

The War against the Tamil People and the Strategic Role of the US: A Short Introduction

It was on the 22nd of February, 2002 that the Ceasefire Agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was signed. Within the seven months that followed the signing of the Agreement, a group of military experts who are affiliated to the US Pacific Command Headquarters in Hawaii visited Sri Lanka in September 2002 and conducted a special study on the state of security in the island from 30 September-10 October. This team was led by Colonel John A. Cardos and was comprised of 26 US military officers engaged in a close scrutiny of the tactic and strategic military capabilities of the Sri Lankan security forces. The final report of their study was hand in to the key Sri Lankan defence officials in October of the same year. Its most important recommendation is as follows:

‘The most important base for the SLN is without question Trincomalee Harbour. Currently, the LTTE control the southern portion of the Harbour. From this area, the LTTE have effectively monitored all ship movement in and out of the Harbour, launch suicide and artillery attacks against the Naval Base and could potentially destroy any vessel coming in and out of the harbour. The SL Army is responsible for this area but they have been unable to completely secure it’ – Trincomalee Harbour Defence /Assessment of the Armed Forces of Sri Lanka

The importance of this recommendation was reiterated by a letter written by the then President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, dated 12 September, 2003, addressed to the then Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesighe. However, even by then a new round of supply of US military support to Sri Lanka in the form of military training had already been started. The US Navy’s ‘Seals’ Special Forces had already started a training session to the Sri Lankan Navy from 05 August - 24 August in the Southern and Central Provinces in the Island.(*US Training for Our Services – Sunday Observer - 04.08.2002*)

However, the Eelam War IV officially started in the month of July in 2006. The immediate aim of the first set of military operations was to destroy the activities of the Tiger guerrillas in the region ranging from the Foul Point, located in the south of Trincomalee harbour, to Verugal Aru, located near the southern border of Trincomalee district. In truth, the importance of bringing this geographical of the Eastern Province under the Sri Lankan military control without any delay was recommended by the above mentioned team of military experts affiliated to the US Pacific Command four years before the actual implementation of it in 2006. What was implemented by the Sri Lankan military forces in 2006 in bringing this region under its control was nothing but

the recommendations of the secret report prepared by the US military experts that was submitted to the GoSL in October 2002. Even if we leave aside for a moment the entire history of US government's full support given to the GoSL since the beginning of the Eelam war to the submission of this secret report it is important to concentrate on the role of the US during the last three years.

It was in 27 October 2005 that the government of People's Alliance led by Chandrika Kumaranatunga and the US government signed a memorandum of understanding for counter terrorism. The present President, Mahinda Rajapakshe came into power only after three weeks from this agreement. After making the customary visit to India the foreign minister of the new government, Mangala Samaraweera, met with the US authorities in January 2006. The minister made an appeal to them not to remove the LTTE from the list of banned terrorist organisations that the US State Department is maintaining. He also made the following statement to the IPS news agency:

'At a time when the United States is promoting new democracies globally, it is also important to protect existing democracies and to protect democracies under siege as in Sri Lanka'. The US government doubled its yearly military aid to Sri Lanka simultaneously. (US promises Sri Lanka aid against Tamil Tigers - Inter Press Service / 24.01.2006)

Accordingly under the scheme of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) 496,000 dollars that was given to Sri Lanka in 2005 was increased to a million dollars in 2006. This is in addition to the other parallel military aid given to Sri Lanka under different other military aid schemes. Commenting on the increased military aid, US Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia, Donald Camp had stated as follows:

'Increased FY 2006 FMF funding will be used to help Sri Lanka's Navy to meet threats posed by national and regional terrorist groups and will help to reform and upgrade its military.' (US lends Lanka more for arms - Tamil Guardian / 01.02.2006)

By 2006, Sri Lanka was included more and more speedily into the new US global military enterprise. Under this strategy, Colombo harbour was actively incorporated into Megaport Initiative, coordinated by the US National Nuclear Security Administrative, as the first harbour in South and East Asia. (www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2006/1/5391.html)

By signing an agreement with the US on 25 June 2006 in Brussels, Sri Lanka became the first Asian country that actively participated in the Container Security Initiative (CSI) launched in

2002 by the US Bureau of Customs and Border Protection of the US Department of Homeland Security Security (www.un.org/events/smallarms2006/pdf/arms060626Sri-eng.pdf).

On 09 January 2006 , addressing a meeting of the delegates of the Chamber of Commerce in Colombo, the US ambassador to Colombo, Jeffery Lunstead sent waring signals to the LTTE saying *'if they are deviating from the path of peace they will have to face a stronger and committed Sri Lankan army which will be full of capabilities'*. The secret of the awareness that the Americans had about the new capabilities of the Sri Lankan military was hidden in the special policy that the US government adopted in relation to Sri Lankan state after the commencement of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement. In an important document published by Asia Foundation in 2007, this policy is explicitly articulated by the ambassador Lunstead as follows:

'US military relationship with Sri Lanka increased substantially from a very low base after the start of the peace process. The relationship was intended to strengthen the capability of the Sri Lankan military in order to deter the LTTE from returning to war and ensure that the Sri Lankan military would be more capable if the LTTE did resume hostilities.' (***US Role in Sri Lanka's Peace Process 2002-2006: A Supplement Study to the Sri Lanka Strategic Assessment 2005 / p. 18***).

Under this new policy towards Sri Lanka, ambassador Lunstead in his document, clarifies the nature of the increase of military aid given to Sri Lanka. According to this document under the US scheme of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) during the period of 2002-2003 US had not allocate any funds to Sri Lankan military in this regard. Under the US scheme of International Military Education & Training (IMET), during the period of 2000- 2002 the amount allocated to Sri Lanka was between the range of 200,000 –250,000 dollars. This was increased to 300,000 dollars in 2003 and during 2004-2006 this was increased to 450,000 – 500,000 dollars. Similarly, the training sessions for the Sri Lankan military that had already been started under the US Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) programme were taken forward with great intensity by small units of US military units conducting training sessions for the Sri Lankan military within the country. In addition to the frequent visits made by the US defence and military officers to the island, Sri Lanka was named as a qualified country to receive Excess Defence Articles (EDA). It was because of this qualification i that Sri Lanka was freely given, in June 2004, the 'Courageous' Naval Craft which had been used for US coastal patrolling.

Once postponed Defence Pact comes to the fore again

The military plans that were implemented by the new government of President Rajapakse which came into power at the end of 2005 were based on the above mentioned basic foundations that were laid three to four years ago prior to its actual implementations since 2005. If we put it concretely it was the Rajapakse regime which fine-tuned the much needed legal framework for military relationships with the US - that had been postponed from time to time by the other regimes due various reasons. The outcome was the Sri Lanka- USA Defence Pact which was signed on 05 March 2007.

Even though this Acquisition & Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA) which was signed without much fanfare by the Sri Lankan Defence Secretary and the US ambassador in Colombo did not attract much attention it is an agreement of paramount importance. The history of the Agreement goes back to the very beginning of the Ceasefire Agreement between the GoSL and the LTTE. In fact, the signing of the Agreement was proposed during the previous government of the United National Front. In view of preparing the first draft of the Agreement a four member delegation of senior officials of the US State Department arrived in Colombo in April 2002 as a follow up of an initial agreement that was reached a month before their arrival. However, as a result of the concerns expressed by the Opposition and especially India the process of reaching the final agreement was disrupted.

A renewed enthusiasm about the Agreement surfaced after People's Alliance led by Chandrika Kumaratunga came into power on 02 April 2004. In month of May, while the foreign minister of the new government Lashman Kadiragamar met with US authorities in Washington the US ambassador in Colombo made a statement to an Sri Lankan English weekly newspaper saying that '*Washington expects that the new government would expedite the most necessary steps in relation to the Acquisition & Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA)*'. However, signing of the Agreement was again postponed. The Agreement that was signed, all of a sudden, by the Sri Lankan Defence Secretary, Gotabaya Rajapakse and the US ambassador to Colombo, Robert O. Blake on 05 March 2007 was the Agreement that had been constantly postponed by both the regimes of Wickremesighe and Kumaranatunga. Accordingly the legal foundation was laid between the agreed two parties for mutual exchange of billeting facilities, port services, storage facilities, services of maintenance, base operations support, training services, non lethal weapons and explosives. Soon it became evident that the new defence agreement would bring immediate benefits. A week after the signing of the Agreement it was announced that the US Trade & Development Agency would release 51 million dollars for an exploration of oil in the Bay of Mannar which is situated in the Northwest of the Island.

Nevertheless, the new Sri Lanka- USA Defence Pact had already sent a decisive signal in terms of the Eelam War IV that had already been gaining momentum. It was under these circumstances that Sri Lanka-USA bi-lateral defence relations were further enhanced. After the first round of Sri Lankan government's military operations against the LTTE in the Eastern Province a four member team led by a colonel of the US Marine Expeditionary Force an observation tour in the areas controlled by the Sri Lankan military in the region. (*Daily Mirror - 28.07.2007*). It was announced that the this tour was aimed at making preliminary plans with regard to community health clinics and welfare for the people whose areas were 'liberated' from the LTTE and brought under the Sri Lankan military control. Less than a month after the observation tour, community health clinics were organised in the districts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa in the Eastern Province, headed by a special team comprised of nine members of the Medical Unit of the US Air Force. According to communiqué issued by the US embassy in Colombo on 13 September 2007 community health programmes were conducted by the members of the US Air Force, targeting the civilian population in the 'recently liberated Kappalthurai, Eechchalampattu and Vakarai in the Eastern region'. At the end of the programme team of 70 Sri Lankan soldiers were also trained in methods of first aid that are necessary for those who get injured in the battlefield.

Technical and Military Cooperation

Even though those representing the USA continue to give advice saying that 'instead of military means political negotiations should be started' it is evident that they have been keen to provide Sri Lanka with stable military support to implement its military option to the Tamil National Question. This includes financial and material military support as well as plans that develop Sri Lankan military's fighting capabilities and technical levels. The Global Hawk spy aircraft equipped with high tech capabilities which is scheduled to be launched in 2009 from the Anderson Air Base in Guam in the Western Pacific Ocean is one such example that will increase technical levels of the Sri Lankan military. According to a spokesperson of the US Pacific Command in his answers to a series of questions sent through emails by Reuters news agency regarding this most advanced reconnaissance aircraft – which is equipped with a highly sensitive radar system and Infra-Red sensors – US is hoping to share its technical capabilities with '*at least 11 countries in an effort to boost security in Asia and Pacific*'. Apart from India the only South Asian country that will be included into these countries is Sri Lanka. (*US seeks Asian partners for Global Hawk Eye in Sky -The Straits Times /04.10.2007*). In November 2007 in a special function held at the Trincomalee Naval Dockyard in the Eastern Province the US ambassador to

Sri Lanka donated a Radar based maritime surveillance system and a set of new Rigid-Hulled Inflatable Boats (RHIB) to the Sri Lankan Navy.

The details of the visit to Sri Lanka by of the Commanding Officer of the US Pacific Command, Admiral Robert F. Willard in the third week of January 2008 also are associated with the growing close relations between USA and Sri Lanka. An official communiqué issued by the US embassy in Colombo clearly stated that the visit of Admiral Willard and the meetings he held with the President Rajapakse and the other high ranking defence officials was to ‘ review ‘ ongoing maritime cooperation , including naval training and exchanges between the United States and Sri Lanka’. Without disclosing the details the same communiqué said that the Admiral visited Trincomalee to discuss US-Sri Lankan cooperation against LTTE terrorism. *‘Admiral Willard reaffirmed the support of the United states to Sri Lanka in defending against terrorist activity through cooperation on maritime security’ (US Embassy Press Release / 18.01.2008).*

There are many examples to prove that the development of USA- Sri Lankan relationships during the period of Eelam War IV is planned with a long term strategic perspective. It was in 1992 that Mercyhurst College in Pennsylvania – a well-known Catholic liberal education institute – started a Research/Intelligence Analyst Program (RIAP) under its Department of History. This was the first time in America that a non-governmental institute started a study programme in the field of intelligence which had been the monopoly of the government of the USA until then. Within the American intelligence agencies, after the 9/11 attack on New York there arose a new need for highly specialised skills in the field of analysis of information related to intelligence. It was due to this new urgency that one time Research/Intelligence Analyst Program (RIAP) affiliated to the Department of History in Mercyhurst College was transformed into Mercyhurst College Institute for Intelligence Studies (MCIIS) in 2004 with state funding as an academic faculty for studies in intelligence. It has become world’s first non-governmental third level education institute that carries out analysis of information related to intelligence and offers doctorates in Applied Intelligence. The staff is comprised of those retired defence experts of FBI, CIA and the American military.

In 2008 the programme coordinator of Mercyhurst College Institute for Intelligence Studies (MCIIS), James Breckenridge and its associate professor Dave Grabelski made a visit to Sri Lanka. This trip that took place without much publicity was coordinated by the US State Department. With their expertise the Office of Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) of the US State Department conducted a two week study course on counter-terrorism and analysis of information related to intelligence for a selected group of 22 officials in the Police Training College in

Kalutara. The study course is an outcome of a contract that had been made between a set of selected countries in the Asia, Africa and Latin America, and Mercyhurst College Institute for Intelligence Studies (MCIIS) and the US State Department in view of improving the skills for intelligence analysis and counter-terrorism of the security forces of those countries. Among the selected countries of the three continents the first practical programme under this new contract was launched in Sri Lanka.

In January 2007, addressing a meeting of the Sri Lanka Development Forum which was held in the Lighthouse Hotel in Galle in Sri Lanka the US ambassador, Robert O. Blake made the following statement: 'We are a strong supporter in assisting Sri Lanka combat terror by helping to stop the financing and flow of arms to the LTTE, by providing law enforcement assistance, and by providing training and equipment to help the Sri Lankan military to defend itself.' The contribution that the experts of Mercyhurst College Institute for Intelligence Studies (MCIIS) made - in the form of conducting a study course on counter-terrorism and intelligence analysis for the Sri Lankan defence officials - is only one example of fulfilling the promises given by Blake and his predecessor, Jeffery Lunstead.

The truth about withdrawal of military aid

In the midst of all these, seemingly there were highly debatable news reports regarding stopping of American military aid to Sri Lanka. According the reports in the media 'as result of taking into consideration the unsatisfactory state of human rights standards in the island the US Congress had decided to stop military aid to Sri Lanka with immediate effect'. In fact, it is very important to investigate this news about 'stopping of military aid'. Let us start this investigation with the report prepared in January 2008 and updated by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) for the use of the members of the US Congress titled as 'Sri Lanka: Background and US Relations'. According to this report the blocked basic military aid comes under the US funding scheme of Foreign Military Financing (FMF). These funds were given as loans on the condition that they are spent to purchase weapons, military ware and services from the USA. Until the Secretary of State gives a definite assurance to the Congress with regard to the improvement of human rights standards in Sri Lanka supply of defence export licenses, military ware and technical support under this scheme will be stopped. Nevertheless, according to the same report supply of, air force and naval surveillance equipments and communication facilities do not fall under the category of blocked items.*(Sri Lanka: Background and US Relations / Updated 22.01.2008 / CRS report for Congress)*

Even within this context, during the first year of Eelam War IV the total value of US military aid given to Sri Lanka under Foreign Military Financing (FMF) is nearly 2 million dollars. Even though it is stated that the financing has been temporarily suspended 1.32 million dollars has been already estimated to be given to Sri Lanka for the financial years of 2008 and 2009 under FMF. ***(US Foreign Aid to East and South Asia: Selected Recipients / Updated 01.05.2008 / CRS report for Congress)***

Even in the coming future there is no indication whatsoever of US withdrawal of military aid to Sri Lanka. In order to clarify this matter without any doubt it is enough to read the document of the estimated budget for Foreign Operations for the financial year 2009, submitted by the Secretary of State in February 2008 to the Congress for its approval. According to this document the estimated budget allocated for Sri Lanka for the year 2008 for Counter Terrorist Activities is 2.656 million dollars and in 2009 it is expected to increase up to 2.9 million dollars. The amount allocated for Stabilizing Operations and Defence Sector Reforms for the year 2008 is 1.013 million dollars. In the year 2009 this will be increased up to 1.85 million dollars. 571,000 dollars had been allocated for the year 2008 for International Military Education & Training (IMET). It will reach 600,000 dollars in the 2009. ***(Congressional Budget Justification - Foreign Operations / Fiscal Year 2009/ pp. 591-594)***

In fact, the actual content of the American policy related to the Eelam War IV could be found in the documents of the State Department and the Pentagon. As an example let us examine the document named as *Section 655 Report*. The name is derived this way as it has been drafted under No. 655 of the *Foreign Assistance Act*. It is the State Department and the Defence Department which hold jointly the responsibility of drafting this report. Both the departments prepare a report separately from each other giving definite yearly details of grants of military equipment and training given by the US to the other countries including also detailed official information about military exports and imports. Among the details covered by the report a full account of Direct Commercial Sales, International Military Education & Training (IMET), Excess Defence Articles and Foreign Military Sales could also be found. Even though the report of the State Department is published for public knowledge the details of the report of the Defence Department are kept as secrets. Only selected sections of the latter report are made known for the public.

It was in July 2008 that *655 Report* of the financial year 2006 was released. During the period covered by the report from 01 October 2006 - 30 September 2007 the total value of officially approved exported military ware, weapons and spare parts to Sri Lanka was 21, 183, 501 dollars.

(Direct Commercial Sales Export Authorization for Fiscal Year 2007/ pp. 180 and 181). During the same period under International Military Education & Training (IMET) programme 4, 83,000 dollars have been spent on Sri Lanka.

Apart from this another important example is the annual report on foreign military training that brings detailed information about the programmes conducted under the direction of the State Department and the Pentagon in the American military schools and in the defence academies and national security institutions of the particular countries. Out of three volumes of this documentation two fall under secret classified status. According to the report issued in August 2007 covering the financial year of 2006 US has spent 1, 426, 236 dollars for the training of 307 members of the Sri Lankan security forces (*Foreign Military Training: Joint Report to Congress, Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007 , Volume I pp. 82-90*). Even now members of the Sri Lankan security forces continue to receive US military instructions in John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Centre and School in Fort Brag, North Carolina, US Army Intelligence Centre in Arizona, Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas, Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, The US Army School of Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, Naval War College at New Port in Rhodes Island, Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia, Near East South Asia Centre for Strategic Studies in Washington DC, Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies in Hawaii and in many other places.

Conclusion: what lies ahead?

Throughout the thirty years of war history in Sri Lanka the task that US fulfilled in strengthening the agenda of the Sri Lankan state is being continued in the present without any interruption. The only change that has occurred is that this process has become intensified and has become more explicit than ever before. At the moment the growing US activities in the Eastern Province that was 'liberated' from the LTTE by the Sri Lankan military is a clear an important reflection of this intensification. The war reality that is gaining momentum surrounding Afghanistan demands stability for the US in the region of the Indian Ocean. After the closure of American military camps in the Philippines the only permanent US military base close to the operational areas of Iraq and Afghanistan is located in the Islands of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. The long distance from Diego Garcia to geo-political regions of Iraq and Afghanistan and to the sea lanes of supplies to the war affected region is a major problem that the US military suppliers face at the moment. The added problem is the legal right won in 2006 by the islanders of Diego Garcia who were expelled from the island 30 years to build the US military base.

Behind the growing war ambitions surrounding regions in western and central Asian and East African states lie the imperialist greed to acquire world's most important energy resources in the region. This greed has increased as never before the geo-strategic importance of the southern and eastern regions of the Indian Ocean. The Island of Sri Lanka is just 6 nautical miles away from the Four major Sea Lines of communications in the Indian Ocean – and in the Eastern Province of this island is situated the worlds third biggest natural harbour. These are the most important sea lanes that connect western region of the Pacific Ocean, South China Sea and the eastern region of the Indian Ocean to the Arabian Sea and the region in the Persian Gulf which is in the west. The ambition behind spending millions of dollars by the USAID in the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka will come to the fore in near future. The national liberation struggle of the Tamil people is seen as destabilising factor that disrupts the achievement of the ambitions of the US. The keen interest shown by the US to totally annihilate its destabilising factor is determined by its imperialist greed in the region.