed to achieve its stated ends and suffered the same fate as the Punjab and Assam Accords of the Rajiv Gandhi era. However, a contrary view could be held that the Agreement extracted the best possible concessions for the Tamils from a reluctant Sinhala-dominated government on their principal demands regarding official language, devolution, merger, and homeland. Furthermore, it could be hoped that these concessions would not remain unimplemented, as past experience forewarned, because the Agreement was guaranteed by India.

¹⁰. Sinha Ranatunga, *The Politics of Terrorism: The Sri Lanka Experience* (Canberra: 1988), p. 123.

¹¹. K. M. de Silva, ed., *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, p. 387.

¹². S.D. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity: India and Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Crisis* (New Delhi/Newbury Park/London: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 72.

¹³. For a perceptive analysis of these shifts in domestic Tamil–Nadu politics on the Sri Lankan–Tamil issue during the MGR era, see Ambalavanar Sivarajah, “Implications of the Indo–Lanka Agreement and Tamil–Nadu Politics,” in Shelton U. Kodikara, ed., *Indo–Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987*, pp. 143–55.

¹⁴. For a brief overview of politico-military developments presaging the Agreement see A.M. Vohra, “Indian Peace Keeping in Sri Lanka,” in Satish Kumar, ed., *Yearbook On India’s Foreign Policy, 1989* (New Delhi/Newbury Park/London: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 83–6.

The disconcerting and unanticipated fallout of the Agreement was that it proved unacceptable to the opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and large sections of Jayewardene's UNP, apart from the radical Sinhala nationalist group, the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP)—in other words, major segments of the Sinhala community—and also the LTTE, which was the major Tamil militant group. This did not augur well for the success of the Agreement, which had to be accepted by all of Sri Lanka's constituent political groups. The danger should have been anticipated that India might be drifting into a situation where it found itself confronting “both Sinhalese chauvinism and Tamil militancy . . . while thinking through the entire gamut of implications, India paid scant heed to LTTE's track record and its possible resistance to make a peaceful transition from a military resistance movement to a legitimate political order.”¹⁵ Indeed, the almost immediate disassociation of the LTTE from the Agreement gives credence to the belief that LTTE leaders had their reservations before it was signed, which were not accorded much significance by the Indian decision makers in their anxiety to reach this Agreement with Sri Lanka.

India's policy towards the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka had been conceived within an operating framework that was delicately poised between denying absolute victory to the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan government while, simultaneously, obstructing the establishment of a Tamil Eelam. India's dual purpose was to stop or reverse the ingress of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees into Tamil-Nadu, but also to establish a *cordon sanitaire* around India's southern security perimeter. Preserving Sri Lanka's unity and integrity was believed to be imperative; otherwise, the emergence of two economically weak, vulnerable states would create the objective conditions wherein external powers that could be inimical to India might establish a presence in Sri Lanka. These security concerns become clear from the letters exchanged between India and Sri Lanka that form part of the Agreement and provided *inter alia* that:

- Both countries would not allow their territories to be used for activities prejudicial to the other's unity, territorial integrity, and security.
- That an early understanding would be reached between them on employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel to ensure that their presence would not prejudice Indo-Sri Lanka relations.
- Trincomalee or other Sri Lankan ports would not be made available for military use to other countries in a manner prejudicial to India's interests.
- The two countries would undertake the work of restoring and operating the Trincomalee Oil Tank farm.
- Sri Lanka's agreements with foreign broadcasting organizations would be reviewed to ensure that they would not be used for military or intelligence purposes.

For its part, India undertook to (1) deport all Sri Lankans found engaged in terrorist activities or advocating separatism or secessionism; and (2) provide training facilities and military supplies to Sri Lankan security forces.

An examination of the balance of rights and obligations in these letters reveals that they imposed a disproportionate burden on Sri Lanka, while India agreed in return not to permit activities directed against Sri Lanka of the type that it had supported in the first place. The subordination of Sri Lankan sovereignty to India's strategic interests, explicit in these letters, brings to mind the scheme of Subsidiary Alliances conceived of by Lord Mornington (Marquis Wellesley) that envisaged that the Indian powers “were to make no wars and to carry on no negotiations with any other state whatsoever, without the knowledge and consent of the British government.”¹⁶

India's concern about Trincomalee increased with the Sri Lankan government's proposal in 1981 to lease some one hundred disused World War II oil storage tanks there to the multinational Coastal Corporation to make them the nucleus for enlarged refueling facilities. These could be used by U.S. forces and would complement the oil storage facilities established in Diego Garcia. Routine access to Trincomalee would thus be available to U.S. naval vessels transiting to Diego Garcia from Singapore. India's concerns in this matter were exacerbated by incautious statements made by some Americans, drawing attention to the excellent natural features of

¹⁵. *Seminar*, pp. 37–8. For the Sri Lankan Tamil, especially LTTE, reactions to the Agreement see Bertram Bastiampillai, “The Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987,” pp. 89–94.

¹⁶. R.C. Majumdar, et al, *Advanced History of India* (4th edition, New Delhi: Macmillan, 1988), p. 699.

Trincomalee harbor. One would believe that India's concerns here were somewhat excessive as the United States seemed unlikely to seek port facilities in another Asian country considering the difficulties it was then facing in retaining the naval facility at Subic Bay and Clark Air Force base in the Philippines and the availability, in any case, of a major naval-air base in Diego Garcia.

Similarly, India's concern with "foreign broadcasting organizations" derived from an agreement that Sri Lanka had entered into with the United States to permit expansion and upgrading of the Voice of America relay station at Chilaw. India was apprehensive that this radio station would be utilized to spread disaffection against countries that opposed the United States,¹⁷ although there was a greater probability that nonstate actors like the LTTE might operate pirate radio stations for this purpose. The reference in the letters to foreign military and intelligence personnel was apparently directed against the presence of Israel's Mossad and Shin Bet, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI), and mercenary agencies like the Keeny Meeny that were widely believed to have been sought and obtained by Sri Lanka for assistance in its counter-intelligence, counter-insurgency, and counter-terrorism operations and that might have been extended into Tamil-Nadu.

The somewhat exaggerated concern in India with a U.S. presence encrusting itself in Sri Lanka was prompted by the general perception that President Jayewardene's economic and foreign policies were leaning towards the United States. This was in contrast to the indifferent state of Indo-American relations, but warm Indo-Soviet ties during Indira Gandhi's tenures in office. However, the perception that deterioration in relations between India and Sri Lanka was partly occasioned by the opposed strategic direction of their core linkages to the superpowers can be overdrawn. Indeed, Indo-U.S. relations improved in the Rajiv Gandhi era, and the United States refused to countenance Sri Lanka's fears of possible intervention by India in its ethnic conflict, but encouraged India to assert its regional primacy and supported the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement.¹⁸ Consequently, India's obsession with Trincomalee and VOA facilities is only explicable as evidence of bureaucratic *ennui* that could not adjust to changed international circumstances, but remained shackled to unrealistic historic beliefs.

Induction of the IPKF

The Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement provided the legal framework for inducting an Indian peacekeeping force into Sri Lanka with India agreeing to "underwrite and guarantee the resolutions, and cooperate in the implementation of these proposals" (Art. 2.14). Should any militant group not accept these proposals, India further undertook, on demand by Sri Lanka, to provide military assistance for implementing the proposals "as and when requested" [Art. 2.16(c)]. This obligation was amplified in an Annexure to the Agreement, which specifically visualized that "an Indian peacekeeping contingent may be invited by the President of Sri Lanka to guarantee and enforce the cessation of hostilities, if so required" (Para 6). A rigid time-frame to end the ethnic conflict was also envisaged (Art 2.9) in the following terms:

- (a) cessation of hostilities within 48 hours of the Agreement being signed;
- (b) all arms held by the militant groups to be surrendered to authorities designated by the Sri Lankan government—the Annexure provided for representatives of the Sri Lankan and Indian Red Cross being present.
- (c) following the cessation of hostilities and surrender of arms, the [Sri Lanka] army and security personnel would be confined to barracks;
- (d) the process of surrendering arms and confining of security personnel to barracks would be completed within 72 hours of the cessation of hostilities; and
- (e) the emergency would be lifted in the eastern and northern provinces by 15 August 1987.

The option lay with Sri Lanka to demand the despatch of Indian peacekeeping forces and the strict timetable negotiated for implementation of the Agreement made such a request almost inevitable. The ostensible reason for the request that was subsequently made by Sri Lanka was the need to relieve its armed forces from the Tamil areas for redeployment against the JVP in the south. It must have been foreseen before the Agreement was

¹⁷. For a portrayal of India's strategic concerns see J.P. Anand, "India's Indian Ocean Neighbors," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XII (2) (May 1989): 151-2.

¹⁸. S.D. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, p. 78 and 118.

signed, which is confirmed by Rajiv Gandhi's statement to Parliament on 31 July 1987 after signing the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement. He revealed that President Jayewardene had requested military assistance in terms of the Agreement, "to ensure the cessation of hostilities and surrender of arms in the Jaffna peninsula and, if required, in the Eastern Province. He also requested for air transport to move some of the Sri Lankan troops from Jaffna to points in the south. In response to this formal request from the government of Sri Lanka, and in terms of our obligations under the just signed Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement, units of the Armed Forces of India landed in the Jaffna Peninsula *yesterday*."¹⁹ (Emphasis added).

Consequently, the deployment of the IPKF began on 30 July 1987, one day after the Agreement was entered on 29 July 1987, and it would require extraordinary obtuseness to believe this was possible unless matters had not been suitably arranged beforehand. Official Indian pronouncements laid great stress that Indian troops were sent in response to a request by Sri Lanka to cloak this unusual enterprise with a certain legitimacy. Atypically, the Ministry of Defense described the IPKF's deployment as being "in terms of the Agreement, to supervise the cease-fire and ensure the safety and security of all communities in the north and east. The LTTE chose to renege on their commitments. . . . the IPKF was forced to start operations to disarm the LTTE in early October."²⁰

A brief digression is necessary here to describe "Operation Eagle" that removed the psychological barrier to the deployment of the Indian armed forces in Sri Lanka. Food supplies were air-dropped over the Jaffna peninsula on 4 June 1987 by Indian Air Force transport aircraft, escorted, very significantly, by Mirage-2000 multi-role war planes, although no resistance could have been reasonably expected. A message was thereby conveyed to Sri Lanka that India could intervene militarily in the ethnic struggle. Significantly again, no reference to Operation Eagle is made in the Annual Reports of the Ministries of Defense and External Affairs for the relevant year. This operation has been differently interpreted by Sri Lankan and Indian scholars. The range of perceptions in Sri Lanka include "the feared Indian military intervention had been consummated. From then on, the necessity of hastening the peace process in Sri Lanka, and of making India an integral part of it, acquired a new urgency;"²¹ it was a "clear enough indication that India was not to be trifled with and is sufficient evidence of the atmosphere of tension, duress and intimidation that prevailed at the time;"²² and, that it constituted: "an emphatic demonstration of Indian support for the Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka."²³ On the Indian side, analyses of Operation Eagle have suggested that it "demonstrated that India would not tolerate Sri Lanka's dealings with foreign powers beyond a certain point. . . . to drive home India's perceptions of regional security and its resolve to prevent the ethnic crisis reaching the 'point of no return'";²⁴ that "it headed off the impending offensive by Sri Lanka army";²⁵ and, that, in an encyclopedic fashion, it "decisively put the military solution as a nonoption for both the Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan government. . . . exposed the limits of external support to Sri Lanka, particularly in the event of a determined Indian action. . . . aroused Sinhalese national sensitivities by bringing their worst fears of an Indian Tamil coalition nearer to reality. . . . created compulsions for India to become a direct party in the Sri Lankan conflict."²⁶ In views expressed nearer the event, the operation "set the stage for the IPKF to follow. . . . the air-drop was to convey the message of India's inescapable interests and unavoidable involvement in the ethnic crisis. It was perhaps a further indication of India's capabilities to send paratroopers to Sri Lanka instead of material, if required."²⁷

Reverting to the circumstances underlying the deployment of the IPKF in Sri Lanka, the distinction between the provision of Indian military assistance to Sri Lanka in 1971 for countering the JVP insurgency, and

¹⁹. The text of this statement may be seen in Satish Kumar, ed., *Yearbook on Indian Foreign Policy, 1987/88* (New Delhi/Newbury Park/London: Sage Publications, 1988), pp. 238.

²⁰. Ministry of Defense, Government of India, *Annual Report 1987-88*, p.3. The same formulation is used in the *Annual Report 1987-88* of the Ministry of External Affairs (see p. iv) suggesting close consultations between the two Ministries.

²¹. Shelton U. Kodikara, "Negotiating the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 29 July 1987," Unpublished paper, p. 30.

²². H.L. de Silva, "The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord: An Appraisal," in Shelton U. Kodikara, *Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 29 July 1987*, p.32.

²³. K. M. de Silva, ed., *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, p. 64.

²⁴. *Seminar*, p. 26. Views expressed by Air Commodore (ret.) Jasjit Singh.

²⁵. Pran Chopra, "Security, Sovereignty and India-Sri Lanka Relations," in Satish Kumar, ed., *Yearbook on India's Foreign Policy, 1987-88*, p. 112.

²⁶. S.D. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, pp. 95-102.

²⁷. *Seminar*, p. 20.

the IPKF's deployment in 1987 under the terms of the Indo–Sri Lanka Agreement is important. The 1971 episode arose from a confrontation between the Sri Lankan government and a Sinhala militant group; whereas, in 1987, India became a party in the ethnic conflict between the Sri Lankan government and a Tamil militant group. It might be added that the belief prevalent in Sri Lanka that “it was India’s acts of omission and commission which accentuated the situation created by the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and thus helped to create the circumstances in which Sri Lanka had to accept India’s help.”²⁸ The attack upon Rajiv Gandhi by a naval sailor during his visit to Sri Lanka for signing the Agreement was reflective of the depth of Sri Lankan resentment against the perceived imposition of an unequal treaty upon it by India.

The clearest geo-political explanation for sending the IPKF to Sri Lanka was provided by J.N. Dixit, former High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, in an address to a largely military audience,²⁹ and deserves special notice. The reasons for the IPKF induction, according to Dixit, were:

- to preserve our own unity; to ensure the success of a very difficult experiment [creating an integrated nation out of a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic society];
- to counter the Sri Lankan government [which] started looking for external support to counter Tamil militancy, Tamil insurgency, which had security implications for us; [these security implications included raising the strength of the Sri Lankan army and paramilitary forces, increasing naval visits by the U.S. and British navies, inviting foreign mercenaries and intelligence agencies to assist its operations, seeking assistance from Pakistan to train its Home Guards and Navy, offering broadcasting facilities to VOA, and buying arms from countries inimical to India].
- to respect the sentiments of the 50 million Tamil citizens of India. They felt that if we did not rise in support of the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka .□□is there any relevance or validity of our [Tamils] being part of a larger Indian political identity?

In Dixit’s view “our strategic thinking has to take into account potential danger .□□[that] can be a creation of circumstances in neighboring countries generating political, social trends in these countries which can have a ripple effect on our polity and disintegrate us.”

A surprising reason for the IPKF’s induction, which could explain the urgency of its deployment, is provided by President Jayewardene. He mentions an outbreak of violence in the south occurring when Rajiv Gandhi visited Sri Lanka to sign the Agreement, whereupon:

I then turned to the Chiefs of the Security Forces. They said that they could spare some men [to control the situation] but did not have the planes to bring them from the north and east. Rajiv heard of my difficulty, and asked, “Can I help?” I told him of our difficulties and he said he will get some planes to transport our troops. Then he also asked whether I also needed some manpower to assist in the north and east, if some of the troops were coming south. This was possible under the Accord. I said, “since the planes are coming empty, why not send some?” That is how the Indian troops came to Sri Lanka.³⁰

It is apparent from the foregoing that no great thought went into drawing up the Indo–Sri Lanka agreement or analyzing the implications of India’s intervention in the ethnic crisis. It was certainly not anticipated that India would be drawn into conflict with the LTTE, although this was possible since the Agreement assured that India “will underwrite and guarantee the resolutions, and cooperate in the implementation of these proposals.” The IPKF’s peacekeeping role became irrelevant after the LTTE disassociated itself from the Agreement on the grounds that “the problems of the affected people have not been taken care of in the agreement. The LTTE could not give up arms without protection, for their future.”³¹ This augured ill for the IPKF’s designated task envisaged by the Agreement to ensure that “all arms held by militant groups will be surrendered in accordance with an agreed procedure,” within a strictly defined time-frame.

²⁸. Pran Chopra, “Security, Sovereignty and India–Sri Lanka Relations,” p. 110.

²⁹. J.N. Dixit, “IPKF in Sri Lanka,” pp. 248–262.

³⁰. *Sunday Times*, 11 February 1990, during the course of an interview.

³¹. A.M. Vohra, “Indian Peace Keeping in Sri Lanka,” p. 87, citing interview given by Prabhakaran to *The Hindu*, 11 August 1987.

In the event, the LTTE surrendered only 488 out of the assessed 1700 infantry weapons in its possession, which was clearly in breach of the scheme envisaged by the Agreement. Furthermore, the arms surrenders were also hampered by delay in disbanding the Home Guards and withdrawal of the paramilitary forces, continuance of Sri Lankan army camps in the northern and eastern provinces, and mistrust, *inter se*, between the Tamil militant groups.³² The steps leading to the crumbling of the Agreement were marked by an escalation of internecine conflict between these Tamil groups, which extended to the eastern province and subsequent anti-Sinhala violence there; the abortive attempt to coopt the LTTE into the Interim Administrative Council; and cessation of the surrender of arms. Obstructive tactics by the LTTE against the IPKF's efforts to restore normal administration in the northern and eastern provinces led to direct confrontation. A complete breach in their relations followed the cyanide incident of 3 October 1987, when seventeen LTTE cadres capture by the Sri Lankan navy committed suicide in protest against their transfer to Colombo for interrogation. Thereafter, the IPKF doffed its peacekeeping guise to don its peace-enforcement garb.

The details of the IPKF's peace-enforcing and peace-maintenance efforts need not detain us. The military and military-political lessons from the IPKF experience in Sri Lanka will be discussed later. At this stage, it would be useful to discuss the ostensible reasons for withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka. This was officially stated by the Ministry of Defense as follows:

Consequent on [sic] discussions with the Sri Lankan government and the Joint Communiqué of September 18, 1989, the IPKF unilaterally suspended offensive military operations against the LTTE and commenced de-induction. The IPKF has rendered a great service in maintaining peace and stability under very complex and difficult conditions.³³

The Ministry of External Affairs noted, *inter alia*, that:

In keeping with the government of India's foreign policy objectives of peace and cooperation, India sought solutions to the existing difficulties in its relations with Sri Lanka. Mutual understanding has been reached regarding the de-induction [sic] of the IPKF from Sri Lanka.³⁴

The main reason for the IPKF's de-induction was the public demand made by President Premadasa, who succeeded President Jayewardene after the latter stepped down from office in October 1988, that the IPKF be withdrawn from Sri Lanka. The grounds urged, in an exchange of letters between the two countries during June and July 1989, were that this "will hopefully contribute to stabilizing the situation in Sri Lanka, where the presence of the IPKF has become a deeply divisive and resentful issue."³⁵ Reference was made to withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka having become a campaign issue in the Presidential and Parliamentary elections, which brought Premadasa and UNP to power—a veiled threat was simultaneously held out that there could be difficulty, otherwise, in hosting the SAARC summit in Sri Lanka. After protracted correspondence, which generated much ill-will, a time-frame for the de-induction schedule was drawn up in the form of another Agreement, entered into on 19 September 1989, that provided for the immediate suspension of offensive military operations by the IPKF and the establishment of an observer group—including the GOC IPKF—to report violations of the cessation of hostilities, consequential actions taken, and further action required to the President of Sri Lanka. These interim arrangements were obviously designed to ensure that the de-induction of the IPKF proceeded on schedule.

President Premadasa was clearly under considerable pressure from the JVP, which had intensified its operations in the south, as well as hardline elements in the UNP, apart from his own position within his Party of consistently opposing the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement. India's efforts to link the IPKF's withdrawal to implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement—which envisaged the devolution of powers to the Tamil provinces, the surrender of arms by the LTTE, and establishment of peace in these areas—could not prevail over Premadasa's obduracy in placing withdrawal of the IPKF on top of his policy agenda. It is arguable that the inability of the IPKF to eradicate the LTTE insurgency and prolongation of its military operations created a

³². Ibid.

³³. Government of India, Ministry of Defense, *Annual Report, 1989-90*, p. 4.

³⁴. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, *Annual Report 1989-90*, p. (ii).

³⁵. Text of letter dated 2 June 1989 from President Premadasa to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi may be seen in S. D. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity*, pp. 218-19.

situation where the IPKF's indefinite deployment proved an embarrassment and began to posit sharply as a sovereignty issue in Sri Lanka. A comparison with the brevity of the period between projection and withdrawal of Indian troops during the Bangladesh operations in 1971 and Maldives in 1988 is perhaps, unavoidable, to stress that unless the time interval between entry and extrication of interventionary forces is brief, their presence would inevitably become a political irritant to the host and inviting country.

Neither leader—President Premadasa nor Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi—emerged unscathed from this encounter of wills, proving yet again that extravagant public posturing by national leaders for internal compulsions and short-term gains in South Asian situations quite often locks them into untenable positions. Such extravagant posturing, whereby they lose their flexibility to alter policy directions, is no substitute for quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy to resolve contentious issues, whose resolution could advance the political interests of national leaders over the longer term. Such low key efforts might have enabled a coordinated approach being made by both countries to either bring the LTTE into the political processes or undertake a joint operation against it. The continuance, to date, of the LTTE outside the political pale—and the armed struggle in the Tamil provinces—reveals the conjoint failure of India and Sri Lanka to achieve a resolution of this festering ethnic problem, which is of vital concern to their national interests.

Success, Failure, and Lessons of the IPKF Experience

It is now possible to undertake an evaluation of the IPKF's successes and failures in Sri Lanka although, obviously, no unequivocal conclusions can be drawn in this regard. The lessons of the IPKF experience in the military and military-political spheres will be discussed separately.

The Balance Sheet

What could be claimed as the IPKF's successes? A mid-term appraisal in April 1989 of its achievements made by the Ministry of External Affairs noted: "Law and order has, by and large, been restored in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka which now constitute a united entity. Provincial Council, Presidential and Parliamentary elections have been held, with overwhelming turn-out of voters. Devolution of authority to the local Tamil population has been more extensive and far-reaching than ever before."³⁶ The Ministry of Defense also stated: "India's basic objectives in sending its forces to Sri Lanka was to preserve its democratic set up and territorial integrity seriously threatened by various militant groups and to ensure that the legitimate aspirations of its Tamil minorities [sic] were not neglected in the governance of that country. These objectives have been achieved in a large measure."³⁷ Such official statements, quite naturally, sought to place the most favorable construct on the success achieved preceding the IPKF's withdrawal from Sri Lanka. The IPKF's campaign had, indeed, succeeded in dislodging the LTTE leadership from their bastions in the Jaffna city and peninsula and scattered them into the Vanni forests and the eastern province. Three effects flowed from this achievement.

First, the ground conditions were created whereby political initiatives could be taken in the Tamil majority areas³⁸ although it was apparent that the IPKF could not ensure success.

Second, the IPKF provided for the safety of Sinhala, apart from Tamil, candidates in the Presidential and Parliamentary elections, enabling them to be conducted in conditions of near-normalcy; and it is significant that the last round of general elections were held in Sri Lanka only eleven years earlier in 1977.³⁹

Third, the IPKF succeeded in providing relief and rehabilitation to the displaced Tamils and restoring the crippled essential services in the northern and eastern provinces "to help revive normal administration with electricity and water supply restored, and banks, courts, post and telegraph department, hospitals, educational institutions working. The conduct of 'O' level examinations was also arranged."⁴⁰ No doubt these were considerable successes in the direction of establishing civil administration in the war-ravaged zone.

³⁶. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, *Annual Report 1988–89*, p. 2.

³⁷. Government of India, Ministry of Defense, *Annual Report 1988–89, Supplement*, p. 5.

³⁸. *Seminar*, p. 52.

³⁹. J.N. Dixit, "IPKF in Sri Lanka," p. 256.

⁴⁰. A.M. Vohra, "Indian Peace Keeping in Sri Lanka," p. 94.

The proposition that the IPKF could not have achieved a military solution to the ethnic problem, which lay in the province of politics, is unarguable. Future commentators and historians, however, would evaluate the IPKF's campaign in its totality, and estimate how far it achieved its task of ensuring a cessation of hostilities, surrender of arms by the Tamil militant groups, and resuscitation of normal political functioning in Sri Lanka. The poignancy of an overall sense of failure is evident from the following introspection by a military officer: "Within days of our vacating areas the NEPC (North Eastern Provincial Council), the CVF (Citizens Volunteer Force) and the 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."⁴¹

The IPKF's military task was to disarm the LTTE. Despite their dispersal from Jaffna, the LTTE was able to continue their armed struggle from its jungle hideouts. The nature of the counter-insurgency operations had perforce to change from proceeding against an urban to a rural and forest-based guerrilla force that used terror tactics as a psychological weapon. The strength of the IPKF was augmented to meet these extended obligations and is estimated to have reached a total of around one hundred and fifty thousand if paramilitary forces are also included.⁴² The local Tamil population, however, perceived the LTTE as nationalists and freedom fighters, and the IPKF as an external force serving an imperialist purpose. Without their support the counter-insurgency operations, unsurprisingly, soon became stale-mated.

The course of events following the Agreement had accentuated its underlying flaws in perceptions. For instance, a basic assumption of the Agreement was availability of LTTE's support on the premise that the devolution package would be acceptable to both the Tamils and the Sinhala and that President Jayewardene would be able to diffuse the reservations to the Agreement within his party and the Opposition.⁴³ None of these beliefs proved accurate and it was inevitable that the Agreement began to unravel, making the role assigned to the IPKF increasingly untenable.

In the later stages it is suspected that the UNP government was providing material support to the LTTE. In consequence: "The departure of the IPKF in March 1990 left a vacuum in the north and east of the island which the LTTE filled with the acquiescence of the government. The LTTE's morale was high; its leadership was intact; and it was better armed than at any time since 1987. It proceeded to stake a claim to a monopoly of power in the north and east of the island and indeed to establish a parallel government there."⁴⁴ This is a most telling commentary on the failure of both countries to achieve the political objectives enunciated in the Agreement before the IPKF enterprise was undertaken in 1987.

We should also note the natural advantages enjoyed by the LTTE in contrast to the disadvantages confronting the IPKF. The LTTE combined a high level of discipline with complete ruthlessness towards its rivals by eliminating their cadres and suspected informers. LTTE finances came from extortion and protection rackets, apart from armed robbery, and, recently, from a narcotics smuggling operation functioning throughout Europe. Binding the LTTE cadres together was their common suicide pact, evocatively expressed by: "The culture of the cyanide capsule dangling from a gold [or gold-plated] chain is the ultimate commitment to a cause, a readiness to commit suicide on its behalf rather than surrender or be captured, a level of commitment which a more conventionally trained regular army cannot match, and cannot be expected to match."⁴⁵

Their higher level of education and middle-class origins ensured that the LTTE were more highly trained and displayed greater technical expertise and capacity for improvisation than guerrillas elsewhere in South Asia; they enmeshed more effectively with the general population that was also, in turn, better educated and politically conscious than in most other parts of the subcontinent.⁴⁶ The "innovativeness" of the LTTE extended to use of

⁴¹. Lt. Gen. S.C. Sardeshpande, *Assignment Jaffna*, p. 92.

⁴². K.M. de Silva, *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, p. 67, citing Ravi Rikhye, *The Militarization of Mother India*, (New Delhi: 1990).

⁴³. *Seminar*, p. 41. Views expressed by Urmila Phadnis.

⁴⁴. K.M. de Silva, *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, p. 77.

⁴⁵. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁶. Lt. Gen. S.C. Sardeshpande, *Assignment Jaffna*, p. 61.

improvised and remotely-operated mines and use of human shields when opposing the IPKF, besides gaining access to superior infantry weapons (AK series) and communication systems.

The IPKF, on the other hand, was handicapped by deficiencies in numbers, with units operating at around 50 percent of their authorized strength; an inability to make use of artillery, mortars or aircraft in close support roles; maps being in short supply; language problems; lack of a proper rotational policy for interposting units to field duties and peace stations, and so on.⁴⁷ Furthermore, there was the little understood but 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 sudden transformation of the LTTE from ally to adversary was especially difficult for the Indian fighting man 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—it was previously considered politically incorrect to even conceive of that possibility. Psychological conditioning against the LTTE was, incidentally, of great importance in Sri Lanka, because a counter-insurgency operation, by its intrinsic nature, is more difficult than regular combat. This change in perceptions required by the Indian soldiery of the LTTE may explain the exceptionally heavy casualties suffered by the IPKF during the initial weeks of the hostilities, although these losses were also due to hasty and ill-planned induction and utilization of troops in these operations, with the desperate intention of achieving early success.

The Military Lessons

The IPKF was called upon to essentially fight an infantry war; although the role of the other arms and services in support of the infantry have been lauded, that of the mechanized forces has been criticized as being too prone to conventional tactics and not being willing to be innovative in the special circumstances of the IPKF's role in Sri Lanka.⁴⁸

Several other organizational and structural problems in the Indian armed forces were revealed during the IPKF's deployment in Sri Lanka. These deficiencies had continued unaddressed during the years of peace that followed the decade of conflict from 1962 to 1971. This is not the place to discuss all the problems and shortcomings of the Indian armed forces highlighted during the IPKF operations in Sri Lanka, but some reference to them is unavoidable while analyzing the military lessons of the IPKF.

On the personnel-administration front, much dissatisfaction was prevalent regarding delays in extending more generous service concessions to IPKF personnel. Moreover, efforts to circulate officers within the IPKF itself⁴⁹ revealed that not only were officers from outside the Command unwilling to be posted into the IPKF, but the Army Headquarters and the Ministry of Defense were unable to ensure that officers posted to the IPKF would not avoid the posting for a plethora, no doubt, of inventive reasons. Among the deleterious effects of this unfortunate state of affairs was that superseded Lt. Colonels continued as battalion commanders, and it was hardly surprising that they showed little enthusiasm for operational tasks, provided uninspiring leadership to their officers and men, and were generally disinclined to “lead from the front,” which still remains the best way to inspire troops in military operations. That function was fortunately, and very creditably, performed by junior officers. The combined effect of this skewed postings policy and uninspiring leadership was that a state of defensive morale set in, “exemplified in losing contact with militants, lacking vigor in pursuit, lifting cordons or releasing pressure prematurely, reluctance to penetrate the jungle boldly, opening fire at long distances and tardiness towards bold experimentation.”⁵⁰ A lack of initiative in the rank and file has also been adversely commented upon by several Indian writers on military affairs. It may be pointed out that the common defects noticed in Indian ECOs (Emergency Commissioned Officers) taken into the British Indian Army during World War II were “lack of initiative and drive” and the related criticism of poor ability at improvisation, lack of original thinking, and a consequent tendency to “stick to the letter rather than the spirit of instructions.” Another complaint of that time was that some Indian officers were not conforming to the Indian Army's great tradition of

⁴⁷. Lt. Gen. S.C. Depinder Singh, *IPKF in Sri Lanka* (NOIDA: Trishul Publications, 1992), pp. iii–2 and 146.

⁴⁸. Lt. Gen. S.C. Sardeshpande, *Assignment Jaffna*, pp. 139–40.

⁴⁹. *Ibid.*, pp. 140–1.

⁵⁰. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

loyalty and self-sacrifice or, as a high ranking officer in the artillery put it: “personal comfort, welfare and self interests are put before loyalty to State, Army, and Regiment.”⁵¹ These are large generalizations of national traits and character, but they seem to be confirmed by reflections of senior military commanders on the IPKF experience in Sri Lanka and cannot, therefore, be lightly dismissed.

Regrettably, this state of affairs may be a microcosm of what is prevalent in the Indian armed forces. The deterioration in disciplinary standards, as elsewhere in the civilian bureaucracy, has been precipitate, with interference in personnel matters at a discount and promotions favoring the negative, “no mistakes” man. Indeed, a major reason why officers avoided postings into the IPKF, apart from the physical dangers and discomforts involved, was the possibility of their making mistakes and their professional merit being called into question. In the prevailing culture of the Indian armed forces, incidentally, the failure of an operation, whatever the reasons, generally reflects adversely in the annual confidential report of the commanders. No allowance is usually made either for the difficulties of the assignment or the magnitude of the problems encountered or the totality of prevailing circumstances. This perverse system of officer evaluation largely explains the reluctance of officers to accept difficult assignments where the likelihood of failure or committing mistakes is higher. It is, consequently, little wonder that of the ten Major Generals who served with the IPKF, only one was promoted to the next higher rank of Lieutenant General.⁵² This underlying system itself, which encourages the formation of negative virtues, needs to be seriously addressed. Apart from basic reform in the syllabi of training, the criteria for promotions in the Indian Army needs to be reformed in the light of the IPKF experience in Sri Lanka.

There were other deficiencies of a military operational nature that also need to be noted. The most apparent was an intelligence failure—not merely in procurement of information on a real-time basis once the IPKF operations started—but in the inability to infiltrate the ranks of the Tamil militant groups during their training phase in India. The lack of an effective police force in the IPKF’s area of operations exacerbated the difficulties of intelligence procurement, since it is at the local level that the most useful information is obtained for counter-insurgency operations. The attention currently paid in India to high-profile intelligence organizations fails to appreciate that the backbone of the law and order machinery is the local police force that understands the local situation; is familiar with the pattern of crime, bad characters, local topography, communications, and so forth; and provides the basic information required to develop any kind of intelligence capabilities. This elementary truth asserted itself in the IPKF operations because the Sri Lankan police organization in the Tamil provinces was either defunct or could not be relied upon, resulting in an excessive reliance on the RAW.

A further deficiency was the weak public relations efforts during the IPKF operations in Sri Lanka.⁵³ Apart from the traditional secretiveness in the defense apparatus, the reactive and defensive nature of public relations, which should have been more outgoing and aggressive, has been noticed. This weakness was compounded by the failure to seek public support within India and, especially, Tamil–Nadu for the IPKF’s deployment in Sri Lanka in the peace enforcement role, which exacerbated cleavages in domestic opinion and greatly eroded the popular support base for the IPKF’s operations in Sri Lanka.

Higher Direction of War

There are important lessons to be derived from the higher direction of the IPKF operations. The observations of Field Marshal Manekshaw in this regard are particularly useful. Despite the obvious professionalism of the Indian Army and its success in anti-insurgency operations in Mizoram, he observes that: “The Fighting Command had too many masters giving different orders and different assessments . . . the insurgents were getting trained in India, were being supplied with large quantities of arms and equipment, money and moral support from Tamil–Nadu. Surely, this could not but have a deleterious effect on their [troops] morale . . . [they] had the feeling that the government of India was not certain as to what it wanted the IPKF to achieve.”⁵⁴

⁵¹. Cited in Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation*, revised edition (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 145–6.

⁵². Lt. Gen. Depinder Singh, *IPKF in Sri Lanka*, p. 192.

⁵³. *Ibid.*, pp. 187–88.

⁵⁴. See foreword (no page numbers) to Lt. Gen. Depinder Singh, *IPKF in Sri Lanka*.

The Tamil–Nadu factor might be considered first. Its influence on Indo–Sri Lanka relations was self-evident. There can be little doubt that the State government’s continued provision of sanctuary to the LTTE in Tamil–Nadu greatly confused the soldiery. It is arguable that the long-subsisting collaboration between the governments of India and Tamil–Nadu in providing assistance to the Tamil militant groups could not be quickly reversed; hence some time was needed to wind up the intelligence operations mounted from Tamil–Nadu. This “rational” argument was too sophisticated for the IPKF personnel, given their operational goal of eliminating the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Since Tamil–Nadu constituted the strategic rear for the IPKF, the fighting man could be excused in believing that, while his political masters may be uncertain about their objectives, he was paying in blood for their confusion. This was especially so when he noticed that the Tamil–Nadu police made no effort to apprehend LTTE cadres that were located, being trained, or recuperating in that state, while: “Some of our own MPs and political figures in the country were adding insult to injury by decrying us, the IPKF, as killers of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and lionizing the LTTE as great fighters who were successfully fighting us.”⁵⁵

The general ambiance in Madras, IPKF Headquarters, incidentally, was hostile to the IPKF, and this ambiguous situation affected morale and fighting value. It may be of limited relevance, but it does require mention that the Indo–Sri Lanka Agreement postulated that:

India will take all necessary steps to ensure that Indian territory is not used for activities prejudicial to the unity, integrity and security of Sri Lanka. [Art.2.16(a)].

and further that:

The Indian Navy and Coast Guard will cooperate with the Sri Lanka Navy in preventing Tamil militant activities from affecting Sri Lanka. [Art.2.16(b)].

Allowing the LTTE cadres to be located and operate from Tamil–Nadu suggests that these provisions of the Agreement were observed in the breach, unless it was that the Government of India was unable to impose its will upon the Government of Tamil–Nadu for political considerations. In either case, the IPKF soldiery were left with the conviction that the government of India was uncertain what it really wanted in Sri Lanka.

Coming to the question of “too many masters giving different orders and different assessments,” Field Marshal Manekshaw has observed that the Prime Minister’s Office, Chief of Army Staff, and Director of Military Operations were engaged in “giving orders,” while the GOC-in-C Southern Command and the High Commissioner in Sri Lanka were providing “different assessments” during the IPKF operations. In theory, a Core Group—functioning under the Cabinet Secretary and comprising representatives of the three Services, Intelligence Bureau, RAW, External Affairs Ministry, and the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO)—was charged with overseeing the IPKF operations. In practice, the PMO (represented by a Joint Secretary) enjoyed an overwhelming importance in the scheme of things, and it was not unusual for the PMO to instruct the Services and intelligence agencies directly. Quick to sense where the locus of power lay, the Services and intelligence agencies also began dealing with the PMO directly; consequently, the Ministries of External Affairs (with the exception of the High Commissioner in Colombo), Defense, and Home Affairs played a peripheral role in the decision-making process and were largely concerned with making logistics arrangements for the IPKF. It was never very clear in this milieu who was drawing up and refining the overall strategy. This haphazard and segmented manner of working succeeded in creating a situation where no one authority or organization had an understanding of the overall strategy or situation in Sri Lanka, which was rapidly evolving and changing. Naturally, this state of affairs affected the integrity of the decision-making process and eroded its institutional character.

The decision-making process regarding Sri Lanka reflected the pre-eminence of the PMO and the centrality therein of a small coterie that had access to the Prime Minister. This phenomenon has become an integral part of the Indian administrative system, but is of comparatively recent origin and can be traced to the Indira Gandhi era, and the small groups of men associated with PMO or PMR (Prime Minister’s Residence) that she trusted in matters relating to governance, party affairs, election fund raising, and so forth. Specific individuals were coopted into these groups either for ad hoc utilization in particular matters or, more generally, for some period of time, but rarely on a permanent basis. In normal circumstances the coterie wielded enormous power in her

⁵⁵. Lt. Gen. S.C. Sardeshpande, *Assignment Jaffna*, p. 87.

name: in times of crisis the locus of decision making shifted out from the concerned ministries—Home, External Affairs, Defense, or the major Economic Departments—into the Prime Minister’s Office.

Indira Gandhi had the experience, gained over the years, to oversee and control this personalized and centralized system of governance with her intuitive grasp of issues and an instinctive feel for the right decision. Rajiv Gandhi continued this system but lacked the experience or capacity to control it, with the result that he became the victim of that system. His coterie consisted of inexperienced individuals, who owed their position to personal relationships and shared a common background in terms of education and social base.

It has been observed here that “the new Congress system as it evolved under Mrs. Gandhi and her dynastic successor has been such as to be increasingly arbitrary and centralized, weakening the myriad of political institutions and, in the process decaying.”⁵⁶ This particular form of governance, distinguishing the Rajiv Gandhi years, led to many failures on external and domestic fronts and largely occasioned the infirmities of the Sri Lanka policy. The then Army Chief incidentally was known to be an activist and inclined towards the kind of risk-taking that characterized the Checkerboard and Brasstacks exercises, and it is likely that the Sri Lanka policy was guided by him at critical junctures of the IPKF’s deployment and utilization. A crucial intelligence appraisal error, for instance, was not recognizing the LTTE’s recalcitrance, despite clear evidence to the contrary. Not only had the LTTE sought to eradicate its rival leadership in the TELO and, thereafter, the EPRLF, but its own leadership had moved out of Tamil–Nadu to Jaffna by the end of 1986. They were physically outside India’s control and were planning the unilateral declaration of a Tamil Eelam, which influenced the determined Sri Lankan assault upon the Jaffna peninsula. The inflexibility of the LTTE was, however, not appreciated in the anxiety to arrive at one more Agreement.

Strategic Lessons

Coming to the strategic sphere, there are at least six general conclusions of politico-military significance that can be drawn from the IPKF experience in Sri Lanka.

First, there is the somewhat obvious point that internal security problems, whether they pertain to law and order, or insurgency, or a terrorist movement, have their roots in the political process. The use of force to resolve them can only deal with the symptoms; their solution has to be sought in the political process. The causes of the disease and its cure lies in politics and the military instrument could, at best, only establish the conditions for the political process to unfold. Consequently, the IPKF could only establish salubrious conditions for the Tamil demands to be negotiated with an unresponsive Sri Lankan government and to deal hard blows upon the LTTE who were obstructing this bargaining process. The IPKF could not have ensured the success of that process, which lay in the province of the two governments and their chief negotiators. In the absence of a political solution, the military instrumentality would get blunted over time, which is especially likely when armed forces are sought to be utilized to achieve political ends in another country.

Second, the conventional wisdom leads us to believe that the appearance or recrudescence of an external danger would still internal dissension, which may not be true if the history of South Asian countries over the centuries is surveyed. Indeed, the greater likelihood is that internal dissension is exacerbated and leads to the internal polity becoming further riven. This conclusion is borne out by the experience of Afghanistan where tribal loyalties have come to the fore in obstructing the return of peace to that unhappy land. In a similar fashion, the Indo–Sri Lanka Agreement and deployment of the IPKF in Sri Lanka widened differences between the ruling UNP and SLFP on the political front; between the LTTE and JVP, as between themselves, and against the ruling UNP government; apart from between the LTTE and other Tamil militant groups and TULF. The present situation in Sri Lanka, some five years after the IPKF’s withdrawal, remains frozen in this pattern of sterile internal conflict with no viable solution in sight for the actors involved in this macabre drama.

Third, it is perceptive to note that “to be drawn into an ethnic conflict in a neighboring state is the worst folly for a regional power (no less than for a superpower) as Israel and Syria have learned in the Lebanon, and India has learned in Sri Lanka.”⁵⁷ The experience of the United States in Vietnam and the erstwhile Soviet

⁵⁶. Urmila Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia* (New Delhi/Newbury Park/London: Sage Publications, 1990), p. 255.

⁵⁷. K.M. de Silva, *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance*, pp. 389–90.

Union in Afghanistan might be profitably cited in this regard. An early withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka would have prevented an adverse image of India positing in the consciousness of the Sri Lankan population, including the Tamils. This adverse image was unavoidable as the IPKF operations proceeded inexorably towards a further manifestation of the Vietnam syndrome. Inevitably, civilians got caught in the cross-pressures exerted upon them by the militants and security forces to support the cause and counter-insurgency operations. Complaints of harassment, torture, and so on associated with all counter-insurgency operations world-wide became more strident against the IPKF, but this was only to be expected.

The “folly” of becoming directly involved in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is compounded by the fact that India had originally intervened by using Tamil militants to broker a just deal for the Sri Lanka Tamils and preserve, thereby, the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka. The transmutation in the IPKF’s role from peacekeeping to crushing 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 Sinhala government would have disappeared. This confusion in objectives depicts the ineffectiveness of India’s Sri Lanka policy.

Fourth, the IPKF experience in Sri Lanka underlines the problem of extrication from external counter-insurgency operations that usually have long life-cycles and no easy solutions. It could be profitably noted here that India was actually aware of the problems associated with prolonged occupation of a neighboring country even if it had been invited to assist that country. This perception guided India’s very early withdrawal from Bangladesh in 1972 lest continuance of its armed forces led to their being considered an alien occupation force and the Mujib government robbed, thereby, of its legitimacy. The objective conditions underlying the IPKF deployment were different, especially its role metamorphosis, but the problem of extrication remained. The domestic criticism in India against prolonged deployment of the IPKF in Sri Lanka were budgetary costs and military casualties, which became an issue as in the United States during the Vietnam war. The external compulsions were that the IPKF in Sri Lanka, not unlike similar interventionary forces, came to be perceived, not as saviors, but as an occupation force; consequently, they became targets for local, nationalist resentments. This happened with the IPKF in the Tamil areas also, while beliefs continued that India was not taking resolute action against the LTTE because it did not wish to ruffle Tamil–Nadu’s sentiments and furthermore, in the view of one Sri Lankan scholar, that “India has a deliberate plan to prolong this operation with a view to bringing Sri Lanka even closer to [sic] her orbit of influence.□□□”⁵⁸

Fifth, the theoretical question arises whether deployment of paramilitary forces in Sri Lanka could have better served the purposes of India and Sri Lanka. (Some paramilitary forces were, in fact, inducted, but placed under the overall operational control of the army). It is dubious, however, if they would have functioned better than the army, as they had the same disadvantages of operating in a foreign country, without the assistance of the local police and administration.

Which leads to the further question of whether a larger association of the Sri Lankan administration, Sri Lankan armed forces, and, especially, its police and intelligence services would have better served the IPKF’s purposes. Obviously, access to local sources of information and support would have improved the IPKF’s performance, apart from conveying the general impression that a cooperative military effort was being made by both countries. The possible objection that the IPKF might have been perceived in the Tamil areas as part of the repressive apparatus of the Sri Lankan government could be countered with the argument that the cooperation sought was only for the limited purpose of bringing the recalcitrant LTTE to the negotiating table. In any event, the cooperation of the Sri Lankan armed forces and intelligence services was not sought and the IPKF remained perceived as the instrument of a hegemonic Indian government *and* an insensitive Sri Lankan government.

Sixth, the conclusion is possible that the training, arming, encouragement, and infiltration of militants to indulge in subversive activities in a neighboring country is a double-edged weapon. It can recoil upon the country pursuing this policy. The empirical evidence suggests this course of events had occurred repeatedly in South Asia. The weapons supplied to the Mukti Bahini in 1971, for instance, flowed back into northeast and east India. (The powerful hand grenade that killed a Union Minister, L.N. Mishra, at Samastipur, Bihar, in 1974 belonged to this *genre*.) U.S. arms supplied through training camps organized by Pakistan to fuel the Afghan

⁵⁸. H.L. de Silva, “Indo–Sri Lanka Peace Accord,” p. 53.

militancy have established a “Kalashnikov culture” in Pakistan, which pervades its polity and has effected a serious deterioration in its law and order situation. The lesson is in the nature of a cautionary tale and informs that promoting subversion in neighboring countries can have unintended consequences for the activist nation.

There are at least two reasons for this. One is that militant, insurgent, and terrorist groups have a way of splintering into community-based and personality-led organizations with the passage of time, leading them to war with each other. The possibility of their extending their internecine conflicts into the host country is usually very high. Furthermore, such militant, insurgent, and terrorist groups do establish fraternal relations with indigenous militant organizations and political parties with similar ideological predilections and can be used by these indigenous groups to further partisan interests. A case in point is the involvement of the LTTE in Tamil–Nadu state elections.

Pax Indica

A final question must now be addressed: was the entire Sri Lanka episode a manifestation of traditional Indian foreign policy? This question might be considered within opposed beliefs that India’s foreign policy should devote greater attention to South Asia or should address larger global issues. Neither could be ignored by a “regional influential” like India: the question of emphasis does remain in practice. The content of the Letters appended to the Indo–Sri Lanka Agreement strengthens the impression that India was seeking to impose a Pax Indica doctrine over Sri Lanka, and it should not come as a surprise that the major external threat perception of other South Asian powers—including Sri Lanka—derives from the specter of a hegemonic India looming over South Asia. But, perceptions regarding India’s desire for regional dominance are easily exaggerated due to India’s preponderance in the subcontinent, whether in terms of economic or military indices or its political weight in the international system.

It needs pointing out, however, that the political reality cannot be wished away that:

The Tamils in Sri Lanka, numbering some three million, form around 20 per cent of its population and 50 million Tamils inhabit the Tamil–Nadu state in India, which is ruled by an opposition party making center-state relations 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.⁵⁹

A large number of regional interstate problems in South Asia derive from their “deeply intertwined” nature and arise from linkages embedded in their shared history. Problems arising, for instance, out of population outflows due to domestic economic and political causes need to be resolved bilaterally and it is dubious if third parties could effect any meaningful intercession in such matters.

These realities could have actuated U.S. policy during the time-period of the Agreement and IPKF induction and were strengthened by the personal relationship established between President Ronald Reagan and Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. This has occasioned the belief that “he [Reagan] praised India’s rescue of the Maldives government and approved of India’s 1987 massive military intervention in Sri Lanka to disarm the Tamil Tigers. In welcoming India’s military build up he seemed to be moving towards licensing India to handle security problems in South Asia.”⁶⁰ That the United States actively encouraged Sri Lanka to seek a *modus vivendi* with India to resolve the Tamil question in both countries is known, despite contrary voices being raised in the United States (for example, the Heritage Foundation) fearful that India’s hegemonic ambitions in South Asia would be legitimized by U.S. acquiescence to India’s intervention in Sri Lanka.

It is significant to note that although Sri Lanka approached China and Pakistan *after* India’s food air-drop operation, neither country offered any material assistance. They were, perhaps, influenced by U.S. perceptions or were unconvinced about Sri Lanka’s sense of grievance against India. Interestingly, the Soviet Union’s reasons for supporting the Agreement were that it was designed to counter separatism. It is possible that all these

⁵⁹. P.R. Chari, “Security Aspects of Indian Foreign Policy,” in Stephen P. Cohen, ed., *The Security of South Asia: American and Asian Perspectives* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 56.

⁶⁰. Lloyd I. Rudolph, “India’s Role in South Asia: A United States Perspective,” in Vernon L.B. Mendis, ed., *India’s Role in South Asia* (Colombo: S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike National Memorial Foundation, 1992), p. 35.

countries shaped their policies towards the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka in terms of their internal situations and were cognizant of the anomalies in supporting separatist movements elsewhere while suppressing them in their territory.

It must be pointed out, however, that external perceptions of a Pax Indica policy motivating India's actions in Sri Lanka would have been strengthened by incautious statements made by responsible officials, typified by the following:

The IPKF is several things in Sri Lanka. It is an affirmation of our commitment to the unity and integrity of a small neighboring country. It is an external projection of our influence to tell our neighbors that if, because of your compulsions or your aberrations, you pose a threat to us, we are capable of, or we have a political will to project ourselves within your territorial jurisdiction for the limited purpose of bringing you back.□□□ It is real-politic, and it brings you back to the path of detachment and nonalignment where you do not endanger our security.□□□ We have projected our Armed Forces, therefore, not only in a peacekeeping role, but in a political role.⁶¹

This unequivocal declaration by a key player in the Indo–Sri Lanka *dramatis personae* subordinates the national security of South Asian neighbors to India's interests. It bears resemblance, coincidentally, to analyses within the Indian naval debate by advocates of a “blue ocean” navy that the threat to India's security emanates from the seaward direction. That is the lesson of history, borne out by diverse European powers abridging India's sovereignty that culminated in the establishment of British dominance over the subcontinent. Consequently, and Sardar K.M. Panikkar is approvingly quoted in this regard, the security of India is demarcated by the Gulf of Suez in the west and the Straits of Malacca in the east, and India must take steps to assure its security within the Indian Ocean and South Asian region by political and military activism.

That India has a special responsibility to discharge in South Asia—and unilaterally, if necessary—is a belief that also animates sections of the Indian elite, who have urged India to adopt an activist and interventionary foreign policy. We noticed the former High Commissioner's declaration that is atypical of such beliefs. An equally representative military opinion states:

India is a regional power and, therefore, has certain security obligations to fulfill in the region. I am not preaching hegemony but emphasizing a duty that the country has to perform. Witness U.S. actions in the past in Granada and Panama and recall the adverse consequences of the United States adopting an isolationist policy in the early years of both World War I and World War II. For similar reasons, India cannot remain oblivious to events occurring in South Asia and areas to its east and west.⁶²

And, more emphatically, yet another military estimation has it that:

The Sri Lanka operation fits the doctrines that emerged in the post-World War II phase. It is an extension of what may be called the “South Asian Monroe Doctrine,” that had been enunciated during Mrs. Gandhi's regime to safeguard Indian interests in the South Asian region. Such an assertive diplomatic stance was a natural outgrowth of India's emergence as a pre-eminent regional power.⁶³

These statements have echoed in academia and within the framework of theoretical constructs, in beliefs that:

India's security is inextricably linked with the stability of its neighbors and their capacity to withstand internal and external pressures. Hence, India's policy towards its neighbors has been guided by several concerns .□□(1) to sustain, even broaden, areas of agreement with its neighbors; .□□(2) to keep external powers, influence and pressure in the region at bay; (3) to respond to national aspirations of the democratically inclined forces.□□□ There is thus an apparent dilemma in India's projections, reconcile as it has to two diverse pulls—India's declared policy of noninterference in the

⁶¹ . J.N. Dixit, “IPKF in Sri Lanka,” pp. 244–46.

⁶² . Lt. Gen. Depinder Singh, *IPKF in Sri Lanka*, p. 202.

⁶³ . IDR Research Team, “Lessons from Sri Lanka: A subcontinental experiment in power projection,” *Indian Defense Review*, July 1988, p. 37.

internal affairs of neighboring countries most of whom are facing problems of political stability and national unity, and its abiding stakes in the maintenance of peace and stability in the region.⁶⁴

The view that India's security interests encompass all inimical developments in the South Asian region and that it has a special responsibility here, has enjoyed fair currency in India. The intensity of such perceptions has varied. The idealism of the Nehruvian era would explain India's foreign policy emphasis on global concerns. Indira Gandhi, as a skilled practitioner of *real-politik*, sought to balance India's global and regional concerns. The Janata regimes were inclined to pay greater attention to working for peace and harmony in the region. These generalizations serve a limited purpose, but would explain the special interest devoted to South Asia in the Rajiv Gandhi administration. The serious crisis in relations with Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and, for that matter, China during his incumbency reveals that Rajiv Gandhi perceived a larger role for India in the region within his strategic vision, which led him to embark upon a course of hyperactive foreign policy.

In the particular case of Sri Lanka, it could be argued that India's concerns were actuated by the real possibility of a large exodus of Tamils from the island into Tamil-Nadu that would have disrupted its socio-economic and political situation *a la* eastern and northeastern India during the Bangladesh crisis in 1971. Consequently, India's entry into the Agreement, and subsequent induction of the IPKF, was in the nature of a defensive *riposte*. This defensive *riposte* was occasioned by Sri Lanka's inability to resolve its ethnic crisis by evolving a *modus vivendi* for its minority Tamil population. This could have been sought through a devolution of political power and accommodating the younger Tamil elements into this power structure. Instead, Sri Lanka was seeking external assistance to establish a majoritarian regime over its significant minority community. It could also be urged that India's concerns arose from the possibility that exacerbation of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka could lead to its dissection along the geographically-distinct Sinhala-Tamil fault lines. These developments in its neighborhood had obvious strategic implications for India and South Asia.

In that sense, India's intervention was unavoidable, although it is arguable as to how it should have been effected and whether the secretive manner in which the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement was finalized and the arbitrary fashion in which the IPKF's role converted from peacekeeping to peace-enforcement was wise in the context of domestic politics in India and Sri Lanka. Some weight might be accorded to the judgment that "though internationally applauded it [the Agreement] has led to domestic confusion and sharp divergence of opinions. It has demonstrated the fact that it is essential, nay vital, to prepare domestic public opinion before we undertake large-scale operations at home and abroad."⁶⁵ 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. In retrospect, the need to harness public opinion was cardinal to obtaining domestic support for the Sri Lanka policy in the face of growing opposition to the wisdom of deploying the IPKF in Sri Lanka; especially as, with the passage of time, its operations began to confront the same problems of extrication as occurred in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Lebanon.

Was the final *denouement* in Sri Lanka another case of "over-extended power"?⁶⁶ Despite the promulgation of skillful apologia, this ineluctable truth asserted itself in the IPKF experience in Sri Lanka. This didactic lesson has permeated into the collective Indian consciousness and seems to be guiding the current foreign policy elite. India's approaches to intraregional, tension-laden situations has become more circumspect, as apparent from Delhi's quiescence towards continuing LTTE intransigence in Sri Lanka, Pakistan's proxy war in Punjab and Kashmir, the unending flow of immigrants from Bangladesh, and the expulsion of settlers of Nepali origin from Bhutan into India. Despite the provocation contained in these situations, India has refrained from military activism, but has restricted its protests to the normal channels of diplomacy and interstate parlance. Possibly, this quiescence derives from its preoccupation with domestic political and socio-economic problems. Some weight might be accorded, however, to India's experience in Sri Lanka and the reaction against idiosyncratic leadership distinguishing the Rajiv Gandhi era that led India into recurrent crises.

⁶⁴. *Seminar*, p. 33, views expressed by Nancy Jetly.

⁶⁵. IDR Research Team, "Lessons from Sri Lanka," p. 40.

⁶⁶. Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army*, p. 205.

It is possible to rest our thesis here, but a basic question which subsumes Indo–Sri Lankan relations and the IPKF episode needs further discussion. This relates to the internal problems arising within South Asia caused by the aspirations of minority communities and the need to accommodate them within the body politic. Otherwise, they threaten to spill across porous borders and prejudice the security and stability of subcontinental neighbors. The issue of population outflow is of special significance because these migrations cause a variety of diverse problems. The ensuing situation has considerable potential to ignite passions at the local level, apart from political tensions within the structure of center-state relations.

A collective effort is necessary to resolve these conjoint problems and calls for greater statesmanship in the South Asian leaders. They must explore the possibilities of cooperative relations among themselves and pursue policies that address these difficult ethno-political problems. One can conclude that security issues arising out of ethnic conflict will gain salience in South Asia over the coming decades. Their emotional overtones are easily exploited and place unbearable strains on the federal polity and governance processes. The IPKF deployment in Sri Lanka and the Indo–Sri Lanka Agreement symbolizes this enmeshed nature of mutual security relations in South Asia.

The larger moral to be derived here is that only a cooperative effort can evolve appropriate solutions to these vexing problems. The logic of the situation points to the need for welding South Asia into a common economic and political unit. The strategic direction is apparent. The statesmanship is currently missing.