

FOCUS BRIEF

SRI LANKA

Issue:

The TMVP (Karuna and Pillayan Factions), Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and other non-LTTE Tamil political parties in Sri Lanka

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

AITUF	Akhila Ilankai Tamil United Front
AHRC	Asian Human Rights Commission (Hong Kong)
EPDP	Eelam People's Democratic Party
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
SLA	Sri Lankan Army
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
TMVP	Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (Tamil People's Liberation Front)
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPFA	United People's Front Alliance

2 PURPOSE

This Focus Brief is intended as an update on current CISNET holdings on Sri Lanka regarding anti-LTTE Tamil political parties, of which the Tamil People's Liberation Front (TMVP) is the most prominent. The definition of a 'Tamil political party' for this brief is taken to mean a political party purporting to represent political and social interests of the Tamil ethnic group, other than the LTTE. It builds on earlier research (such as CISQUEST No. LKA9899CQ completed 16 October 2009) and attempts to provide an update on the organisational structure and activities of the various non-LTTE and anti-LTTE Tamil political parties in Sri Lanka.

3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The practices of the TMVP, as the largest of the non-LTTE Tamil parties, have come under frequent criticism since its inception as a separate and opposed political movement from its parent LTTE organisation, in 2004. The then TMVP leader 'Colonel Karuna' (Vinayagamorthy Muralitharan), a former senior LTTE operative in eastern Sri Lanka, has been criticised for his movement's treatment of Tamil civilians in the east. Those Tamil civilians believed by the TMVP or Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to be LTTE operatives, in addition to other human rights concerns such as the recruitment of child soldiers. Other non-LTTE Tamil groups, such as People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), have also been accused of involvement in serious violations of human rights, such as extrajudicial killings, torture and disappearances in the north of Sri Lanka.¹ The presence of 'Colonel Karuna' as a minister (currently holding the portfolio of National Integration) in the government led by President Mahinda Rajapaksa, since 2008, has also given the Karuna Faction a role within the Sri Lankan political system, although the exact extent of Karuna's own influence is unclear. Planned parliamentary elections in April 2010 may also alter the relative position of each party, both as members of the ruling UPFA coalition and at the provincial level, further changing the dynamics of Sri Lanka's non-LTTE Tamil political parties.

The three mentioned non-LTTE Tamil political parties – the TMVP (both Pillayan and Karuna Factions), EPDP and PLOTE – have all, to some extent been implicated by various organisations, including UN agencies and NGOs, with extensive human rights abuses in their respective areas of operation.

¹ 'UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines', *UNHCR*, April 2009, CISNET

4 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 *The Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP)*

Whilst the motives of ‘Colonel Karuna’ in breaking away from the LTTE in March 2004 are subject to extensive debate, reasons cited by a BBC News article on 9 May 2008 claim that ‘Karuna’ (referred by his *nom de guerre* throughout this paper) broke away as a result of an administrative dispute with now-deceased LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran in June 2004. This dispute, the article alleged, was based on Karuna’s fundamental disagreement with Prabhakaran over the alleged disbursement of development aid in eastern Sri Lanka, following the Norwegian-brokered ceasefire in 2002.² Since early 2002, Karuna, according to the article, had been dissatisfied over the distribution of funds to eastern Sri Lanka and had sought direct access to Prabhakaran, rather than going through the established LTTE chain of command.³ The article claimed that as Prabhakaran’s effective ‘No. 2’ operative and head of LTTE forces in Eastern Sri Lanka, Karuna also commanded loyalty from LTTE cadres in that region and most of these cadres formed the TMVP under Karuna’s leadership.⁴

Various reports confirm this article’s statement that the TMVP was formed largely, if not entirely, from LTTE cadres in eastern Sri Lanka. Despite reports that the TMVP Pillayan Faction, led by current Chief Minister of Eastern Province, Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan (*nom de guerre* ‘Pillayan’), had attempted to disarm his faction cadres in February 2009, it was believed that the Karuna faction of the TMVP had not disarmed its cadres as of November 2009.⁵ A report from the Australian post in Colombo dated 17 November 2009 stated that as of that date, some 2000 Karuna faction cadres had applied for and obtained membership of the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party by early November 2009.⁶

In mid-2007, the TMVP divided into two factions, the ‘Karuna group’ led by Colonel Karuna (Vinayagamorthy Muralitharan) and the ‘Pillayan group’, led by ‘Colonel Pillayan’ (Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan). Clashes, assaults and

² ‘Questions over renegade Tamil Tiger’, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 9 May 2008, CX240744

³ ‘Questions over renegade Tamil Tiger’, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 9 May 2008, CX240744

⁴ ‘Questions over renegade Tamil Tiger’, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 9 May 2008, CX240744

⁵ ‘CIS Request No. LKA 9899; activities of paramilitary groups in Sri Lanka’, Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 18 November 2009, CX236521

⁶ ‘CIS Request No. LKA 9899; activities of paramilitary groups in Sri Lanka’, Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 18 November 2009, CX236521

assassinations of rival party members have been reported; these were allegedly at their most serious in the Eastern Province districts of Batticaloa and Ampara.⁷

CRS is not aware of any precise internal party structure within either the Karuna or Pillayan factions of the TMVP. Various TMVP members have, as previously alluded to, joined the current ruling SLFP and some have contested local elections in the east under the UPFA banner, which also includes other political parties.⁸

4.2 *The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP)*

The EPDP was founded in November 1987 by veteran Tamil activist Douglas Devananda, as a result of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement and was founded upon a principle of regional autonomy for a Tamil *Eelam* (homeland) within an envisaged federal political structure.⁹ It nominally calls for joint Tamil-Sinhala cooperation and for a wide measure of autonomy within the *Eelam* but rejects outright independence.¹⁰

The stance of the EPDP relative to the ruling SLFP coalition of President Mahinda Rajapakse appears ambiguous. An article in the Sri Lankan English-language daily *The Daily Mirror* dated 30 January 2010 stated that EPDP leader Devananda was considering resigning from his parliamentary seat, as he felt his support for the Rajapaksa presidency was not popular in his Jaffna electorate.¹¹ When news of Devananda's intended resignation reached Jaffna, numerous protests were launched urging him to reconsider his decision.¹² As of the date of this Focus Brief, it was unclear to CRS whether or not Devananda had in fact resigned.

4.3 *The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE)*

In a release dated 13 December 2001, the Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) claimed that the PLOTE was working alongside the GoSL, as a paramilitary force. AHRC urged the disbandment of the PLOTE.¹³ The AHRC release also mentioned the related paramilitary organisation Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) as being in alliance with both GoSL and PLOTE

⁷ 'CIS Request No. LKA 9899; activities of paramilitary groups in Sri Lanka', Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 18 November 2009, CX236521

⁸ 'CIS Request No. LKA 9899; activities of paramilitary groups in Sri Lanka', Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 18 November 2009, CX236521

⁹ 'Profile of Kathiravelu Nithyananda Douglas Devananda', Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), 2008, CX240748

¹⁰ 'Profile of Kathiravelu Nithyananda Douglas Devananda', Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), 2008, CX240748

¹¹ Roel Raymond, 'To resign or not to resign', *The Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)*, 30 January 2010, CX240749

¹² Roel Raymond, 'To resign or not to resign', *The Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka)*, 30 January 2010, CX240749

¹³ 'Sri Lanka: Denial of disappearances', UA 41-2001, Asian Human Rights Commission (www.ahrchk.net), 13 December 2001, CX240750

and also urged its disbandment.¹⁴ According to a news article from the *TamilNet.com* website dated 2 September 2009, PLOTE had also backed an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Government of the Maldives in 1988.¹⁵ This is one of the few extant news references that provides some detail on PLOTE.

An article in the UK *Times Online* dated 2 December 2009 reported the emergence of a new armed movement known as the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which it alleged sought to continue the armed struggle for an independent Tamil homeland following the GoSL's military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009.¹⁶ It is not known to CRS at this stage whether the PLA is linked to the PLOTE. The PLA's spokesperson quoted in the article, 'Commander Kones' (a *nom de guerre*) claimed that the PLA had 300 active members and expected to recruit some 5000 additional volunteers from 280,000 Tamil civilians who had recently been freed from IDP camps in the North-Eastern Province.¹⁷ Kones added that the PLA had no intention of emulating the style of warfare pursued by the LTTE but rather would pursue a more 'asymmetrical' warfare directed at economic and administrative targets, as well as military.¹⁸

4.4 *The Tamil National Alliance (TNA)*

As of 26 May 2009, the TNA held 22 of the 225 seats in the Sri Lankan Parliament.¹⁹ Journalist Amantha Perera described the TNA as being closely aligned to the LTTE with goals generally in step with the LTTE's long fight for an independent Tamil homeland during the latter's 26-year insurgency against Colombo. Since the LTTE's defeat in May 2009, it has adopted a pro-autonomy, rather than pro-independence, stance.²⁰ The article quoted Suresh Premachandran, a senior Member of Parliament with the TNA, as saying that the TNA was prepared to negotiate with other Tamil parties (without specifying which parties), in pursuit of a shared solution that gave greater autonomy to the Northeast.²¹

¹⁴ 'Sri Lanka: Denial of disappearances', UA 41-2001, Asian Human Rights Commission (www.ahrchk.net), 13 December 2001, CX240750

¹⁵ 'Claymore mine killed PLOTE leaders', *TamilNet.com*, 2 September 1999, CX240751

¹⁶ Anthony Loyd, 'New Tamil group People's Liberation Army vows to start a fresh war', *The Times of London*, 2 December 2009, CX237369

¹⁷ Anthony Loyd, 'New Tamil group People's Liberation Army vows to start a fresh war', *The Times of London*, 2 December 2009, CX237369

¹⁸ Anthony Loyd, 'New Tamil group People's Liberation Army vows to start a fresh war', *The Times of London*, 2 December 2009, CX237369

¹⁹ Amantha Perera, 'What Next for Sri Lanka's 2.5 Million Tamils?', *Time Magazine*, 26 May 2009, CX227543

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²¹ Amantha Perera, 'What Next for Sri Lanka's 2.5 Million Tamils?', *Time Magazine*, 26 May 2009, CX227543

4.5 *The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)*

According to its website, the TULF (also known as the Akhila Iankai Tamil United Front or AITUF) had been in existence since the early 1970s and came to prominence in May 1976 when it issued the Vattukottai Resolution opposing Sinhala dominance under the 1972 republican constitution.²² It re-formed in December 2005 as the AITUF and was registered with Sri Lanka's Commissioner for Elections in February 2006.²³ As enunciated by its General Secretary, Dr K. Vigneswaran, the AITUF subscribes to the Thimphu Declaration of July 1985, supporting:

1. Recognition of the Tamils of Sri Lanka as a nation
2. Recognition of the existence of an identified homeland for the Tamils in the island of Sri Lanka
3. Recognition of the right of self determination of the Tamil nation
4. Recognition of the right to citizenship and the fundamental rights of all Tamils who look upon the island as their country.²⁴

²² 'Vattukottai Resolution, of May 1976', *TamilUnitedFront.com*, undated, CISLIB 18328

²³ Dr K. Vigneswaran, 'About Us', *TamilUnitedFront.com*, 16 July 2007, CISLIB 18327

²⁴ Dr K. Vigneswaran, 'About Us', *TamilUnitedFront.com*, 16 July 2007, CISLIB 18327

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