



ZRÍNYI MIKLÓS NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC AND DEFENCE STUDIES  
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1581 Budapest PO Box: 15 – Phone: +36-1-432-90-92 – Fax: +36-1-432-90-58  
[www.svki.zmne.hu](http://www.svki.zmne.hu)

***Premises and Perspectives of the Anti-Terrorists Operations in Sri Lanka***

by Béla Háda

Since its start in 1983, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has been the most acute security concern for the whole country. From the original terrorist attacks conducted by the Tamil separatists of the Northern regions, the situation has gradually worsened to a full-scale civil war. The main reasons behind are the ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese majority of the population (approx. 74%) and the Tamil minority (approx. 17%). The Sinhalese nationalists have perceived the Tamils – forming a steady majority in their home Northern and North-Eastern regions – as a constant threat to the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Consequently, Tamils have gradually been pushed out of the key political functions, have lost their positions in the cultural life, etc. Among such circumstances, more and more Tamils have adopted the idea of establishing a sovereign state, the Tamil Eelam, or Tamil Ceylon. However, despite the more than 70.000 victims, the conflict could never really cross the threshold of sensitivity in the West. This might well be the reason, why it has become one of the longest lasting armed conflicts of the contemporary world.

The history of the civil war is usually divided to four periods. The so-called First Eelam War started with the first anti-Tamil riots in the early '70s, and with the establishment of the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) organization in 1972. The Sinhalese armed forces lacked the necessary training and equipment to break the Tamils, therefore in 1987 President Julius Richard Jayawardene signed an agreement with Rajiv Gandhi of India on sending a 60.000 strong Indian Peace Keeping Forces to the Northern parts of Sri Lanka in order to disarm the Tamils and settle the conflict. In the Second Eelam War the LTTE gained significant strength, parallel to the withdrawal of the unsuccessful Indian Peace Keeping Forces. The LTTE has established its own navy, air force, intelligence, and also started to exercise governmental on their territories held, such as organizing a central bank, a supreme court, printing money, etc. The Third Eelam War lasted from the re-capture of Jaffna in 1995 to the ceasefire agreement in 2002. Though the armed forces of the Sin-

halese government could not break the Tamil resistance, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 had a negative effect on the image and public support of the LTTE as well.



Many believed that the 2002 agreement might lead to a lasting peace, however, the rise of Mahinda Rajapakse and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party in 2005 has shattered these hopes. The new leadership was rather in favor of a military solution, and as an overture of the Fourth Eelam War, armed clashes have started again in 2006. In January 2009 the government has launched a large-scale offensive against the LTTE, which quickly broke the resistance of the already divided Tigers.

The main source of concern of the post-war situation is that a political solution is still to be found to the persisting ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil population. The availability of the resources necessary for re-building the war-torn Northern regions is also questionable. Moreover, the prestige and resources gained by the victorious military might endanger the internal stability of the country, as it has already happened in certain countries of South-East Asia.